

Bilingualism at an English-Medium university in South Africa

Introduction

At the end of the apartheid era, students with diverse backgrounds were allowed entry into universities that were previously linguistically and racially homogenous. Even though that is the case the system in previously white universities did not change; English and Afrikaans continued to dominate as languages of higher education, while the local indigenous languages remain at the margins of these institutions. That means the previously disadvantaged students (especially those who do not speak English as a home language) had to find a way to adapt within the system. The languages used in higher education is characterised by terms that are usually abstract and difficult to understand, especially for those to whom the language of teaching and learning is not their first language. Research (Batibo, 2010; Cummins, 1979; Vygotsky, 1986; Paxton, 2010) shows that cognition i.e. making sense of knowledge presented by a concept represented by a term is facilitated better in a language which one understands best. The paper will provide a contextual background of the issues discussed where the legislative framework guiding the use of language in education will be presented; then move onto the theories that speak to the relationship of language and learning. The issues that arose from the study will be presented, analysed and discussed using the theories mentioned above. Lastly, the recommendations and the conclusion of the study will be presented.

Contextual background

The post-apartheid institutions such as The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), language policy for higher education (LPHE) (2002) and the RU language policy (2013/2014) will be briefly discussed as contextual background. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) will be illustrating what it entails regarding linguistic rights in education whilst LPHE and RU language policy will be representing institutional language policies.

Section 6(2) of the Constitution acknowledges the disadvantaged past of indigenous languages and states that there must be practical measures taken to uplift the status and advance the use of these languages. So, there is a need for language planning which would allow indigenous languages to develop and consequently enable their use in domains that used to be reserved for English and Afrikaans only.

To regulate the operation of HE, the Higher Education Act (1997) was formulated to govern the functions of bodies such as the Council for Higher Education (CHE) and to provide for transitional arrangements and repeal of certain laws that governed HE before 1994 (Higher Education Act, 1997).

The Higher Education Act required the CHE to draft a language policy framework for HE which would attend to, and advance the development of LPHE (LPHE, 2002).

The LPHE (2002) acknowledges that language is a barrier to access and success in HE as indigenous African languages are not developed enough to be used in high-function domains and as there are students who are not proficient enough in English and Afrikaans (LPHE, 2002). The policy states that one of the challenges that is facing HE is to ensure the development of multilingualism where all languages are developed and promoted as academic languages and there are ways which are proposed by this policy to address the language issues within HE in SA.

HEIs are advised to identify an indigenous language of their choice, in alignment to provincial language policy, for development as medium of instruction. With Rhodes being geographically situated in the Eastern Cape with the majority speakers of isiXhosa (Maseko, 2011; Kaschula et al, 2009), isiXhosa is the indigenous language which is targeted by the Rhodes RU language policy (RU Language Policy, 2005 revised in 2014).

The RU language policy was formulated in 2003 and as suggested in the LPHE, the policy is supposed to be reviewed every three years. The policy was revised between 2012 and 2014. The primary objectives of the policy include the following:

- Promotion of multilingualism in teaching and learning, to nurture the linguistic and cultural diversity on campus
- Promotion of academic literacy in English for speakers of LOTE
- Development of multilingual teaching materials in line with the official languages of the institution
- Development of isiXhosa as an academic language
- Promotion of awareness on issues around multilingualism

The role played by language in learning is acknowledged by the policy and constructive debate about bi/multilingualism on campus is encouraged (RU Language Policy, 2005/2014). The use of additional resources such as glossaries and dictionaries is also encouraged and that these resources should be made accessible (Gambushe, 2015; Mawonga, 2015). The next section is going to discuss the theories behind the relationship between language and learning.

Theoretical Framework

This section is going to discuss the theoretical framework around the relationship between language and learning and how important it is for one to master their primary language before moving onto an additional language.

