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Chapter

Strategies Used by UNISA Student Teachers in Teaching English First Additional Language

Margaret Malewaneng Maja and Masilonyana Motseke

Abstract

The teaching of English to non-English speakers in historically disadvantaged areas of South Africa is a difficult task for student teachers. This study was conducted in the township schools at Ekurhuleni North District, in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which students at the University of South Africa (UNISA) used interactive teaching strategies in the teaching of English as a First Additional Language (EFAL). The study also intended to highlight the support provided by UNISA lecturers to these student teachers. The study was grounded in interpretivism with self-determination theory (SDT) informing it. The study was a qualitative descriptive case study with document analysis, observations and semi-structured interviews utilised to collect data. Purposive sampling assisted in selecting six student teachers, of which three were male and three were female. The student teachers were studying in their 3rd and 4th years of the Bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed.), specialising in English. Data collected were categorised into codes and themes. The findings reveal that student teachers only used pictures, charts and flashcards as interactive teaching strategies in teaching EFAL. It was concluded that student teachers were not well-prepared in the use of interactive teaching strategies in the teaching of EFAL and were not adequately supported by the university. It is recommended that UNISA lecturers should regularly visit student teachers during their teaching practice offering support, motivation and advice.

Keywords: interactive teaching strategies, English First Additional Language, open distance learning, teaching practice, student support

1. Introduction

The use of English as a language of business and communication in many countries has dramatically increased the importance of English in the world. This trend has also popularised the teaching of English in non-English speaking countries. Due to the increased demand for instruction in English, 80% of the English teachers in the world are non-English speakers [1]. Studies have shown that the teaching of English to non-English speakers is a complex task for student teachers [2, 3]. This is because the learning or acquisition of English as a second language, is characterised by a number of factors, such as the environment in which it is learnt, the teaching methods employed, and the resources available to enhance its

teaching and learning [4–6] assert that as traditional teaching methods are used in the teaching of English First Additional Language (EFAL), communicative skills are not being adequately developed in the classroom. For instance, the teacher-centred lecture method, which is commonly used by many township teachers, does not offer learners the opportunity to use the EFAL. Therefore, [7] believe that student teachers need to have effective interactive teaching strategies in order for learners to acquire the target language.

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which University of South Africa (UNISA) student teachers used the interactive teaching strategies in the teaching of EFAL in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6), as well as to highlight the extent to which university support was offered to these student teachers. The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What interactive strategies do UNISA student teachers use in teaching EFAL?

- To what extent are the UNISA student teachers supported by lecturers in using interactive strategies in teaching EFAL?

Teaching strategies refer to a broad plan of action, which includes the selection of teaching activities with the purpose of achieving a specific outcome [8]. Van Wyk [8] indicates that teaching strategies include methods, procedures, activities and techniques that may assist the teacher in promoting learners' ability to understand the learning content. Therefore, teaching strategies are methods and activities that student teachers use to engage learners in the acquisition and development of English as a first additional language. Ko et al. [9] state that an interactive teaching strategy is instruction that enables the achievement of a specific goal through an active participation of learners in the learning and teaching process. This implies that in the use of an interactive teaching strategy, the student teacher becomes a facilitator who encourages learners to actively participate in the teaching and learning process. Since English is not their home language, learners should be encouraged to use it freely. The [10] stresses that when using interactive teaching strategies, language learning should be a natural process with learners being exposed to the target language and being given opportunities to practise or produce the language by communicating for social or practical purposes.

Interactive teaching strategies differ from teacher to teacher, the subject matter engaged with and the learning context. A study by [11] found that primary school English student teachers in the United Kingdom used pictorial resources, prompts, pair work, visual aids, gestures and target words as interactive teaching strategies. In addition, the student teachers provided learners with increased opportunities to work with others to improve proficiency in the target language [11, 12] show that the student teachers' responses suggested that these interactive teaching strategies develop learners' basic speaking-and-listening skills and reading-and-viewing skills, which may enable the learners to write correct spelling. Mansour et al. [13] found that in Khartoum, Sudan, interactive teaching such as group discussion, brainstorming, case studies and role-play minimised learners' fear and anxiety in the learning of the target language. In addition, interactive teaching strategies help collaboration in learning, reflect on learners' use of language in discussions, discourage memorising of facts, improve behaviour, increase the attention span and enable learners to express feelings [14–18] found that interactive teaching strategies may provide for diverse learning opportunities, since learners are motivated to play an active role in the teaching and learning process.

