Subscribing to diverse subjects in different classes: language development dichotomy

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ABSTRACT

Language teachers, yet on the other side, language enhancement is compromised for learners whose home language is not English. Further than that, for teachers lacking specialisation of other subjects allocated to them, besides English language teaching and learning becomes a monotonous activity that does not inspire learner attitudes more so that the greatest percentage of subjects underpinning the curriculum is offered in an English medium. This paper aims to explore if offering different subjects in varying classes has any significant impact on language development. The study is located within interpretivist paradigm using qualitative research appraoch and case study research design. 5 secondary school English language teachers were purposefully nominated and interviewed to study the problem's complex phenomenon. Findings divulged that multi subject allocation in the site investigated seemed to be compromising subject specification, thus leading to a decline in enhancing language development. The study recommends that to re-build teacher and learner motivation, policies should be put in place to consider subject speciality when allocation of subjects is administered.
Keywords: Subject allocation; pecialisation; urriculum enactment; motivation; learner assertiveness

INTRODUCTION

For enhanced academic throughput with regards to all subjects reinforcing the school curriculum, classroom setting should be structured such that teachers offer tuition based on their subject specialisation. This is declared by Broadfoot, Osborn, Planel & Sharpe (2000) who advocate for empowerment strategies for teachers to excel in their varying fields. Those teachers who demonstrate some permissiveness during teaching and learning have been noted for their appositeness in the subjects allocated to them. This notion is in line with (Jordhus-Lier, 2018) who proposes that learning environment becomes operational if focus has been made when subjects are allocated in relation to certain specifications. Henceforth, for effective and efficient language development, teacher-learner stimuli could be inspired when specialisation is considered as of paramount importance, this resulting at improved assertiveness in both learners and teachers as recipients of language learning (Tanjung, 2018). Moreover, there seems to be a dire need for education curriculum advisors to be acquainted of the caliber of teachers required for inspiring learner attitudes towards engaging with a language unfamiliar to them, further than that, a language not even their home language.

The assumption here is that when teachers are not allocated in accordance with their fields of specialization can affect learners, the teacher's on-the-job development, and their language proficiencies and in turn, learners also suffer from such set-up. It is believed that when a teacher is

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teaching a subject that is not their area of expertise, it can hinder the teacher's ability to properly develop lesson plans and deliver instruction in an engaging and effective manner. In addition, it is also believed that such a set-up can also hinder a teacher's language proficiency development and learner language achievement, as they are not using the language associated with their field of specialisation on daily basis (Myrberg et al., 2019). As a result, Johansson & Myrberg (2019) argued that it is essential that schools allocate teachers in accordance with their fields of specialisation to ensure that learners receive the best possible education.

Henceforth, curriculum enactment in South African schools could be inspired if specialisation logistics could be taken cognizance of. This means therefore that, for improved learner performance that would lead to improved development in the learning of languages, with specific focus in English language hence an additional language for the purposes of this inquiry, and as a way of overcoming re-manifestation of declining language learning outcomes over the past few years in the Senior Secondary subdivision, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is faced with a challenge to consider specialisation measures during employment and allocation of teachers. In addition to that, a similar case was reported in Zambia where it was noted that there are numerous dynamics encroaching learning achievement (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2016). These factors included teacher, learner, and school background factors (Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training & Early Education, 2013). In relation to teacher factors, a huge range of intercessions were instigated as a way of enhanced teacher capacitation (Darling-Hammond, 2014). It is for this reason that an interest emerged to investigate the main aim into whether subscribing to diverse subjects in different classes had any significant influence on language development.

For enhanced and motivated curriculum enactment, both teachers and learners need to own and commit to the subject learnt. Nevertheless, for a teacher to be allocated many different subjects and in different classes might lead to a decline in language proficiency more so that in the studied site English language is the only additional language, further than that, the greatest percentage of curriculum enactment is offered in the English medium. This then raises some alarm bells as English subject is underpinned by diverse aspects that need full and proper consideration. Such aspects include listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, poetry, and literature. Language learning strategies then become compromised when a specialist teacher is bombarded with diverse subjects across different classes. Shi (2017) and Moono, Mwinsa, Mwanabayeke, Sikota, Mwiinga, Sinkala, Mubanga & Chakanyika (2019) coincide by mentioning that for a teacher to focus on own speciality, such a strategy has been noted for improved language skills, thereby sustains confidence and accumulated learner motivation coupled with positive learner assertiveness towards curriculum implementation (Meliasari, 2019).