Cummins & Swain (1986) argue that the first language and second language have interdependent aspects and this interdependence is usually shown on academic related language proficiency. So, it is important that one first has a conceptual understanding of a concept in their primary language before moving onto the second language. This can be started off by introducing briefly Cummins' argument about BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) and CALP (cognitive-academic language proficiency). There are many written texts about these two language proficiency concepts (Cummins, 1984; 1979; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Baker & Jones, 1997; Paxton, 2009). The distinction between these two concepts was made to justify a situation where for an example one would be fluent in a language (English) but find it difficult to understand or perform well in a non-verbal academic test. The explanation is that the students might only have communicative skills for the language and they do not have any capacity to deal with the demanding abstract and academic content in the language (Cummins, 1979; 1984; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Baker & Jones, 1997).

Without any cognitive understanding of certain concepts of a discipline in a first language it becomes very difficult to grasp those in the second language. Ouane & Glanz (2010) argue this point by saying that learning in one's first language lays cognitive and linguistic foundation for learning additional languages. So, additive bilingualism helps as one would learn a second language and things would be easier for them when it comes to grasping concepts which are available in their languages. Obanya (2004: 41) also states that "first language lays a foundation for learning". The points that have been made are not arguing that the students should learn in their languages, but it makes sense if there is some integration between the language of teaching and their first language where there will be a provision of certain concepts in their languages for them to understand the concepts easily.

When students get exposed to new concepts and ideas it is ideal to introduce these in a language which they understand best as that would be a proper supportive tool for comprehension (Batibo, 2010; Kaschula, 2013; Maseko, 2011). Kaschula (2013) states that it is unquestionably that one understands concepts properly in their primary language and Batibo (2010) also argues that if this does not happen it leads to learners not being confident enough and they tend to fail to articulate themselves properly during the process of learning. Understanding concepts in one's own languages enhances what Boughey (2009) refers to as epistemological access which is where learners also participate in construction of knowledge and they do not only become passive participants who would not challenge and would reproduce the same knowledge. Ball (2011) argues that epistemological access is important as the use of international languages as languages of instruction at school as that confuses and places a challenge to learners because they cannot relate the curriculum to their everyday experiences.

With mother-tongue education seeming to be problematic to achieve now, bilingual education is encouraged as the first language can act as a supportive tool for learning. Through all of that, mother-tongue based bilingual education is encouraged using terminology to help students with learning. As

the study seeks to evaluate the use of terminology planning for the implementation of bilingualism, the next section is going to discuss the methodology employed in the study.

The methodology of the study

For this study, semi-structured observations, interviews and questionnaires were used. In this study, the students who participated were requested to give consent to participate and were made aware that their participation is optional and their responses would be kept confidential and their identity would be kept anonymous. I attended the Extended Studies Politics 1 classes with the students where I systematically observed and described students' behaviour regarding the use of LOTE in a classroom context, especially the use of the multilingual glossary.

I observed whether the students use the glossary which they were provided with, which language they were using when they were learning in class with the lecturer and when they were discussing issues among themselves. Cohen et al (2011) states that observation also helps the researcher to see things that participants might not freely talk about in interviews or answer them on questionnaires. This method has helped me to see if the students used the glossary in class and confirm some of the responses that they gave in the questionnaire. Observing ES Politics 1 classes benefitted me to get a full image of the class rather than only getting a description which was given by the participants during interviews and in the responses of the questionnaires.

Questionnaires were used in this study to obtain information about the students' home languages; the language which was used when learning in high school and their experiences on the use of the bilingual Political Philosophy glossary.

There were two sets of questionnaires that were distributed to the participants. The first set of the questionnaires was distributed to the students at the beginning of the term when they were starting with the module. The purpose of the first set was to gather students' perceptions about the use of multilingual resource materials as well as the use of LOTE to facilitate learning at university. This helped to get the students' viewpoints and understand their high school experiences compared to what they were experiencing in their first year at university.