Harvey and Prinsloo [19] believe that in the South African context, student teachers' use of interactive teaching strategies in EFAL can only be learned through

teacher training. However, the physical and psychological distance characterised in an open distance learning (ODL) environment, may be frustrating for both student teachers and lecturers. Walters-Archie [20] affirms that students in distance learning, experience a sense of loneliness, isolation and disconnectedness. Hence, the provision of academic support is essential for student teachers in an attempt to bridge the gap between the lecturer and the student. Walters-Archie [20] states that the support provided to ODL student teachers should enable them to have a sense of belonging and connection to the institution and its programmes. Van Wyk [21] argues that a student who is fully motivated may overcome barriers of situation and time and find ways of developing appropriate skills in order to be able to deal with the stress of study with very little extra external support. However, student teachers' subject knowledge and teaching skills flourish when they are supported or provided with academic language skills and subject-matter concepts [22]. To achieve didactic excellence, [23] recommend that the academic programmes include teaching practice experiences as this helps student teachers experience what it means to be a teacher under the guidance and mentorship of schoolteachers and university lecturers.

The teaching of EFAL in South African schools is complex and as such, interactive teaching strategies may be difficult to apply in many of the schools. For instance, many schools for African learners are characterised by overcrowding, lack of resources and facilities, shortage of teachers and poor parental involvement in school matters [24, 25]. Learners from historically disadvantaged areas tend to come from poor and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds [25]. In addition, many African teachers obtained their teaching qualification during the apartheid era, when education and training provision for Africans was inferior and resulted in poorly trained teachers [26]. Although a democratic government was elected in 1994, problems, which had plagued South Africa prior to democracy, are still experienced in many African schools [27]. This implies that the teaching and learning taking place in historically disadvantaged areas is inadequate and below expected standards due to lack of resources, shortage of teachers and ill-discipline among learners [28]. As a result, it may be that challenges experienced in schools have a negative impact on the teaching practice of EFAL student teachers.

This study was conducted in township schools in the Ekurhuleni North district, in the Gauteng province of South Africa. In these schools, home language is the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) from Grades R to 3 (Foundation Phase) and EFAL becomes the LoLT for Grades 4 to 7 (Intermediate and Senior Phases). Nemati and Taghizadeh [29] believe that a good knowledge of the home language is important for the acquisition of second language, since the learners use the skills and rules of the first language to learn the second language.

In South Africa, there is no use of interactive teaching strategies among African teachers due to poor teacher training [30]. The researchers, having realised the need for the advancement of the knowledge gap pertaining the interactive teaching strategies, were thus prompted to investigate how UNISA student teachers teach EFAL and to highlight the support provided by their lecturers during their teaching practice.

2. Theoretical framework

The researchers drew from the self-determination theoretical (SDT) perspective to explore the use of interactive teaching strategies used by UNISA student teachers and to the extent to which they were supported in the teaching of EFAL. SDT, a theory of motivation developed by [31] describes intrinsic types of motivation, and outlines how these motivations influence situational responses in different spheres,

as well as social and cognitive development and personality [32, 33] argue that motivation is one of the most significant components of learning in any learning environment. Researchers like [34] and [33] have illustrated that motivated student teachers tend to accomplish more difficult activities, take on active roles in activities, enjoy these activities, adopt a deeper approach towards learning, and display higher performance, continuity, and creativity. Deci and Vansteenkiste [35] state student teachers should have autonomy to be self-directed, take control of their own learning, and have the competence that enables efficacious interactions with learners. In addition, there is the need of relatedness which aims at connectedness to other student teachers and lecturers in order to experience caring and feelings of belonging. The theory proclaims that the student teachers' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are significant in order to flourish and grow in the teaching of EFAL [32]. Therefore, in this study, the student teachers' level of performance was presumed to be a determinant in the extent to which they were motivated to enjoy and appreciate the opportunity afforded by teaching practice, applying and implementing their knowledge and utilising the resources available.

3. Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature and was grounded in the philosophy of Interpretivism. Qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense and interpret them in terms of the meanings people bring to them [36, 37] assert that binding the case may ensure that the study remains reasonable in scope. The study was a descriptive case study, focused on selected undergraduate 3rd and 4th year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree students specialising in EFAL in the Intermediate Phase.

The sampling strategy was purposive. Purposive sampling occurs when individuals are selected as they possess the attributes of interest to the study [36]. A list of Ekurhuleni North District B.Ed. student teachers was requested from the teaching practice office. The researchers focused on the 3rd and 4th year student teachers who were undertaking EFAL teaching practice in the Intermediate Phase during the third term. Of the eleven 3rd and 4th year student teachers on the list, six were selected as they were practising teaching in the township schools while the others were in the former model C schools. Three student teachers were male and three females. Three of the participants were in the 3rd year of the B.Ed. degree, and the other three in the 4th year. These student teachers were selected as they were placed in a disadvantaged area and the purpose was to determine how they use the interactive teaching strategies and the support they received from UNISA. Arrangements for observation and interview visits were scheduled with the student teachers and relevant school principals. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used to identify participants.

Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Creswell [38] explains that observation is the process of gathering open-ended, first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site. The designed observation protocol contained the aspects to be observed during EFAL lesson presentations by the student teachers. Semi-structured interviews, a qualitative method of inquiry that combines a pre-determined set of open questions (questions that prompt discussion) with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore particular themes or responses further [39], were also used for data collection. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for EFAL document [10] was also analysed during the document analysis phase. Creswell [38] affirms that documents are ready for analysis without the necessary transcription that is required with observational or interview data.

Thematic data analysis was used through the process of coding in six phases to create established meaningful patterns [39] and themes were clearly defined. The researchers read and allocated codes to the raw data. From the developed codes, themes emerged, and these were refined by checking for data coherence. The themes were also named, and clear definitions were presented. This was followed by a narrative discussion related to the themes.

4. Discussion of themes

The purpose of this case study was to explore the use of interactive strategies in the teaching of EFAL by UNISA student teachers during their teaching practice in township schools of South Africa. Emanating from the results, the following themes emerged and are discussed below.

- Theme 1 – Use of pictures, charts and flashcards

- Theme 2 – Seating arrangements

- Theme 3 – Code switching

- Theme 4 – Academic support offered by lecturers

4.1 Theme 1- use of pictures, charts and flashcards

It was expected that student teachers would use interactive strategies during their lesson presentations as it may provide for diverse learning opportunities, since learners are motivated to play an active role [18]. However, only two of the student teachers observed during teaching practice used small group discussion, while the other four used pictures, charts or flashcards in their EFAL lesson presentations. Student teachers discussed their particular choice of strategies and justified their use:

> I use flashcards, or flash words. ... which means my level of flashing will be different. If I'm flashing the sentence, the simplest sentence that I'm going to show them is the opportunity I give learners who are struggling to spell the words. (Student Teacher 1)

> I believe in charts. Something like this one (grabbing the charts bound together), these are charts that keep the learners through the lesson and I actually fold them because they get lost. If you take the chart with the picture there, it unlocks the child's memory to know what the teacher is all about and what is supposed to write (sic). (Student Teacher 2)

> The most effective strategy for me is pictures and charts. (Student Teacher 3)

> The strategy that I use is the direct approach. The direct approach is when I use the pictures that I have with me and then learners will be talking one by one. (Student Teacher 4)

The student teachers believed that the use of pictures, charts and flashcards was effective in involving learners in the lesson, or in helping the learners talk to each other and discuss using English as the medium of communication.

