Plurilingual practices in Higher Education: An analysis of student perceptions from a South African University

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Abstract

This study describes student perspectives on the teaching and learning of a newly introduced University language acquisition course. It identifies three basic components of teaching and learning, namely teaching approaches, teaching and learning resources, and assessment of learning. The study focuses on how students perceive these basic components of teaching and learning by investigating how 1st-year students at a university in South Africa perceive the teaching and learning of the Sesotho First Additional Language (FAL) course (a newly introduced course in the university). Hence the objectives of this study are to establish the views of 1st-year Sesotho FAL students regarding the teaching approaches used by the lecturers presenting the course; the teaching and learning resources used in the course; and the quality of assessments applied in the course. Guided by complex dynamic systems theory, the study employs a survey methodology. A questionnaire comprising both close-ended belief statements as well as open-ended statements for students to respond to was administered to 51 study participants purposefully selected. Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS, while qualitative data were analysed by the researchers. Results emerging from the study reveal that 1st-year students generally find their lecturers' teaching approaches and assessment methods satisfactory; however, they perceive the teaching and learning resources used by their lecturers in teaching Sesotho as inadequate. This findings point to the need for further dialogue broadly on the quality of teaching and learning, quality of assessment criteria and the availability of teaching and learning resources provided for presenting newly introduced courses in higher education institutions (HEIs); and specifically on the level of preparation of lecturers in these courses tasked with the teaching and learning.

Keywords: Plurilingualism, teaching approaches, teaching and learning resources, assessment in higher education

Introduction

The Language Policy for South African higher education (Department of Education, 2002) stipulates that each university should formulate a language policy that strives towards promoting the development of languages other than English and Afrikaans for academic purposes (Mkhize & Balfour, 2016). In adherence to this policy, South African institutions of higher education need appropriate strategies to promote and develop the country's eleven official languages as academic languages. The university under review, like most South African universities in the country, heeded this call in developing its language policy, which states that isiZulu and Sesotho are to be developed as academic languages. The policy reasons to develop both isiZulu and Sesotho are because these languages represent two major language clusters (Nguni and Sotho) to which seven indigenous African languages belong (Mbolo, 2018).

In 2019 the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of African Languages introduced Sesotho and IsiZulu language-acquisition courses in addition to South African Sign Language (SASL) as a way of promoting the development of African languages at the University. To promote these languages, the Faculty of Humanities made it compulsory for all students enrolled for the BA General degree to take a full year of one of the African Languages at 1st-year level as one of the requirements for the degree (University Rules and Syllabuses for Degree and Diplomas offered in the Faculty of Humanities, 2021). A number of postgraduate students in the Linguistics and African Languages departments were recruited to teach 1st-year Sesotho and IsiZulu First Additional Language (FAL) courses. A significant number of Engineering students also take the African languages courses as part of their degree requirements. Since research and scholarly investigations to identify useful and effective teaching and learning methods are among the most important functions of educational systems, the current study explores the perceptions of 1st-year students on the teaching and learning of Sesotho FAL.

The sections below discuss complex dynamic system theory before examining perspectives on the notion of plurilingualism in higher education institutions (HEIs), approaches to language pedagogy, availability of teaching and learning resources, and

assessments in higher education. After outlining the methodology of the study, the findings are presented before making recommendations and offering some conclusions.

Theoretical Framework: Complex dynamic system theory

Language, its use, its evolution, its development, and its learning are processes in complex systems. The key characteristic of complex dynamic system theory (CDST) is transdisciplinary, which makes it a suitable theory for studying these complex systems, including plurilingualism. Although CDST emerged from the natural sciences, it has also been used in the social sciences since the 1970s. CDST has also been used in investigations of English as a lingua franca, World Englishes, second-language development, language teacher education, and the psychology of language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2017).

CDST is a systems theory, and as such it encompasses systematic thinking in terms of patterns, relationships, or contexts (Capra & Luisi, 2014). A system is a collective whole, made up of interdependent constituents which can include components such as humans or technological objects, conceptual elements such as affective or cognitive variables, or a semiotic dimension such as words or texts (Hilpert & Marchand, 2018).

Patterns in language emerge from the multiple interactions of its learners/users as they make meaning and position themselves as they wish. As users of language interact, they assemble their language resources, adapting them to a specific context for a specific purpose; thus, each language learner's/user's developmental trajectory is different, influenced by their prior experience and their own unique circumstances, including other languages that they know, the social codes and languages to which they are exposed, their particular interlocutors, their intentions and the application of domain general mechanisms (Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford & Lawrence, 2021).

Student perceptions in higher education institutions

A perception involves the way one sees the world (McDonald, 2011). The notion of student perception in higher education settings is important to lecturers, students as well as the learning environment: lecturers attempt to manage course pass rates by encouraging positive actions among students. To improve the quality of a course, it is critical to appreciate the uniqueness of student perceptions. According to Jandug-Montera (2020), university student perceptions of their learning experiences and their engagement with peers, lecturers and content beneficially impact the learning environment. An acknowledgement of student perceptions is therefore critical in the process of refining newly introduced courses.

Plurilingualism in higher education institutions

Current research in multilingual settings seems to be advocating for multilingualism with an increasing focus on plurilingual pedagogy in education (Kubota, 2016; May, 2014; Piccardo & Capron, 2015). Plurilingualism is not a new concept in European language education policies. From a political perspective, plurilingualism was promoted and framed as a key policy orientation in Europe; and recommendations were made for the promotion of linguistic diversity, intercultural dialogue and social cohesion in the 1990s (Vallejo & Dooly, 2020: 3). On the other hand, Khan (2013) points out that in the global south, a pluralistic policy was considered unacceptable by Pakistani politicians, because it was contrary to the ideal Pakistani image they wanted to create.