Furthermore, allocating teachers in accordance with their fields of specialisation can assist at improved language proficiencies, this being extended to appropriateness in both spoken and written tasks (Pickl, Holzinger & Kopp-Sixt, 2016). Through this improved proficiency level, communicative competencies would surely be enhanced. Teaching many subjects in different classes and not focusing into own specialisation is likely to deprive some as teaching English language has an ultimate aim of developing competent English communicators. Teachers therefore should dedicate themselves and devote sufficient time for teaching and learning mastery of the four language skills for learners to become communicatively competent, this encompassing communication abilities regardless or being in or out of class, with regards to either spoken, written and other language skills (Savignon, 2018).

Additionally, for motivated learner assertiveness coupled with accepted attitudes towards learning an unfamiliar language, for enhanced curriculum enactment, there arises an urgent need for

specialist teachers to engage at close and continued range with learners. Such close engagements are necessary as they examine teacher specialisation quality traits when curriculum is administered (Jordhus-Lier, 2021). As opposed by Ishiekwen & Benjamin (2014), despite such a vital aim in the learning of languages, there is still a cry that for most teachers in South African schools, their specialisations are put under the carpet when allocation of subjects is outlined, with the pretext of shortages in staffing. This concern calls for us as authors of this manuscript to question ourselves of the underlying reasons for the South African government to embark on the notion of closing all Teacher Training Colleges around the country despite the consistent outcry of subject specialisation versus staffing shortages or challenges.

In consideration of the gaps in-between curriculum enactment for diverse and varying language aspects, there is great concern regarding counter acting forces. As authors we then question ourselves whether the problem could be that of specialist teachers, yet not seen as the most vibrant linkage between learners and learning of language aspects. Teachers as language specialists are ones who can enhance curriculum implantation process (Ajeng, 2017). This is amongst some of the reasons that led to investigate why specialisation is overlooked when subject allocation is tabled down (Poland, Colburn & Long, 2017). Is it because those who lead the processes of subject allocation do not understand the importance of allocating teachers as per subjects they have specialised with, or is it because language education is not regarded as one of the fundamentals sustaining the curriculum (Bridges & Searle, 2011)? For this enquiry, it is in this light that a question had to be answered: How is subscribing to diverse subjects in different classes influencing language development? Edson, Marjorie and Danilo (2020) opined that teacher perceptions towards efficiency in handling any allocated subject is solely guided by subject matter understanding. In this instance, for a teacher to be allocated another subject yet lacking grounded subject matter knowledge might lead to consequences of difficulty to relay the intended learning outcomes. Such consequences are harmonized by Ndhlovu, Nkhata, Chipindi, Kalinde, Kaluba, Malama, Mambwe, Bwalya, Lufungulo and Chipande (2021) who argue that limited background and orientation as relevant prerequisites to curriculum enactment, have been noted of a tendency to lead to poor attitudes by both learners and teachers as beneficiaries to learning processes. Additionally, Maton and Chen (2019) are of the same opinion as they affirm that training teachers on diverse specialisation is of beneficial significance on teacher self-efficiency in relation to teaching a particular subject offered. This therefore brings us to comment that for maintained teacher attitudes, learner attitudes, motivated employees, proficient learners, DBE has to take teacher qualifications and specialisation into serious accord when re-visiting processes of subject allocation (Elliot, Kratochill, Cook & Travex, 2000; Majoni, 2016).

Further than that, for enhanced growth in professional competence, teachers are expected to attain some measurable knowledge for the subjects they have specialised with. This would assist at coping with the expected demands revolving around teaching and learning, likely to erupt to improvement in learner academic attainment, coupling this with intrinsically motivated teachers and learners. Specialisation in subject matter for the teaching profession has since been regarded as amongst vital aspects in a classroom environment hence intertwined with benefits like imparting relevant and reliable knowledge when learning occurs, boosting teacher-learner morale, let alone restoring teaching as a profession. Underpinning this inquiry is Opinion Leadership Theory by Thompson (2009). This theory is in line with people perceived as information providers due to specific quality information they have. Such people have prominence as they have been noted to have awareness of the recent and relevant information, with expectations that they disseminate such

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information to others for capacitation in a particular sphere of learning. Concurrently, for the purposes of this examination, educational implication of Opinion Leadership Theory is that teachers owning subject specialisation need to be considered as relevant to provide and disseminate information to respective learners, instead of them being barraged with subjects not trained for, further than that, to be expected to offer tuition in a wide range of classes (Roy, 2016).

Language is something that is very important in human life. Language is used by humans to communicate with others in everyday life. Language is one way to communicate between people in words. There are many different languages in the world. Today, English is the most important language. As we can see that English has been used as a common language used to communicate throughout the world.

METHODS

This section presents the method adopted for the study ranging from Research Paradigm, approach, design, participants, instrumentation, and method of data analysis.