The second questionnaire was distributed in the middle of the term. This is when the students had access to the bilingual glossary as it was distributed to them. The purpose of the questionnaire was the students' experiences of the bilingual glossary whether they used the glossary; they found it useful and their general opinions about the terms that were in the bilingual glossary. Some questions in the questionnaire were asked to help the researcher with deeper understanding of certain issues that the students might

have regarding multilingual glossaries. Open-ended questions were used for this purpose as Silverman (2010) states that they help to understand one's opinions and experiences. Follow-up interviews were used to complement some of the responses given by the students. These are going to be discussed below.

The interviews were conducted when the Political Philosophy I module was over, so that the participants could reflect on their experiences and their use of the bilingual glossary. The students that were selected for the follow-up interviews were those who had indicated in the questionnaires that they had used the glossary. The students who stated that they did not use the glossary were not interviewed because they had stated in the questionnaires their reasons for not using the glossary.

The semi-structured follow-up interviews also actively encouraged the participants to reflect more on language issues such as the use of LOTE at university to facilitate learning

Themes that emerged and the analysis of data

In searching for answers to the main research question, this section presents and analyses issues that emerged from the data collection process. These issues are linked to the research sub-questions and some of them are:

- the languages used by students in formal learning contexts
- the availability of multilingual resources for students in learning and executing tasks during the learning process
- the students' perceptions on the role of LOTE as languages of academia
- the students' perceptions on the role of English in HE

Languages used by students in formal learning contexts

From the students' feedback, in high school they were always using two languages as medium of instruction (MoI): English, and another language which was either Afrikaans or an indigenous African language such as isiXhosa or SiSwati. Ninety-one percent (91%) of the thirty-three (33) sampled students spoke LOTE as home languages and these languages were also used in conjunction with English (which is spoken by three students as home language) which was the LoLT in high school. Therefore, the students are used to being taught with their primary languages to support learning in English. During interviews, one of the students explained:

"I am used to talking SiSwati...I did it at school in all my subjects, now it is like my first time I learn in English. If for an example they were explaining 'Global Warming' they would explain it in Swati."

The LoLT in the schools is the child's primary language in the first four (from Grade R- Grade 3) years of schooling. According to the Department of Basic Education (2014) the LoLT from Grade 4 to Grade 12 is English. When LoLT changes from the learner's primary language to English, there is more code-

switching that happens in class (Setati et al, 2002; Meyer, 1998; Madiba & Mabiletja, 2009; Desai, 2012). In Limpopo schools, Madiba & Mabiletja (2009) found out that the implementation of the Language in Education Policy (LiEP), it was found out that teachers of Ex-DET schools also mostly choose to teach using learners' primary languages rather than English. According to Madiba & Mabiletja (2009: 216) the teachers choose learner's primary languages in order "to make learners understand" what they are being taught.

The use of learners' primary languages with English in high school happens in order to facilitate cognition. According to scholars (Bangbose, 1991; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Cummins, 2001; Obanya, 2004) there is a relationship between language and learning, learning in one's primary language facilitates more learning. It has been argued that it is better when new abstract concepts are introduced to the students in a language which they fully understand (Alexander, 2003; Kaschula, 2013; Maseko, 2011; Batibo, 2010). According to Vygotsky (1986) abstract thinking is required for learners when they are in school for them to understand the scientific and complicated concepts that are usually used. Language has been recognized to be playing a huge role in concept learning and conceptualization, and conceptual development happens in one's primary language. Thus, it makes it difficult for learners to learn and understand difficult concepts in a language that is not their primary language. For learners to be able to participate in learning and in the construction of knowledge, it is important that they are taught in a language which they understand the most (Maseko, 2011; Batibo, 2010; Kaschula, 2013).