A plurilingual approach does not only view language as a set of standard norms, but views the use of language as symbiotically interacting to generate new meanings (Canagarajah, 2018). This notion, however; is not unique to a plurilingual approach, the notion applies to any language at any given time. Although plurilingualism is evidently crucial in generating new meanings; Galante, Okubo, Cole, Elkader, Carozza, Wilkinson, Wotton and Vasic (2019) state that pedagogical practices in higher education are still monolingual and they often do not capitalise on the opportunity to turn students' spontaneous plurilingual practices into pedagogical strategies.

Recognizing and valuing students' plurilingual competence is fundamental for improved academic performance in higher education. Marshall and Moore (2013) examined how 1st-year students used their plurilingual competence in a Canadian university and the results show the students have agency over their plurilingualism in both social and educational contexts; and make use of their linguistic repertoire as a resource to communicate, even if the language of instruction is only English. While students spontaneously use languages other than English in their academic studies, the lack of teaching and learning resources to implement pedagogy that can harness students' plurilingual practices is a cause of serious concern (Galante, et al., 2019). Ellis (2013) investigated English second-language teachers' views on language teaching and learning and found that plurilingual teachers have an increased awareness of their own plurilingual strategies but still need institutional support to harness this knowledge for meaningful pedagogical practice. Similarly, a study examining the extent to which university lecturers accommodated increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse Australian and British students (Pauwels, 2014), indicated that while the lecturers themselves

were plurilingual, most of them had limited awareness or interest in their students' linguistic profiles and viewed students' plurilingual practices as an annoyance.

Abiria, Early and Kendrick (2013) investigated Northern Ugandan teachers' use of local linguistic and multimodal cultural resources as plurilingual pedagogical tools to enhance students' learning in English classrooms. Three themes emerged from the study, namely the teachers' exploratory plurilingual practices, students as plurilingual peer tutors, and integrated multimodal and plurilingual instruction. These studies clearly indicate that a shift towards plurilingual pedagogy in HEIs requires a systematic approach where lecturers are provided with the necessary and sustained pedagogical support.

In South Africa, while the discourse is still widely focusing on translanguaging and multilingualism, a group of plurilingual postgraduate students, namely Sabela, Masuku and Qwabe, (2020), investigated academisation and its effect on curriculum transformation in South Africa's higher education. The investigation by Madiba (2013) into multilingual education in South African universities revealed that while multilingual education is not yet fully realized at a particular South African university, the existing multilingual language policy in that university has created opportunities for implementing multilingual education. Current debates on multilingualism posit that the use of multilingualism in higher education contributes to the learner's conceptual and pedagogical development as well as to their communicative competence (Hlatshwayo & Siziba, 2013).

While emerging research is seemingly excited about the increasing number of studies on plurilingualism, Kubota (2016, 17) critiques the term itself:

> While notions such as hybridity, fluidity and multiplicity are potentially liberating, they can obscure actual struggles and inequalities… using the multi/plural frame of reference with insufficient critical reflection makes us complicit with neoliberalism that exacerbates economic and educational gaps and with a neoliberal multiculturalism that evades racism and other injustices.

Kubota's critique of plurilingualism echoes Cenoz's (2009) study which shows translanguaging can be considered simultaneously as a threat to the survival of minority languages or as an opportunity for their development (Choi & Ollerhead, 2018).

Language context at the university

The purpose of the University's Language Policy approved in 2014 is to drive its transformation agenda through the recognition of diversity in the university, which involves the provision of a clear pathway for the intellectualisation of African languages. Within the Linguistics and African Languages Department, IsiZulu and Sesotho are earmarked as languages of teaching and learning parallel to English. Certain courses in the department are now taught in isiZulu and Sesotho, while others are still being taught in English. In 2019 the Faculty of Humanities Language Requirement Rule was implemented, allowing the Department of African Languages to draw a large pool of students across the Faculty of Humanities for 1ˢᵗ-year enrolment in language-acquisition courses in isiZulu and Sesotho. These languages are used to practise studying, writing and speaking about a certain field of study, including both academic and scientific language. In order to assure parity of esteem, transformation of the University's linguistic profile will unlock cross-cultural understanding and enhance access to Sotho and Nguni language groups at postgraduate level. For example, postgraduate students are allowed to do research either in Sotho or Nguni language group such as Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana, isiXhosa and isiZulu (University Rules and Syllabuses for Degree and Diplomas offered in the Faculty of Humanities, 2021).

The university's language policy stipulates that all staff must learn an African language for the sake of effective communication. This should be achieved through the Department of African Languages and the university's centre for part time studies. Although African languages are regarded as official languages of many South African universities, their status has not been elevated to languages of curricula and research (Bangani, Masilo, Makate & Moyo, 2018). The university reviewed has already used signage boards to make isiZulu- and Sesotho-speaking students feel more at home, but other African languages are marginalised.

Approaches to teaching in higher education

Teaching and learning is a two-way process, involving among other things the teacher and the one being taught (in this case, the student). Teachers constitute an important part of the learning context for the students, and the students in turn constitute an important part of the teaching environment for the lecturers. Research on university teachers' approaches to teaching consistently shows evidence of variation in the ways teachers approach their teaching. The Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI) developed by Trigwell, Prosser and Waterhouse

(1999) highlighted five different approaches to teaching that are closely linked to the teachers' underlying conceptions of teaching:

- Teaching as imparting information;
- Teaching as transmitting structured knowledge;
- Teaching as an interaction between the teacher and the student;
- Teaching as facilitating understanding on the part of the student; and
- Teaching as bringing about conceptual change and intellectual development in the student.

    Adapted from Richardson (2005).