The student teachers reported that they utilised pictures, charts and flashcards to enhance their teaching, as it also offered learners an opportunity to view-and-read. Learners, for example, looked at the word or sentence displayed on the chart, read it aloud, and then they wrote it in their books. This strategy assisted learners reinforce the spelling of the word or sentence in their minds, thus improving retention of information. Read [11] affirms that reading-and-viewing skills may enable learners to write the words using correct spelling. Sun [40] found that the use of charts and flashcards supported comprehension through both textual and illustrated contexts and reinforced the meanings and memory of words, thus developing vocabulary. The common use of pictures, charts and flashcards could be a confirmation that the schools visited were poorly resourced, and consequently, there were no other resources available to use, except pictures, charts and flashcards, which could be easily produced by student teachers (even at their own expense). It is assumed that student teachers took an active role in creating the above-mentioned teaching aids for learners to understand and enjoy their lessons.

Interactive teaching strategies such as brainstorming, case studies and role-play suggested by [13] were not used by the student teachers in their teaching practice. The reason could be the student teachers were not adequately trained to apply the above-mentioned interactive teaching strategies.

Non-availability of resources may have served as a poor motivator for student teachers, influencing how they taught their EFAL lessons. In ODL institutions, students are generally computer-literate and use computers, smart-phones and other devices to communicate, to prepare assignments and to access information [41]. However, the lack of computers at these schools may have affected student teachers' enthusiasm and preparedness to work, although it seems that all used other more traditional visual aids.

4.2 Theme 2: seating arrangements

It was observed that two student teachers had seated their learners in small groups, while the other four had their learners seated in the traditional way (in rows as in a bus). During interviews, the two student teachers who had seated their learners in groups, reported that the seating arrangement was very helpful in their lesson presentations as this facilitated group work both as a strategy for discussion, as well as support or scaffolding for weaker learners and in addition, it allowed the teacher to interact with each group on a more personal level.

> *They are seated in groups and the stronger ones mixed with the weaker ones. They help each other when is time for assignments. (Student Teacher 1)*

> *I walk around the groups when learners are doing their tasks and help learners with special needs. I use group discussions. (Student Teacher 3)*

The four student teachers who had seated their learners in traditional rows complained that the classes were too big (too many learners), and because of the lack of space, it was difficult for them to arrange them in smaller groups.

> *There is not enough space for groups in the venues. I can hardly find space to move around. (Student Teacher 2)*

> *It seems it is impossible to make groups due to overcrowding. The teachers here prefer this arrangement. (Student Teacher 5)*

The results revealed that while two student teachers seated learners in small groups, others allowed learners to be seated in traditional rows. The student teachers who had seated learners in small groups, saw the benefit of such an arrangement, since other learners in the group supported slower learners [42]. The small group seating arrangement established by these student teachers motivated them to create a conducive teaching and learning environment and facilitate the teaching and learning process. However, the student teachers who had seated learners in the traditional rows complained about overcrowding. Overcrowding, which is a serious problem in many township schools, is accompanied by serious shortages of resources and facilities and makes the teaching and learning process a difficult task for many teachers in these schools [24, 25]. The implication is that the teachers in schools that utilise the traditional seating arrangement may be powerless to bring about any changes. This situation could be challenging for student teachers and have an effect on their performance in the classroom and their ability to use interactive strategies in teaching EFAL.

4.3 Theme 3 - code switching

Code switching refers to the choice to alternate between two or more languages within the same sentence or conversation [43]. The use of home language during the EFAL teaching was common in the classes observed. With regard to interviews, the student teachers reported that they switched to home language in cases where learners did not understand and needed clarification on certain aspects of the lesson and better understanding of concepts and meanings.

> *I use English every time, every time. I do switch in other learning areas and in English lesson where you find a concept and you see blank faces (bowing down to show breaking up in communication), and for me to bring them back, I just switch for few seconds at least I have their attention back again so that I can run with the lesson. (Student Teacher 2)*

> *I do it only here and there where they don't understand, I have to switch to their language but not all the time. (Student Teacher 3)*

The two student teachers did not code switch as they could see the value of consistent use of English as the language of teaching and learning through the lessons to ensure that the learners were exposed to the language which would then assist them in acquiring and developing their language skills. It was assumed that the student teachers' control of their own learning of English resulted in the competency that enabled them to engage in effective interactions with learners.