With English being the only LoLT at RU, students used their home languages to discuss certain concepts or when performing tasks in formal and informal learning contexts. Using observations, when the students were with their classmates with whom they share a primary language, and were discussing a particular task that they had to do, they would discuss it in their home language. For instance, the students who had isiXhosa as a home language would explain instructions about a task to each other in isiXhosa before they commenced with performing the task. When students were grouped together for a discussion they would, for an example, detach themselves from the main group which would consist of other students who spoke different languages. Those who spoke the same language would separate themselves and discuss the work in their home languages on the side. Then when finished with the discussion they would report back to the main group in English. This was not happening only with students who spoke indigenous African languages as primary languages, but also with those who spoke Afrikaans as a primary language.

For instance, a discussion by a group of isiXhosa speaking students was as follows:

“...le offence ukuba iphysical yi-harm leyo.” {Lit. If this offence is physical then that is harm}

“Kufuneka sikhumbule iharm principle, so kuqala we must discuss ukuba yintoni iharm principle” {lit. We must remember the harm principle, so we must first discuss what harm principle is}.

“...so *iharm akunyanzelekanga ibe*-physical... *iharm ne-offence ziyalink(a)*” {Lit. So harm does not have to be physical... harm and offence link}.

Throughout their discussion, the use of their primary languages was used to emphasise understanding and to clearly articulate their thoughts about what they were required to do.

During the interviews, when asked which language they would prefer to use in learning the students stated that they preferred a language which they understand the most, which is their primary language. one student stated that:

“It is isiXhosa as it is easy to understand and you can explain things easily when using isiXhosa”.

Another student responded that:

“*SisiXhosa ngoba nasendlini sithetha isiXhosa, naxa ndiphupha ndiphupha ngesiXhosa. Xa ndithetha I think in isiXhosa then translate loo nto ke ngoku to English*”. {Lit. It's isiXhosa because at home we also speak isiXhosa, I also dream in isiXhosa. When I speak, I think in isiXhosa then translate my thoughts into English}.

“...I would prefer Xhosa because it is my home language so I understand it much better than English.”

The above pattern was also observed in the studies of Setati et al (2000) which was conducted in South African primary schools. In terms of research that has been conducted in higher education and has illustrated similar results it is that of Dalvit (2010) and Paxton (2007; 2009). Even though in Paxton's study (2009) some students admitted sometimes even in their languages it becomes difficult to come with equivalents of the English academic terms. Studying students in Computer Science, Dalvit (2010) found that the students who are speakers of indigenous languages would sometimes discuss and explain to those who did not understand what the lecturer was saying in their own languages. The students used this method to cope with the “context-reduced” and cognitively demanding language used at university. In Dalvit's (2010) study which focused on the implementation of isiXhosa terminology in Computer Science, he reported that some bilingual tutors who could speak indigenous languages stated that sometimes in practicals they were also code-switching to broaden the students' understanding. Also in Paxton's study (2009: 355) where she was researching the use of students' home languages in a multilingual glossary project in Economics, the students provided responses such as:

“It's easy to learn when you are using your home language but with English you need to start learning language before you get to the concept.”

The above statement by the student shows that the students find it difficult to cope when they are learning in English only as they only have BICS-equivalence in the language and have not yet acquired the CALP level which requires them to perform at an abstract level.

The availability of multilingual resources for students in learning

This section is going to discuss students' use of available resources to support learning when performing tasks, particularly to look for meaning. In the first questionnaire students were asked if they would make use of multilingual glossaries if these were made available to them. The students' responses in the questionnaires stated that they would use the multilingual glossaries if they would be provided with them as resource materials. Of the thirty-three students, 83% responded that they would use the materials if they would be provided with them.; 15% responded that they would not use the materials and 2% did not answer the question.. The results in this part of the study were similar those conducted on language attitudes in different higher education institutions in SA (Dyers, 1998; Aziakpono, 2007; Dalvit & de Klerk, 2005; Shembe, 2005; Dalvit, 2010).