Murphy, Eduljee and Croteau, (2021) distinguish between two teaching methods utilised at undergraduate level: teacher-centered methods and student-centered methods. The key difference is the focus. In a teacher-centered approach, the focus is on teachers who are viewed as information providers or evaluators to monitor students to get the right answers, while students are viewed as passively receiving information (Emaliana, 2017). In a student-centred approach, the focus is on student activities (collaborating, communicating, interacting), which are viewed as important indicators in learning process and quality of learning product (Zohrabi, et al., 2012). A comparison of these two approaches calls for a paradigm shift from the teacher-centred approach that focuses on content dissemination, to the student-centred approach which focuses on learning experiences. Colet, (2017) expands on these two approaches by challenging university courses to move towards competence-based programmes.

Outcomes Based Education is a student-centered approach that emphasizes on what learners should know, understand, demonstrate and how to adapt to life beyond formal education (Tan, Chong, Subramaniam & Wong, 2018). In this approach, the focus is on learner outcomes. The competence-based approach (an extension of the outcomes-based approach) focuses on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education. The key focus of the approach is functionality: it emphasizes on life skills and evaluates mastery of skills necessary for an individual to function proficiently in society (Mkonongwa, 2018). The two approaches cater for societal needs in education and training and emphasise on producing students who contribute positively to society. Thus, HEIs are mandated to expand their course offerings in terms of the skills developed or the generic attributes acquired, and in terms of the potential contributions to social development.

The content-based approach integrates language content with the presentation of topics and tasks in learning second language acquisition (Crandal & Tucker, 2016). Thus, the content-based approach has a dual focus on language and content-learning. It is an approach that integrates the content of subjects with the use of language, making it applicable both to the context of language learning and foreign languages (Aini, Sari & Rikarda, 2020).

Teaching and learning resources in higher education

Teaching and learning resources are various tools that provide the teachers with the opportunity to teach effectively in order to facilitate the learning process for students (Savery, 2015). According to Khoza and Mpungose (2020), teaching and learning resources are objects or persons communicating the teaching and learning; and they are divided into three main categories:

- Hardware resources: machines or tools used in teaching such as computers, laptops, and mobile phones;
- Software resources: materials used with hardware:
    - application software, Microsoft office, the internet, Learning Management System (LMS),
    - file management software,
    - operational software; and
- ideological-ware resources: the mind processes and systems motivating lecturers and students to use hardware and software resources.

Adapted from Khoza and Mpungose, (2020)

While Khoza and Mpungose (2020)'s definition clearly classifies the non-paper-based objects mainly used in digital teaching and learning environments, the aspect of ideological-ware resources relates to perceptions made about the teaching and learning process; and therefore, places great emphasis on viewing the teaching and learning process as centred on ideological-ware resources. Learning is the transformation of the subconscious thoughts, using the conscious mind (Khoza & Biyela, 2020).

In addition to digital teaching and learning resources, paper-based learning resources such as textbooks, course packs, tutorial guides, scientific journals or library books that are provided in a university course of study are also important learning tools for facilitating student learning. Firstly, these tools reflect an academic disciplinary community of practice. Teaching

and learning resources are chosen by the academic experts who usually select resources developed within their community of practice, which sometimes may be shared across different higher education institution or belong to a specific institution (Wenger 1999). Secondly, the selected teaching and learning resources are a significant part of a community of practice that reflects the shared understandings of the specific academic discipline. Lastly, the teaching and learning resources selected for a university course align with a disciplinary pedagogic discourse that reflects the history and development of the discipline in the respective universities. Furthermore, the selected teaching and learning resources also reflect the pedagogic identity of the course designer as a representation of their professional expertise (Horsley, Knight & Huntly, 2011).

Assessments in higher education

Assessment is a process of gathering and analysing data to establish whether the goals of a lesson were achieved (Khoza & Biyela, 2020). An assessment of understanding for feedback is formative (assessment for learning) and an assessment used to get an evaluation of the student's knowledge at a point in time is summative (assessment of learning) (Dixson & Worrell, 2016).

Summative assessment (an example of assessment of learning) is a process in which an outcome is derived through criteria and standards (Bacquet, 2020). When lecturers administer summative assessments, they are able to establish whether students should pass or fail, based on prescribed objectives (Khoza, 2021). This makes summative assessment very formal. Ideally, a formal assessment task is compiled by the lecturer, bearing in mind the structure and progression of the subject discipline(s) involved, an appreciation of the sequencing of the intellectual and moral development of students, and a knowledge of the current level of intellectual development of the students. The students' understanding of the assessment task is enhanced through the specification of assessment criteria. In other words, the lecturer should provide the assessment guidelines and also explain the criteria to the student. The student interprets and responds to the assessment task according to his or her knowledge of the subject and the level of his or her intellectual development, bearing the assessment criteria in mind. The student's performance is assessed (interpreted) by the lecturer against the specified criteria, and feedback is given through grades and/or commentary/feedback. At this point, there is a potential for dialogue between the student and the lecturer, mainly to discuss the student performance and/or ways of improving their performance (Yorke, 2003).

Assessment for learning helps learners and lecturers to improve their performance, because they establish what needs to be revised before, during, and after lessons (Khoza, 2021). Formative assessment (an example of assessment for learning) is more informal than summative assessment. Formative assessment highlights student knowledge through informal structures (Bacquet, 2020). Types of formative assessments include: group discussions, dialogue with lecturers, reflective questions, and monitoring the students through classroom activities. In formative assessment, feedback is provided informally (Daşkın & Hatipoğlu, 2019).

Peer assessment involves reviewing and feeding back on each other's work; in the process, students are also learning from and with each other (Wride, 2017). Types of peer assessment include grading a peer's research report, providing qualitative feedback on a classmate's presentation or evaluating a fellow trainee's professional task performance (van Zundert, Sluijsmans & van Merriënboer, 2010).