Research approach

We adopted interpretivist paradigm to lens this study. The paradigm is based on the belief that reality is socially constructed and that there is no single objective truth (Wilson, 2017). Interpretivism believes that meaning is created through the interaction between people, and that research should aim to understand how people make sense of their experiences (Knoblauch, 2013). Interpretivist research is relevant because it employs qualitative methods of inquiry and methods such as interviews, participant observation, and case studies (Ponelis, 2015). This argument informed our decision to adopt a qualitative research approach, case study design and interview as an instrument. With this perspective, we were able to understand how our participants make sense of their experiences, which is important to generate new knowledge about the phenomenon under study.

The study adopted a qualitative method research approach in order to have an in-depth understanding of the participants and their lived experiences (Daher et al., 2017). This approach was chosen because it allows for a deep exploration of the participants' perspectives and personal narratives (Smith, 1996). In addition, this approach is well-suited for exploring sensitive topics, such as those related to human behaviours. The data collected through qualitative methods is typically richer and more detailed than that which is collected through quantitative methods. As a result, the qualitative approach was deemed to be the most appropriate for this study.

Research design

The case study research design has been used extensively in both the natural and social sciences. For the purposes of this inquiry, the case study design was deemed appropriate for the study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon or issue which in this study is the measurement of whether subscribing to different subjects in diverse classes has any significant influence towards language learning. It is particularly well suited to investigating topics that are inherently complex and multi-faceted. In addition, the case study design is flexible and can be adapted to accommodate for changes in the direction of the research. The flip side of this flexibility, however, is that it can be difficult to draw definitive or generalised conclusions from a case study. Nonetheless, the case study remains a valuable tool for researchers who are interested in understanding a particular phenomenon in depth such as the problem under study.

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Participants

Participants are nominated people who participate and answer questions in qualitative studies (Patton, 1990). These individuals are essential informants possessing some special knowledge and are renown of their eagerness to share the information and skills they have, with the researcher. For this investigation, we embarked on using purposive sampling to nominate our participants. This is a sampling technique that qualitative researchers use to identify relevant participants able to supply both detailed and in-depth evidence with regards to the investigated phenomenon

With intentions to obtain rich and purposeful data, five secondary school English language teachers were nominated as participants to this qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2014). These teachers were perceived as the relevant cohort to produce substantial evidence regarding the topic under examination as they rendered services in a school where staffing shortages were noted, leading to teachers allocated many subjects across different phase levels. The investigated school is situated in one Education District from the Eastern Cape Province.

Data collection and ethical consideration

We conducted semi-structured interviews as a means of collecting data from participants (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). This method allowed us to fully engage with each participant, probing deeper into emerging themes. The questions we asked were centred around teachers' perspectives on language development, including aspects like listening, speaking, reading and writing. This helped us to gain a better understanding of the participants' views on the topic. Overall, the semi-structured interviews proved to be an effective way of collecting data from the participants. Moreover, the nominated participants had granted us permission to conduct research on them and assured us willingness to engage in interviews, as authors guaranteed them that all their responses would be kept anonymous, thereby not to disclose their names even at the stage of data presentation.

Data analysis

We adopted thematic analysis to make sense of the data, thematic analysis as propounded by Braun and Clarke (2006) is relevant to this study because it allows us to break down the interview text into thematic areas for the purpose of meaning-making. The six steps of doing thematic analysis as indicated by Broun and Blake are: generating initial codes; reviewing codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and writing report. In our study, we followed these steps to identify the main themes that emerged from the data. In doing so, we followed the basic rules of confidentiality and anonymity by reporting the data without any traces against the identities of the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an argument of findings in accordance with the emergent themes (Mackey & Gass, 2016), namely: multi subject allocation and compromised subject specific application. On the first theme on multi subject allocation this paper found out that language development is hindered as teachers offering English language are faced with challenges to offer other subjects in varying classes. The second finding on compromised subject specific application was noted to be having an influence on language enhancement in learners. For a teacher not fully capacitated and without proper training to offer a particular subject, specifically English language for the purposes of this investigation, language learning is compromised indeed.

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Multi subject allocation

From all participants during the administration of the interview schedule, it relatively emerged as a major finding that multi subject allocation has proved to be a fundamental encounter as it emanated that English language teachers get overwhelmed as they are expected to offer other subject not trained for. This statement became evident when one participant responded: *I really had a huge conflict with my Staff Management Team as I clearly outlined to them that each year when allocation of subjects is done, my specialization seems to be taken for granted. For me to be allocated other subjects besides what I was trained for is demoralising me day in and day out.* Another participant was of a similar opinion: *It would have been much better if my managers would make me offer just one and the same subject, no matter the number of classes, instead of expecting me to offer diverse subjects, yet in diverse classes. This is really a mess that I am faced with ever since I started working in this school.* This situation was worsened by that these teachers when allocation was pioneered, they would be spread across diverse classes, grades, and levels. This is also supported by other participants with exact that: *this kind of arrangement has resulted in the failure of learners and I was made to account for it, yooh, this is unfair to me.* We therefore argue that such arrangements tended to impact on learner-teacher motivation and thereby distorting learner attention.