In response to whether they used other resources when they had a problem understanding terms in the subject under study, students indicated that there were indeed other resources that they used to help them understand a certain concept that they would find difficult to understand. They acknowledged that they used dictionaries as sources to understand meaning of concepts which they found difficult to understand. Also in class, during observations the students were encouraged by their lecturer to buy monolingual dictionaries which seemed to be prescribed for them. In the questionnaires and interviews, all students who participated stated that they used dictionaries. Students also stated that they used other resources such as the internet, specialised subject dictionaries and glossaries. During observations, there were students that seemed to own monolingual dictionaries and they would use them solely when they were reading in class or working within groups. In discussions, when students were looking for the meaning of a certain concept they would consult their dictionaries.

When the students were asked during the interviews how they were using the glossary, they stated that they were using it when they were executing tasks such as tutorials and assignments.

“Bendiyisebenzisa at my own time xa igama ndingali-understand(i), naxa ndifuna i-meaning yelo gama.”
{Lit. I was using it at my own time when I don't understand a certain term and looking for the meaning of that term}.

“I only used it when I was doing my essay, assignments... so that I can understand the terms.”

“This glossary helps me a lot on writing meaningful essays and understanding what I am reading about.”

These results are similar to those conducted on language attitudes in different higher education institutions in SA (Dyers, 1998; Aziakpono, 2007; Dalvit & de Klerk, 2005; Shembe, 2005; Dalvit, 2010). In these studies, students stated that they want their languages to be used to support their learning.

These studies to some extent had similar results. For instance, in the studies of Dyers (1998) (University of the Western Cape); Shembe (2005) (University of Durban-Westville); Dalvit & de Klerk (2005) (University of Fort Hare) and Aziakpono (2007) (Rhodes University) that were conducted on attitudes of students towards the use of African languages (isiXhosa or isiZulu) as LoLT. The results showed that the students were not totally opposed to this view. But the difference was in how LOTE would be introduced in the spheres of learning. For an example, in Shembe's study (2005), where he was investigating the use of isiZulu as a teaching, learning and assessment tool in Chemistry in HE the students stated that they would like isiZulu to be used, but in combination with English. In other studies (Dalvit & de Klerk, 2005; Aziakpono, 2007) most isiXhosa speaking students were not against the use of isiXhosa at university but they emphasised that they should be used in a bilingual form, where they will be used in-combination with English especially at first year level.

It made sense for these students to state that they would use the resource materials as the LoLT is not their mother tongue. According to Obanya (2004) and Batibo (2010), when students have access to scientific concepts in their own languages, it becomes easy for them to transfer their understanding into English. This is based on Cummins' study (1979) where he shows the relationship between first language acquisition and second language learning. Therefore, it is important that bi/multilingual resource materials are produced for the facilitation of learning.

There are multilingual glossary projects that have been initiated in most HEIs in the country to assist in facilitating learning (Maseko, 2014; Nkomo & Madiba, 2011; Madiba, 2010; Paxton, 2007; 2009; RU-SANTED Report, 2010). Students who participated in this study have also indicated their support for the introduction of these resource materials. When the students were asked for their general thoughts on the provision of bilingual resource materials one of them stated that:

“I would like for them to be used, because it is much easier to understand something in your own language. My marks would improve.”

According to Antia (2000), for one to access knowledge for a certain discipline it is important that they master the terminology used in that discipline. Most students stated that they are coming from Ex-DET schools where they were using their primary languages alongside English in class. This makes it necessary to provide the students with multilingual resource materials. The bilingual glossary was made available to students after the distribution of the questionnaires on their perceptions on the use of LOTE at university. Seventy-six percent (76%) of the students stated that they have used the bilingual glossary. There are certain views that the students hold regarding bilingual glossaries and these are going to be discussed in the next issue observed.

Students' perceptions on the role of LOTE as languages of academia

In this section, I present how the students have perceived LOTE. As presented in the first theme that I presented as an issue in this paper, the students that participated in the collection of data for this research speak different home languages and most of those are LOTE.

Responding to questionnaires and interview questions, there were students who stated that they were used to being taught in LOTE, and that it was new to them that everything was done in English.

“...coming from a township school it is difficult to follow what the lecturer is saying as we are used to being taught in Xhosa.”