While research highlights the differences between formative and summative assessments, the two types of assessment should complement each other, as they serve related purposes. The student's interpretation of the assessment, together with his or her ideological resources, are key influences on the teaching and learning process.

Methodology

Information about perceptions that are otherwise difficult to measure using observational techniques can easily be collected through the use of surveys. A survey methodology was selected for this particular study, mainly because it allows the retrieval of information on variables that can be studied from a population sample, which allows for generalizing (Creswell, 2014). Data collected from the survey were stored in a password-protected computer.

Research context

This study investigates how 1st-year students at a university in South Africa perceive the teaching and learning of Sesotho FAL courses. The research site was the Faculty of Humanities at a South African university that is strategically located in a historically advantaged community in one of South Africa's economic hubs in Gauteng province. The university's language policy recognizes English as its main language of learning and teaching, while isiZulu, Sesotho and South African Sign Language are the only three African indigenous languages taught at FAL level.

Sampling

The investigation targeted 1st-year students in the Faculty of Humanities, Department of African Languages. The university's model to introduce an African language as a compulsory requirement for all degree courses as recommended by the White Paper on post-secondary education and training (DoHET, 2013) targeted 1st-year students. This particular sample was chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, they were the first cohort to take an African Language as part of the requirements for the BA General Degree. Secondly, the 2019 cohort was used as a pilot study for informing the roll out of the model across all Faculties, making these students' perceptions of the pilot phase a critical component of the model.

Participant demographic data

Participants were made up of 57% (n=29) female and 43% (n=22) male students. 59% (n=30) of the students were taking the African language course as a free elective, 2% (n=1) were taking the language as a major, 29% (n=15) were taking the course as a requirement for other degree purposes and 10% (n=5) were uncertain of why they had to take the course. Participants' home languages spanned across 14 languages, including South African indigenous languages, some regional languages such as Kalanga, Arabic and Amharic; and some international languages such as Norwegian, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' Mother Tongue

		Frequency	%
Valid		5	9.8
	Amharic	1	2.0
	Arabic	1	2.0
	English	11	21.6
	IsiZulu	8	15.7
	Kalanga	1	2.0
	Norwegian	1	2.0
	Portuguese	1	2.0
	Sesotho	2	3.9

Setswana	4	7.8
Shona	8	15.7
Swahili	1	2.0
Tshivenda	3	5.9
Xhosa	1	2.0
Xitsonga	3	5.9
Total	51	100.0

The most common home languages were English (22%, n=11), followed by a tie between Shona and isiZulu at 16% (n=8). The least common languages included Swahili, Portuguese and Xhosa (2%, n=1). Study participants where requested to indicate their frequency of using isiZulu and Sesotho outside the university African languages lessons; the results are shown in Figure 1.
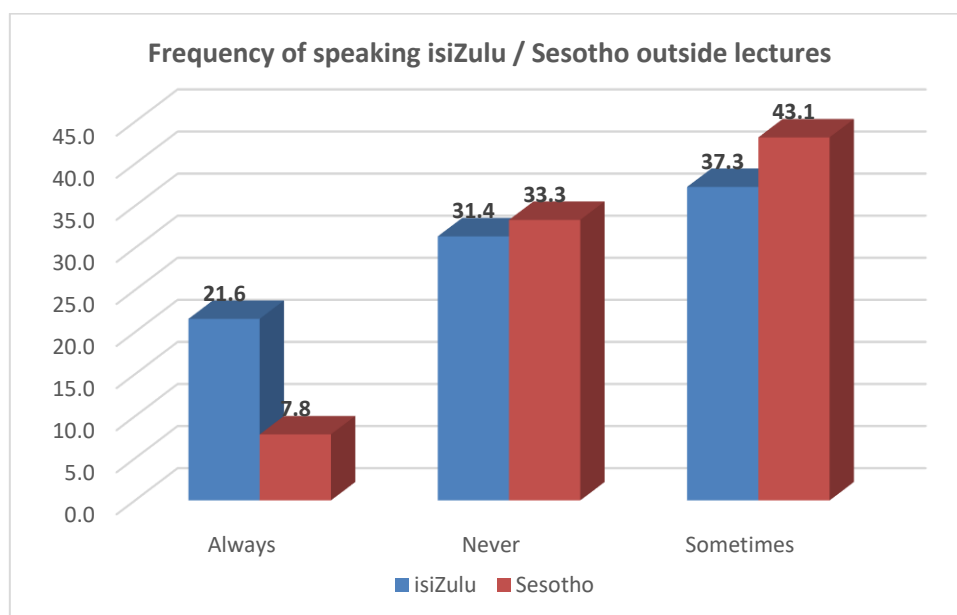
Figure 1: Frequency of using isiZulu / Sesotho outside of university African Languages lectures

21.6% (n=11) of students always use isiZulu outside of lectures, compared to only 7.8% (n=4) who always use Sesotho outside of lectures. About 30% (n=15) of the students do not use either of the two languages outside the university lectures, indicating that these students do not have

exposure to the languages outside of the formal lectures. 37.3% (n=19) sometimes use isiZulu, while 43.1% (n=22) sometimes use Sesotho outside of the lectures. The relatively low use of the two African languages compared to the wide variety of languages spoken by the students as home languages may suggest that the African languages being taught at university are competing with a wide range of languages in society and this is evidence of a student group that is plurilingual. With specific reference to Sesotho, it is to be expected that a very low percentage of students (7.8%, n=4) always use Sesotho compared to a relatively higher percentage (33.3%, n=17) of those who never use the language outside of the lectures, as the specific course is meant for students who are interested in learning Sesotho for the first time. The even higher percentage (43.1%, n=22) of students who sometimes use the language could be an indication that some students may be practising the newly acquired language outside the lectures.