> *If you want to see the kids progressing well, never switch to the home language. (Student Teacher 1)*

> *I have realised that code switching disturbs the learning and use of English. That is why I use pictures and gestures to try and explain what I mean. (Student Teacher 4)*

The findings indicate that code switching was common in many EFAL lesson presentations by UNISA student teachers. According to [44] and [45] code switching is discouraged by many authors who believe that it delays the learners' acquisition of English. However, English is the second or third language for many African teachers and learners [46] which may just have an effect on the development of

English. In addition, the exposure of African learners to English in South Africa is very limited, particularly in the townships [46]. Hence, learners may find some words and statements very difficult to understand, thus compelling the teacher to switch to the home language for the sake of understanding and progress. The student teachers in this study were also from a non-English speaking background, although they had selected to specialise in EFAL, and ultimately become professional EFAL teachers.

4.4 Theme 4: academic support offered by lecturers

Minimal support from UNISA lecturers was observed. Of the six student teachers during the teaching practice, five were visited by UNISA lecturers. However, of the three lecturers who visited the student teachers, only one lecturer was helpful, and could give the student teachers advice in how to deal with lesson presentation. The following comments of the student teachers confirmed the situation:

> *My lecturer once visited me when I was studying year 2. Now, No. The only person assisting is my mentor teacher. (Student Teacher 1)*

> *The supervisor visited me. He had a meeting with me before the lesson and asked me how I am doing with my portfolio. He looked at it and asked when the due date is. He did not help me with my assignment. (Student Teacher 2)*

> *No one came to support me, and I am left with three days to finish my five weeks teaching practice. I hope I will get support next year when studying my last year. It is frustrating to be on your own while teaching. I do not know how to handle the big class, as learners are rowdy. (Student Teacher 3)*

> *Support? Sometime last year one of UNISA lecturers supported me. She was of a great help as she advised on how to prepare my lesson and how I can approach the topic I was teaching. (Student Teacher 4)*

> *The lecturer who visited me showed me how to introduce a lesson. She even demonstrated how to introduce the lesson. Learners were participating and liked it. I am now trying to emulate her when I introduce the other topics of the lesson. (Student Teacher 5)*

> *The other man came to observe my lesson but did not say anything concerning my teaching method. He gave me average marks and told me to improve in giving learners time to talk and not to talk alone. (Student Teacher 6)*

The support from the university staff seemed inadequate. It is customary for teacher training institutions to provide support to their student teachers when they are undertaking teaching practice. This is done by way of liaising with schools that host student teachers in their schools and arrange for the appointment of mentor teachers [47]. UNISA lecturers and external supervisors (retired teachers who assisted with the student teacher supervision) were assigned to visit student teachers at the schools where they were placed at different times during the first, second and third school terms. Most of the external supervisors were never exposed to the interactive teaching strategies during their training due to the apartheid education policy, which intended to offer poor teacher training to African teachers [26]. Therefore, the student teachers may have experienced inadequate support from the external supervisors. Hence, the student teachers felt neglected, isolated and not

supported to address challenges that they faced. The provision of academic support and presence of lecturers during teaching practice can minimise student teachers' sense of loneliness, isolation and disconnectedness in ODL.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- The policy on the use of interactive teaching strategies should be emphasised in the ODL curriculum to prepare student teachers to teach EFAL.

- UNISA lecturers should regularly visit the student teachers for support and motivation during their teaching practice, as per policy requirement.

- All UNISA lecturers who visit student teachers at schools should support and guide student teachers on the use of interactive teaching strategies.

- More research on problems encountered in the teaching of EFAL in schools should be undertaken, and student teachers be trained on managing these problems.

- Future research should be on how UNISA could empower the lecturers and external supervisors to support the student teachers in interactive teaching strategies.

6. Conclusion

The study focused on the extent to which student teachers managed to use interactive teaching strategies in the teaching of EFAL. The results have indicated that the circumstances under which student teachers worked were not conducive to the implementation of interactive teaching strategies. A number of challenges, which include lack of resources and overcrowding were experienced, student teachers themselves were not well-prepared to apply interactive teaching strategies in the teaching of EFAL, and in addition, support that student teachers received from UNISA was not adequate. It was recommended that student teachers should be prepared to teach EFAL, supported and motivated during the teaching practice and trained on how to manage problems.

Acknowledgements

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