Compromised subject specific application

The second finding asserts that curriculum enactment was found to be deprived because for a teacher to be allocated a subject not have undergone specific training for it, is tantamount to a decline in learner achievement rate. On the other hand, when performance is noted to be in decline, learners are likely to be assertive, thereby affecting teacher-learner relations as learner attitudes may go out of hand due to dissatisfaction in curriculum implementation. For an English language teacher to be expected to produce quality and competent learners yet expected to implement a functional curriculum not specialized in, really calls for compromised subject specific application. The statements above are extracted from responses by participants: *As I am standing in front of those learners, I feel I am not confident enough, I feel I am not imparting information fully, this being caused by the mere fact that I have been forced to offer a subject that I am not comfortable with.* In line with the very same challenging effect, we felt so disturbed and troubled as the other participant commented: *I feel so glad that at least there are people prepared to listen to my troubles. I have long been reporting to management the re-allocate me because learners complain now and again with my delivery of the content. I can not blame these learners because I am fully aware that I am not confident enough to teach this subject, I really feel like I am compromising both the subject and learners.*

As the findings to this enquiry were noted to be multi subject allocation and compromised subject specific application, this seemed to hamper focus and adherence to English language, henceforth, this medium was reported to be the language of instruction for the greatest percentage of subjects offered in the investigated school. Additionally, English subject with its diversity, has plenty components needing one to have specific focus coupled with proper academic and professional training with regards to the subject matter specifications. In line with these findings, Brill and Amir (2018) articulate that some subjects offered in most South African schools adhere to the practice of adopting English language as medium of instruction, and to that effect, learners have proved to easily adapt even in English lessons. Further than that, those learners who have engaged in studying and acquiring English language, their skill at learning other subjects is likely to be enhanced. When curriculum implementation reaches its highest peak with regards to learner progression, both learners and teachers as recipients to teaching and learning become motivated and assertive. Henceforth, when

learning environment is positive and conducive for functional learners, learner attitudes are of a positive nature as well, as declared by Razali, Talib, Abd & Hassan (2018).

Moreover, for English language teachers to be specifically allocated for the subject they were trained for, yet at the same time not compromising the subject specific application logistics, teachers need to achieve this by becoming more language aware. When allocation of subjects for teachers is done, what is expected, as per author opinions, is to consider challenges underpinned more so that English language composes of dissimilar components inclusive of listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar. Furthermore, learning an additional language is no mean task. It needs concentration as learners only encounter engaging when at school, faced with encounters to vocabulary and language structures (Muijs & Reynolds, 2018). Bohndick, Kohlmeyer and Buhl (2017) resonate that to incorporate English language learning really needs specialist teachers hence aligned with miscellaneous spheres in the field of work skills learnt are vital for success in other subjects, hence the medium of instruction that cuts across most subjects offered by the South African curriculum. When proficiencies like listening, speaking, reading, writing have been fully developed in learners, academic attainment is likely to improve as learners would have obtained fluency in English subjects with its diverseness.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, subscribing to diverse subjects in different classes towards language development was evaluated. Teaching many subjects in different classes and contexts really proved to be an overwhelming encounter. During subject allocation contexts, teacher specialization needs serious consideration. Findings that multi subject allocation together with compromised subject specific application prove to be fundamental encounter are in line with the Opinion Leadership Theory as it proposes for dissemination of information by people perceived to have specific quality knowledge in a certain field, in this case, implying consideration of teachers as specialists in the subjects trained for.

To cater for language development engulfed by subscribing to diverse subjects in different classes proprieties, we recommend that when schools practically undergo subject allocation procedures, stringent measures be taken care of for teachers who had undergone specialisation, and this be infused in practical and functional policy as an imperative. Further than that, we recommend that subject allocation should not be diversely spread across different grades, yet different subjects. Theoretically, such disregards have been seen to result at distorted learner attention due to lack of motivation. When teachers themselves get demotivated because of offering many subjects in different classes, both teacher and learner morale is irrigated. As learning English as an additional language is a compulsory practice in the investigated school, both teachers and learners need to be motivated and granted entire focus hence English is not learners' home language. For further research coupled with functionality and efficiency, future studies could investigate the extent of subject specific application towards improved academic attainment. We already believe that such a strategy would attest resourceful on curriculum enactment aimed towards enhanced language development.

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