Procedure: questionnaire schedule

To respond to the study's research question, a questionnaire was used to collect data in the second semester of 2019; the questionnaire included both close-ended and open-ended items to achieve coverage across the student population as well as achieve depth in the form of written responses. A total of 51 questionnaires were distributed to 1st-year Sesotho FAL students. There were three distinct sections of the questionnaire. The first section, which sought to elicit student perceptions on teaching approaches used by the lecturers while presenting the Sesotho course contained eight close-ended Likert-scale belief statements. The second section with four close-ended Likert-scale belief statements focused on student perceptions of the teaching and learning resources used in the Sesotho lectures. The third section with three close-ended Likert-scale belief statements sought to elicit student perceptions on the quality of Sesotho course assessment activities. All the three sections had an additional section for open-ended comments in addition to the closed Likert-scale belief statements to which students had to respond to as Strongly Disagree (**SD**), Disagree (**D**), Neutral (**N**), Agree (**A**) or Strongly Agree (**SA**). While the inclusion of the neutral category provided a midpoint indicating neutrality 'neither agree nor disagree' (Tutz, 2021); results interpretation focused on the straightforward agreement and disagreement categories. According to Babbie (2015), validity indicates whether the instrument measures what it is intended to measure. Cronbach's alpha coefficient analysis was used to investigate the internal consistency of the measures, since it is the most reliable test of inter-item consistency reliability for Likert-scaled or rating-scaled measures (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

Data collection and analysis

Primary data were collected at the reviewed University (Ethical Clearance: H20/04/23) through the administration of the questionnaires to 1st-year Sesotho FAL students by researchers in three different classes. Students were given 25 minutes to complete the questionnaires. Instructions were clearly explained to students by the researchers. The closed Likert-scale belief statements gathered quantitative data, while the open-ended comments gathered qualitative data to develop an in-depth understanding of the teaching approaches, the learning and teaching materials, and the assessments used in Sesotho language courses at the University. Quantitative data were analysed quantitatively using IBM SPSS Software, while qualitative data from open-ended comments of the questionnaire were analysed qualitatively by the researchers using thematic analysis. Quotations exemplifying the identified themes were extracted from the questionnaire responses. Trends emerging from the qualitative and quantitative strands were merged.

Findings

The key finding of this study is that 1st-year students generally find their lecturers' teaching approaches and assessment methods satisfactory; however, they perceived the teaching and learning resources used by their lecturers in teaching Sesotho as being inadequate.

The first research question was addressed by analysing student responses regarding the teaching approaches used by lecturers presenting 1st-year Sesotho FAL courses. The eight variables analysed were **TA1**: *stimulation of student interest in the language*; **TA2**: *pacing and management of class time*; **TA3**: *lecturer organization and preparedness for class*; **TA4**: d*iscussion and response to questions*; **TA5**: *lecturer subject knowledge*; **TA6**: *lecturer interest and enthusiasm in the language*; **TA7**: *use of a variety of instructional methods;* and **TA8**: c*hallenging students to perform even better* (see Figure 2):
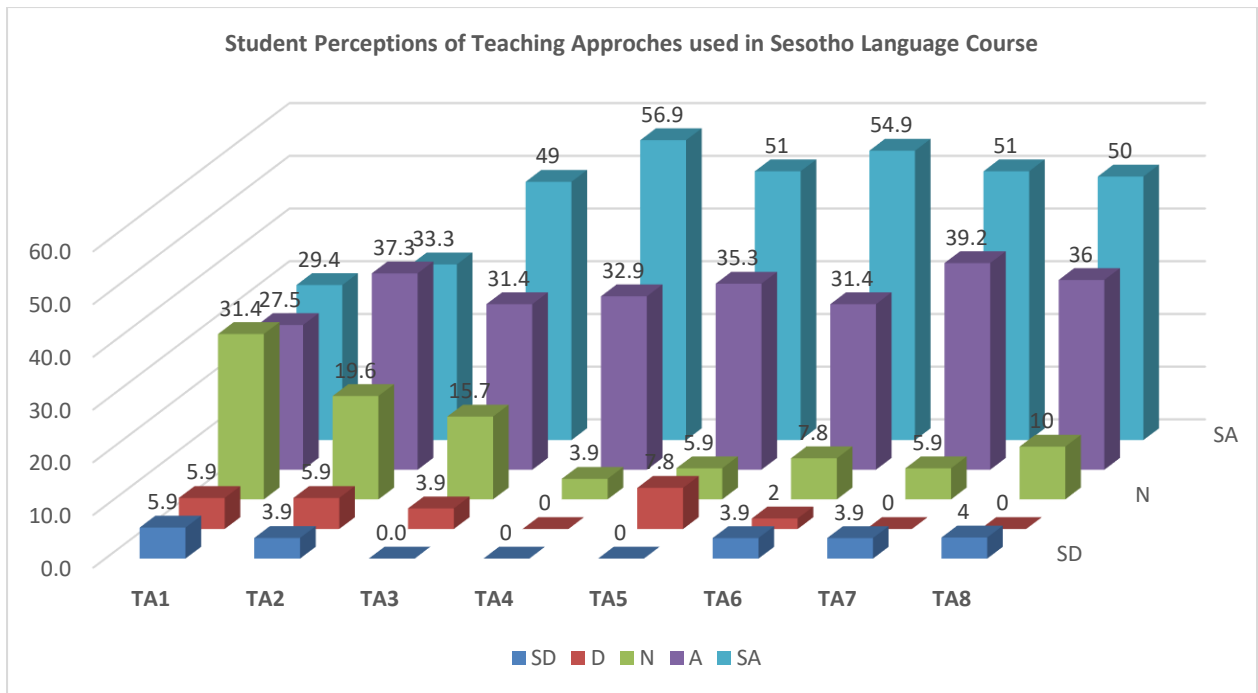
Figure 2: Student Perceptions of Teaching Approaches used by Sesotho Language Lecturers