As it has been previously discussed, in most Ex-DET schools still use teachers use code-switching to facilitate learning for the students even though the LoLT is English from Grade 4 (Setati et al, 2002; Desai, 2012; Madiba & Mabiletja, 2009). The students in this study responded that they would like it for LOTE to be used in HE in order to help them with understanding certain concepts when they are learning. According to Aziakpono's (2007) study, sixty-five percent (65%) of the students who took part stated that they would like it for LOTE (isiXhosa in this case) to be developed and be used as LoLT. The students stated that learning would be better if there were terms that are in isiXhosa as that would enable them to understand. There are other studies (Dalvit & de Klerk, 2005; Dyers, 1998; Dalvit, 2010) where students stated that the use of their mother tongues in conjunction with the main LoLT which is English in most universities would be beneficial. In this study, most students were also in favour of use of LOTE (“I wish they could be used so that we can understand our studies better”).

The students' preference for the use of LOTE with English shows that they are aware that using their mother tongue with the LoLT when learning can help them in understanding their work better. Even though it is the case, similar to Aziakpono (2007); Dalvit & de Klerk (2005) and Dyers (1998), the students who agree to and support the use of LOTE in HE support that these languages can be used in addition to English which will still be the LoLT.

The students do not want to lose access to English because of what they believe access to English will allow them. For example, English allows people to participate in different sectors and it is a common belief among the students and some parents that when their children have more access to English then they have more chances of succeeding and getting better jobs (De Klerk, 2002).

The students' fear of losing access to English has led to some scepticism among the students regarding the use of their home languages in HE. Some students were asking questions such as “do you think it is possible to learn in African languages at university?” In Dalvit's study (2010) during the data collection process there were students who also found the idea of using African languages in HE (in the field of Computer Science for Dalvit) to be amusing and not possible. According to Edwards

(1994) a language that is associated with high-domain or is seen to be dominating is always given high-status not only by its speaker, but by speakers of other languages as well. In this context, because English is linked to the language of access to good education, better resources and employment opportunities and is seen to be the language of the 'elite' and speakers of other languages aspire to access it.

Even though this is the case, studies (Setati et al. 2002; Desai, 2012; Madiba & Mabiletja, 2009; Makgato, 2014) show that code-switching is used in most Ex-DET schools to facilitate learning where the learners are not first language speakers of English. According to Aziakpono (2007), some students who have participated in her study stated that in universities such as the University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape there has been interventions where students are taught in tutorials with their home languages to assist learning. This shows that the students acknowledge the potential that their home languages have in assisting to facilitate cognition.

According to Paxton (2009), the students in her study appreciated the use of their own languages for discussing concepts and perceived it to be more beneficial.

“It’s easy for me to translate in English when I know it in Xhosa.”

From the student’s comment above, it can be supported by Cummins’ hypothesis of developing conceptual learning. According to Cummins (1979) in order for one to facilitate cognition in a second language it is important that understanding in the first language has been fully developed. The first and second language are interdependent for academic functioning, also, cognition is initially attained in the first language then the skills get transferred into the second language after fully proficiency in the mother tongue has been reached. In this context as the students above have explained, it is easy for them to learn new information in their own languages which they are proficient in and then transfer it into the second language which is English in this case.

As LOTE (indigenous languages to be specific) are mostly associated with being used at home and in other small institutions, another view that came from the students was linking the use of LOTE to traditions and culture. When the students were asked for their views on the use of LOTE in HE some students responded that:

“African languages should be used because it is neglected as mother tongue. Traditional learning languages at schools and university is important”

“I support them to an extent that people don’t forget where they come from. So that I do not get caught up in this English world that I forget my own language”.