56.9% (n=29) of students indicated that the lecturer stimulated their interest in the language:

>**S38**: *...the lecturer encourages students and believes in each and every one of us, always there when you don't understand something*

70.6% (n=36) of students indicated that the lecturer managed class time and pace well, while 80.4% (n=41) indicated that the lecturers were organized and prepared for every class:

>**S15**: *It is very productive the way the lectures are conducted*

>**S51**: *The lecturer always came prepared to class …*

89.8% (n=46) of the students indicated the lecturer encouraged discussion and responded to questions:

>**S51**: *The lecturer… would answer every question asked and make sure everyone understands*

86.3% (n=44) of the students indicated the lecturer demonstrated in-depth subject knowledge:

>**S16**: *It was appropriate for beginners, basics and important cultural ideas were taught*

S23: *... lecturer taught us well, made our lessons very interesting, we were allowed to participate and now my knowledge of Sesotho language is better than it was at the beginning of the year ... imparted deep knowledge on the course*

86.3% (n=44) of the students indicated the lecturer appeared interested and enthusiastic, while 90.2% (n=46) believed the lecturer used a variety of instructional methods:

S13: *I found group discussions working very well*

S44: *... uses great teaching style when explaining in class*

86% (n=43) of the students indicated that their lecturers challenged them to do their best in the course.

The student responses indicate that the lecturers' teaching approaches are student-centred and generally facilitated students' knowledge construction processes, as alluded by Trigwell (2012). While the majority of the students were satisfied with the teaching approaches used by their lecturers, a few but significant number of students registered their concerns:

S2: *More work was given over a short interval of time of learning the language*

S17: *It is too hard for me, the lecturer expects us to know Sotho as if it is our home language*

S24: *The approach is not quite robust, we are just fed with vocabulary but our sentence construction is poor*

S25: *It is not that good because we have not been taught from the root of the language. And the teaching method doesn't flow. It is un-understandable, we can't even understand the language*

S28: *We went through work too fast, half the class is Sotho speaking. We worked at their pace even though the class was meant for non-Sotho-speaking students*

S37: *The lecturer could be more inclusive in his teaching approach*

**S41**: *Questions posed were often difficult and when we struggled, it was discouraging.*

S43: *... instead of giving us answers to questions we were told to do research...*

Student dissatisfaction revolves around issues of inclusivity, having to master a lot of content within a short space of time and over-reliance on self-directed learning. Furthermore, the fact that students come from diverse backgrounds, with some having some exposure to the Sesotho language, while others do not (as indicated in the demographic section of this study), left the

learners believing they are under pressure to perform at the level of fellow students with a higher level of exposure to the language.

The second research question was addressed by analysing student responses regarding the teaching and learning resources used in 1st-year Sesotho FAL courses. The four variables analysed were **RA1**: *use of library resources to support coursework;* **RA2**: use of *chalkboard resources in the lecturer room;* **RA3**: use of *Sakai resources*; and **RA4**: l*ecturer guidance regarding where to find resources.*
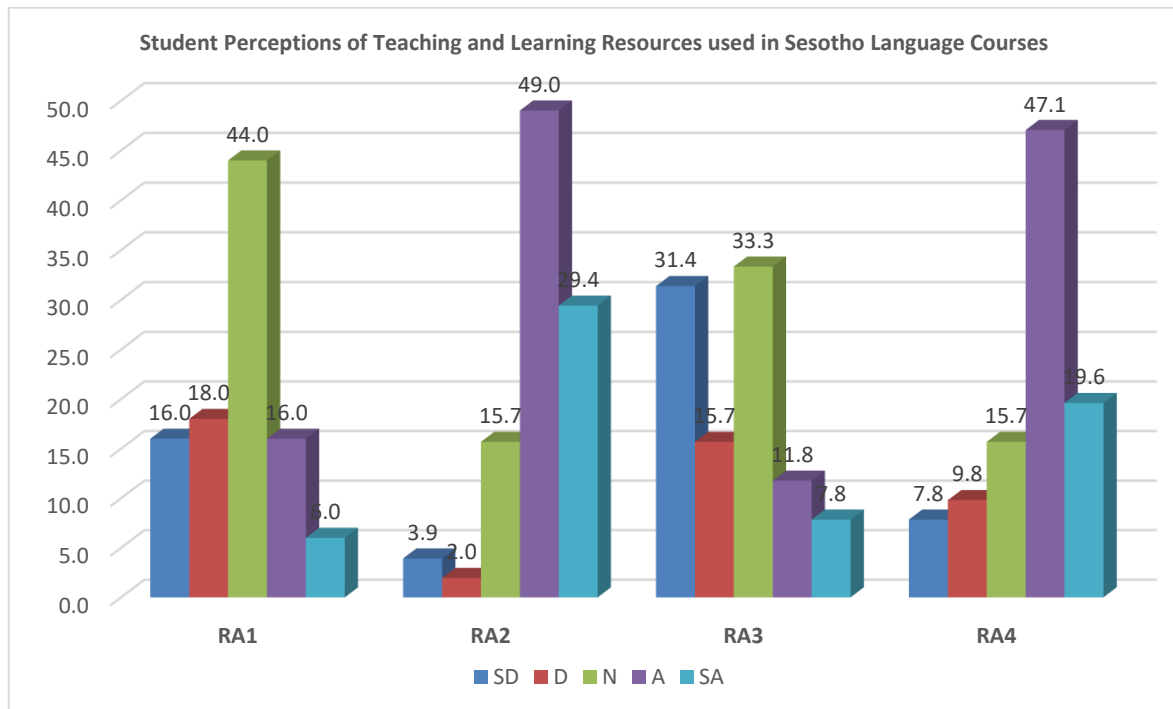
Figure 3: Student Perceptions of Teaching and Learning Resources used by Sesotho Language Lecturers