According to Dalvit and de Klerk (2005), in their study as well isiXhosa was being more associated with the Xhosa culture while English was not seen to be belonging to any culture. According to Phillipson (1992), English has globalised to a point where it moved from where it originated, has

spread and is used at a non-regional, non-national and non-ethnic level because of the ‘power’ it holds. Wardhaugh (1987) (cited in Phillipson, 1992: 275) explains this notion:

“...since no cultural requirements are tied to the learning of English, you can learn it without having to subscribe to another set of values...tied to no particular social, political, economic, or religious system, English belongs to everyone or to no one, or it at least is quite often regarded as having this property.”

When the students think of LOTE they also consider values and traditions because they are used to using these languages at home.

Most students in this study seemed to be aware of the value of LOTE and how much the use of these languages can assist them in learning. There are other studies such as Shembe (2005); Dyers (1998) that have been mentioned where the students state that they are aware that the use of their home languages in HE would help them in learning and also they would be able to participate in class as they would fully understand what they are being taught. The use of LOTE in HE is supported by the students especially at first year level. However, in all of that, the students do not want to use the languages solely, but rather they prefer to use them in a manner in which they will facilitate learning in English. Even though they want access to English, they are aware that learning in their home languages has more benefits and that is what makes the students to be more positive on the use of LOTE in HE. The next section is going to discuss the issue on the students’ perceptions on the role that English has in HE.

The students’ perceptions on the role of English in HE

With English being the LoLT at RU there are different perceptions that the students have regarding the language. This issue emerged as the students were comparing learning in English to their home languages and the role which the students think English plays in learning and in HE. Starting off this section, the perceptions that are held in the South African schooling context are going to be briefly presented. These refer to the perceptions from the teachers; parents as well as learners, the beliefs that they have regarding the role of English. These views are going to be discussed because the students who are part of HE might relate to them as they experience being in high school before they come to university.

As stipulated in the language in Education Policy (LiEP) (1997) English or Afrikaans is the language of teaching in most high schools. Even though this is the case, it has been discussed previously that in some schools especially Ex-DET code-switching is dominating where teachers use indigenous languages to explain concepts to the learners. Some parents who can afford good quality education manage to take their children to English-medium schools where there are well-equipped teachers as well as adequate resources to assist the learning process of the pupils.

In de Klerk's study (2002) that was conducted in all English-medium schools in Grahamstown she was investigating the parents' reasons for sending their children to English-medium schools where they would be taught in English. The parents' responses were based on their view of English. Most parents stated that they chose the English-medium schools because of the quality of education that these schools offer (De Klerk, 2002). There are other responses that are relevant for this study such as that the parents believed that English is one of the most important languages that a child should learn while they are still young and that will allow them more job opportunities, better life and high chances of educational success in the future (De Klerk, 2002).

Similar to the parents' beliefs, the learners in Limpopo schools on a study conducted by Madiba and Mabiletja (2009) stated that they prefer to be taught in English. According to Madiba and Mabiletja (2009) most of the learners believe that they are proficient in English and can learn using English as LoLT. With the observations from the study the researchers found out that the learners do not have academic proficiency of English. This is a typical case where learners who have acquired the BICS of a language assume that they can learn in the language. According to Cummins (1979) acquiring basic conversational proficiency in a language does not guarantee that one can learn in that language. Some teachers on the other hand also stated that they prefer to teach in English because it is the language that is used in HE therefore they are preparing the learners for university.

English is indeed a language that is used for teaching and learning in most universities in South Africa. Also because of multilingual nature of the university environment, it is used in most universities as a lingua franca. There are certain studies that have been conducted on the university students' attitudes towards English (Dyers, 1997) as well as some other students' languages that are other than English (Aziakpono, 2007; Dalvit, 2005; Shembe, 2005; Dyers, 1998).

In this study, when the students were asked about their perceptions about English being the only LoLT at university the students' responses showed that they were comparing learning in English to learning in their home languages instead of comparing learning in English with their home languages as additional mediums of instruction. When this happens, then the students would come with arguments such as "English is an international language and most people in the world communicate in English, which is why it is important that we learn in English." This was indicating the students' fear of losing access to English as they are aware of the "benefits" of being able to speak the language. Similarly, Aziakpono's (2007); Dalvit and De Klerk's (2005) and Dyers' study (1997), their findings on the students' attitudes towards English were that the students wanted access to English as they believed that being proficient in the language will allow them to have better jobs and easy access in other sectors. This is because of the power that English is associated with. According to Giles et al (1997) and Edwards (1994) (cited in Aziakpono, 1997) any language that carries a high-status is always positively

evaluated by its speakers and other people. This has also been illustrated earlier in studies that have been conducted in the schooling context.

Even though the students indicate that they want access to English they acknowledge that an English only policy puts them in a disadvantage when it comes to academic success (Aziakpono, 2007). Kapp (1998) argues this notion as that students are willing to access English at university as LoLT but in a manner in which there will be inclusive methods to accommodate those who speak English as a second language. When students enter university, there are new concepts and information that they get introduced to (Batibo, 2010) and sometimes most of these students are not first language speakers of English and that makes it necessary to establish an intervention that is going to assist them in learning. One of the students stated that:

“...it is not like we don't understand [English]. We do understand, because we are students who qualified for university. What then I would suggest is that university to try and help those students who don't understand and who have problems with some terms.”

The student above states that they can communicate in English, therefore the problem is not speaking the language but the terms that are used in most academic contexts. When interpreting this in Cummins' terms, one could say that the student is acknowledging that they have proficiency of the BICS level of the language for them to hold conversations. However, that does not mean that they have academic proficiency as acquiring BICS of a certain language (especially second language) does not guarantee the CALP level. Because English is not some of the students' first language, it becomes difficult for them to learn in the language only as the process of cognitive development is highly facilitated in one's home language.

In Dyers' study (1998), some students reported that they are competent enough to cope with learning in English because they can speak the language. However, their poor English results in matric did not support their statements and with other studies that have been conducted which state that one of the reasons students fail at university is because of their insufficient level of English (Sinclair, 1992; Agar, 1990) (cited in Dyers, 1998). Dyers (1998) in this study the students stated that they are doing well with English being the LoLT but when they discuss their tasks among their peers which they share a common language with they would discuss in their mother tongues. Without them realising, the students in this context use the language which they know best to facilitate learning. As they do not have CALP in English, they use their own languages to facilitate cognition and conceptualize the register which they need to master for them to succeed.

Similar to other studies (Dalvit & de Klerk, 2005; Shembe, 2005; Aziakpono, 2007) in this study the students perceive English to be important in HE as it is also a language of communication between students who have different mother tongues. The students in this study state that English terminology is complicated in academic contexts so there is a need for other languages to mediate.

Recommendations of the study

This section provides recommendations that the study makes in response to the issues presented and discussed above. The first recommendation responds to the first issue that it is quite clear that there is a presence of multilingual teaching and learning practices in HE although there is very little management, documentation and reflection on these processes. Therefore, it is important that there be careful planning and management of these learning processes so that there is no and perpetuate misconceptions about multilingualism. Researching teaching practices that involve multilingualism would not only provide reputable multilingual teaching strategies but would also initiate the process of grounding scholarship in African languages in the African context.

It is also recommended that the role of teachers in facilitating multilingualism needs to be considered as an important factor. Most teachers in HE are monolingual even though their student body is diverse. It is important that teachers are equipped with skills as part of their teaching training in teaching in HE, to use students as resources, as illustrated by HE Monitor (2009). However, managing the process is important as it is critical that learning will take place.

Even though not in the realm of this study, it is also recommended that students' deficiency in CALP needs to be researched as it is a great concern. Academic literacy programmes need to provide interventions addressing these issues.

The view that English is a language of opportunity is real and true. The opportunities presented knowledge of English as well as other languages, including one's own mother tongue, are not part of academic (and generally, education) discourse. I recommend that courses on benefits of mother tongue based bi/multilingual education form part of learning in higher education. This would deal with myths related to bi-multilingualism.

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