As indicated in Figure 3, the study participants were dissatisfied with teaching and learning resources provided for the course. Only 22% (n=11) of the students were of the opinion that the course was supported by adequate library resources. Responses indicating student dissatisfaction regarding availability of resources include:

> **S2**: *We had limited resources to refer to besides the notes in class*

> **S16***: There should be a lecture package available to all students so that they can refer to additional notes when studying and for better understanding*

> **S24**: *… there is a lack of resources …*

> **S27**: *Expose students to more content, like books and text to refer to*

While 78.4% (n=40) of the students were of the opinion that the chalkboard resources were useful, only 19.6 % (n=10) of the students were of the opinion that Sakai resources were useful. Students who believed more could be done regarding the use of Sakai stated:

S27*: Use Sakai more and give online assignments*

S41*: … Sakai was barely used efficiently*

S43*: Sakai was never used, yet it is a platform that everyone has access to … we don't all have the resources. At times the course work is beyond elementary level*

S51*: We did not get much resources via Sakai, we had to rely merely on emails sent from our lecturer*

66.7% (n=34) of the students were of the opinion that the lecturer guided them regarding where to get resources:

S1*: Handouts were provided, mistakes were there but lecturer provided additional corrected material*

S23*: Lecturer sent us emails regularly, giving us notes*

S30: *Lecturer prepares notes for us*

S37*: Lecturer applied extensive referrals for research*

It is a cause of concern that the majority of participants in this study felt they did not have important learning tools for facilitating student learning. A few respondents indicated some notes and handouts were provided. It is a cause of even greater concern that the Learning Management System that is easily accessible to most university students was underutilised as stated by **S43**. The lack of teaching and learning resources may compromise the development of the discipline in the university, as stated by Horsley, Knight and Huntly (2011).

The third research question was addressed by analysing student responses regarding the quality of feedback and assessments used by lecturers while presenting the 1st-year Sesotho FAL course. The three variables analysed were **FA1:** c*larity of information on assessments***; FA2:** *provision of feedback within a reasonable timeframe*; and **FA3:** *provision of feedback showing ways of improving student performance*, as indicated in Figure 4.
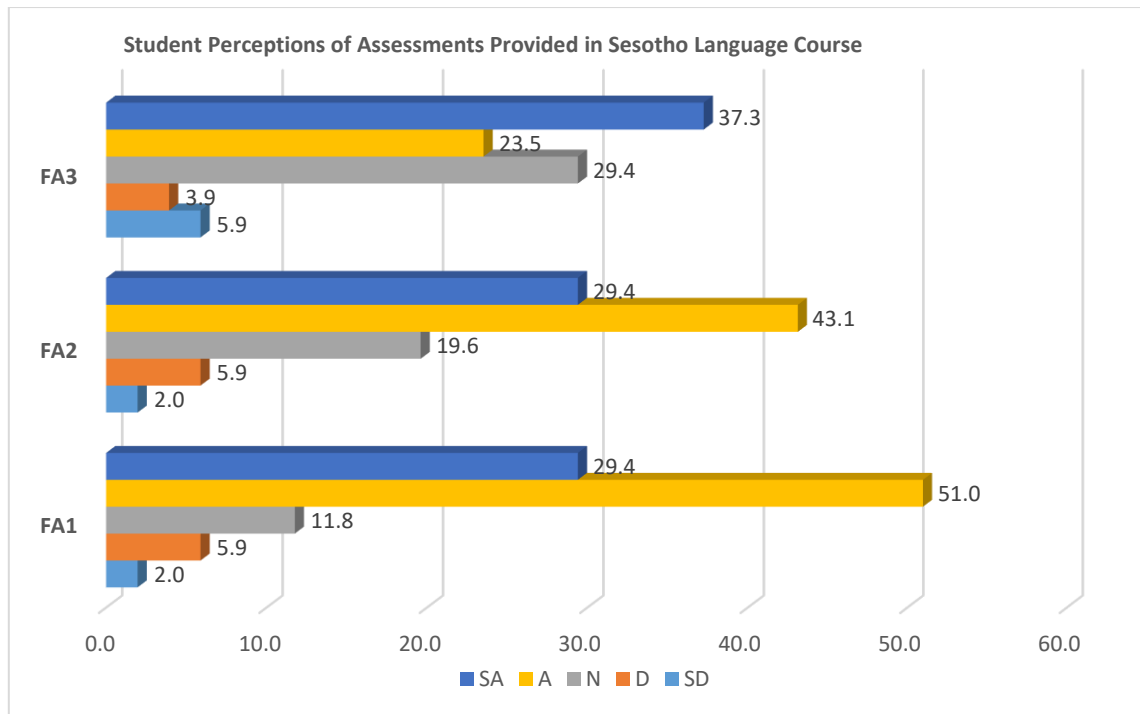
Figure 4: Student Perceptions of Assessment provided by Sesotho Language Lecturers

60.8% (n=31) of the study participants indicated that the information about assessment was communicated clearly, as reported by S23:

> **S23**: *The lecturer explained this course assessment very well before I began with it*

72.5% (n=37) of the study participants indicated that the feedback was provided within a reasonable timeframe. Responses that registered dissatisfaction with the assessment timeframes ranged from those that were concerned about the limited time afforded to work on the assignments: (**S43**); and the feedback that was not provided at all: (**S51**).

> **S43**: *Our diversity work is often sent the night before, which makes it hard to dedicate time for it*
>
> **S51**: *We did not get back our diversity activities so that we can check our mistakes and where we needed to improve, they gave us the marks when they were all combined*

80.4% (n=41) of the study participants indicated that the feedback showed them how to improve on their work. Although participant responses on the quality of assessments were generally favourable, students were of the opinion that a lot more could have been done:

> **S27***: ... give online assignments*
>
> **S33**: *I feel that the department should equip all lecturers with a pre made lesson plan as I as a student, have noticed a trend where when we need to complete an assessment*

such as a test, some classes may not have covered the same topics as others and in certain cases this gives some classes an advantage over others.

Recommendations

Each language user's developmental trajectory is different and is influenced by their prior experience and their own uniqueness, including other languages that they know and the social languages and codes to which they are exposed (Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford & Lawrence, 2021). Considering that the students taking Sesotho FAL come from diverse backgrounds, with some students having some exposure to the language while others do not, it is recommended that a thorough vetting system be used in selecting students for the course. Having students with different knowledge levels of the language in one lecture requires the lecturer to use inclusive approaches that accommodate students at different levels of the language acquisition. Shirani Bidabadi, Nasr Isfahani, Rouhollahi and Khalili (2016) suggest lecturers should consider the following points for a meaningful teaching and learning process:

- How to increase the students' motivation;
- How to help students feel confident in solving problems;
- How to teach students to plan their learning activities;
- How to help them to carry out self-assessment at the end of each lesson;
- How to encourage the students to motivate them for future work; and
- How to give feedback to the students and inform them about their individual learning.

Teaching and learning resources are very important components of the teaching and learning process. The major purpose of learning and teaching resources is to provide a source of learning experience that is effective enough to invoke interaction among students and teachers in the learning or teaching process (Savery, 2015). An effective learning resource has the ability to assist the students in the learning process and broaden the learning experience of the students along with meeting the learning needs of the students. A variety of resources are required not only at lower levels of education, but in HEIs as well, more so when a language-acquisition course is offered to a group of linguistically inexperienced students. The first point of departure is using the students' home languages as resources in the language-acquisition course. Furthermore, additional tools that students can access outside the classrooms provide an additional layer of engaging with the language; however, it is of paramount importance to guide students on where to get such resources, especially for a newly introduced course. Language

teaching and learning resources are therefore very important for both the lecturer and student for a meaningful language-acquisition teaching and learning process.

Participants in this study highlight a point about quality assuring assessments. When different classes of the same course are presented, it is paramount to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessments taking place in the different classes is equitable. One of the ways of countering wide variations of the same course being offered is to have one lecturer offering the same course to the different groups of learners, albeit human resources challenges may arise from this model. Whether it is assessment of learning or assessment for learning, there are inherent components of assessment that need to be prioritized; these include providing developmental feedback and providing the feedback timeously. An equally important point is allowing students reasonable time to undertake the assignment and this brings the component of fairness to the assessment. The importance of feedback within assessments was referred to by only a few respondents. Nicol (2021) posits that regular feedback within assessments makes students more critical of their own work and more attentive to other students' work; it improves their learning and makes them develop more competencies. According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), good feedback should:

- Help clarify what a good performance is;

- Facilitate the development of self-assessment in learning;

- Encourage teacher and peer dialogue around learning;

- Help deliver high-quality information to students about their learning;

- Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;

- Provide opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performances; and

- Provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching.

Adapted from Orsmond & Merry (2013).

Limitations and future research

While the study paid careful attention to the study design, the study's limitations suggest a point of departure for future research. The researchers acknowledge the ambivalence of the neutral category in the Likert scale section, which often attracts more responses than it should. The open-ended comments collected from students in the questionnaire provided qualitative, explanatory data that was crucial for interpreting the students' quantitative responses. However, interviews or focus group discussions might have yielded valuable in-depth data essential to understanding and explaining the teaching approaches, teaching and learning

resources, and quality of assessments that were investigated in the current study. The 'lecturers' referred to by the respondents in the current study are postgraduate students who were recruited to present the language-acquisition courses. There is a need to conduct similar research where courses are presented by more experienced lecturers.

Conclusion

A meaningful dialogue on plurilingualism in South African HEIs calls for fundamental changes in the way policy makers, curriculum designers and lecturers perceive language, multilingualism, and education, as well as entailing a critical understanding of the language learners themselves, that is the students who are on the receiving end of the newly introduced language policies. While it is the lecturer's responsibility to present the lecture, choose appropriate teaching and learning approaches, resources and assessment tools, these choices need to be informed by the envisaged facilitation of the learning process.

The study investigated how 1st-year students at a university in South Africa perceive the teaching and learning of the Sesotho FAL course; the objectives of the study were specifically to ascertain the students' views on the teaching approaches used by lecturers presenting the course; the teaching and learning resources used in the course; and the quality of assessments. The study was guided by complex dynamic systems theory and it used the survey methodology comprised of a questionnaire with both close-ended belief statements and open-ended statements. Results emerging from the data revealed that 1st-year students generally found their lecturers' teaching approaches and assessment methods to be satisfactory; however, they perceived the teaching and learning resources used by their lectures in teaching Sesotho as being inadequate. This finding points to the need for further dialogue broadly on the quality of teaching and learning, the quality of assessment criteria, and the availability of teaching and learning resources provided for newly introduced courses in HEIs, and specifically on the level of preparation of lecturers tasked with the presentation of the newly introduced courses.

Without this critical dialogue, South African universities run the risk of rolling out and multiplying language-acquisition courses that merely adhere formally to higher education Language Policy stipulations without making a meaningful contribution to the student's language acquisition. This study envisages opening up the debate that will engage a deeply nuanced understanding of plurilingualism in South African HEIs that interrogates the current

teaching approaches, the availability of teaching and learning resources, and the quality of assessment in the newly introduced language acquisition courses.

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