



Teacher's Experiences of Teaching siSwati As A Second Language In Urban Senior Secondary Schools in the Lubombo Region of Eswatini

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Abstract

The study sought to explore siSwati language teachers' experiences of teaching siSwati as a second language in urban senior secondary schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. The study was based on the following research objectives; Explore teachers' experiences of teaching siSwati as a second language in urban high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini, Establish what teachers consider to be best practices when teaching siSwati as a second language in urban high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini, Determine the challenges that teachers encounter when teaching siSwati as a second language in urban high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. The study adopted the qualitative research approach and a case study research design. While the simple random sampling technique was used for the selection of the 3 schools that were engaged in the study, purposive sampling was used for selecting the 9 teachers (3 from each school). The data were collected using one on one interviews with the teachers and it was analysed using content analysis. The study found that the teaching of siSwati as a second language in urban schools was challenging. This was because most urban school learners who were doing siSwati as a second language were of foreign origin, hence they failed to understand what they were reading, could not pronounce or write siSwati words correctly. Another finding was that siSwati is not a universal language and therefore learners have no interest learning it and this is why they fail it. The study recommends that schools should give learners the opportunity to speak the siSwati language outside of their siSwati classroom. This can be done by setting aside days in a week where all learners will be forced to speak in the siSwati language; just as it is done with English where learners are punished if they do not speak it at school, the same thing should be done for the speaking of the siSwati language so that learners can improve in the language.

Key Words: Experiences, second language, challenges, best practices

Introduction

Before 2006, the curriculum that was used at Senior Secondary School level in Eswatini was the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE-O-Level). In 2006 the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), later localised into the Swaziland General Certificate of Secondary Education (SGCSE), now Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education (EGCSE) was introduced to replace it. In the former curriculum learners were expected to do core subjects such as Mathematics, English and Science. SiSwati, which is a subject that is rooted in the indigenous language of the people of Eswatini, was not core but it was optional, and learners therefore had to choose between siSwati and

French. What this means is that while learners were compelled to do other subjects, they were not compelled to learn their mother tongue as a subject if they did not want to. This was the situation at both primary and high school. The learners' privilege to choose between siSwati and French was more prevalent in urban areas where French was offered in the school curriculum and this is where you would find a learner who has never learnt siSwati for the whole duration of their school years.

The introduction of the new and localized curriculum saw siSwati as a subject being upgraded and usurping a new status, a core subject. Being a core subject means that siSwati, as a subject is now a compulsory subject, which also means learners are now compelled to learn it despite their competency and nationality. This is because the situation in some of the schools is that there are learners who are of foreign origin and have very little or no competency in the siSwati language. The new and localized curriculum has further divided the siSwati subject into two syllabi, siSwati as a first language and siSwati as a second language and therefore learners are expected to learn siSwati either as first or second language depending on their preferences and abilities (Eswatini Education and Training Sector Policy (2008). Most learners of Eswatini origin and nationality opt for siSwati as a first language while those of foreign origin/nationality opt for siSwati as a second language (Mkhabela, 2014). There are however, some learners who, despite being of Eswatini origin, opt for siSwati as a second language as well. So, unlike the O'Level' curriculum which allowed learners to choose between French and siSwati, the new and localized curriculum compels all learners to learn siSwati.

Statement of the problem

The declaration of siSwati as a core subject in high schools as per the directive of the Eswatini and Training Sector Policy (2008) has presented challenges especially for learners that are of foreign origin who do not speak siSwati as these learners are expected to learn the subject. As a core subject all learners in senior secondary schools of Eswatini are expected to learn and pass siSwati despite their ability or nationality. These learners have to grapple with both the content and the language in which the content is presented and this is a problem. Teachers are also expected to teach a subject using a language that the learners do not understand. It is in the light of this situation that the study intended to find out the experiences of teachers on the teaching of siSwati as a second language to learners who are of foreign origin and do not speak siSwati as their mother tongue.

Objectives of the study

The research was based on the following objectives:

1. Explore teachers' experiences of teaching siSwati as a second language in urban high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.
2. Establish what teachers consider to be best practices when teaching siSwati as a second language in urban high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.
3. Determine the challenges that teachers encounter when teaching siSwati as a second language in urban high schools in the Lubombo region of Eswatini.

Theoretical framework

The study was guided by the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) by Kolb (1984). According to this theory learning is defined as the process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. In this view, knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 1984). The ELT theory is based on the role that experience plays in the learning process. Kolb's ground breaking work is influenced by the idea that learning occurs in a cycle, and learners learn best when their learning experience touches on every part of this cycle. The Experiential Learning Theory involves studying in four phases connected with doing, sensing, observing, reflecting, thinking and planning. An important characteristic of the theory is that different phases are connected

with particular learning styles and also that people differ in their own learning styles. Accepting this is an important premise that enables the learners to realize the possible alternative approaches used for learning and to become more flexible in different learning situations. In view of this teachers need to realize their own learning styles as a basis for the development of effective teaching and study strategies. This is because studying can suffer if there is an underlined discrepancy between the learning styles of the students and the style of the teacher.

For Boreham (1987) the concept of experiential learning really means learning by reflection on experience. Without reflection on experience, students are in danger of continuing with the same mistakes over and over again. The essence of Kolb's model is a description of the learning process, which is pictured as a cycle made of four phases. The model shows how experience is transformed through reflection in ideas and concepts, which in turn are used for active experimenting and choice for new experiences.

Literature review

The review of literature reveals that the teaching/learning of a second language is a very challenging task, not only to the teacher, but to the learners as well (Philp, Oliver, & Mackey, 2008). Studies on second language issues have established that English teachers face a number of challenges as they teach English to students (Tsai, Ernest, & Talley, 2010). According to these studies there is always an interference of the first language when the second language is taught (Sarafianou, & Gavriilidou, 2015). What teachers and learners do, according to research, is that they overuse the native language and this deprives the learners the opportunity to hear the target language being spoken. The overuse of the language does not only end with the learners speaking the language but it extends to them thinking, processing, and analysing issues in the native language. This increases the learners' chances of relapsing to the mother tongue (Babu, 2016).

The review of literature further reveals that the challenges that are encountered when the second language is taught vary from one region to the next. Although the challenges that English teachers face differ from one region to the other, some regions face more challenges than others (Aljuhaish, 2015). The differences in the challenges can be attributed to a number of aspects in the different regions, for example, students' motivation to learn the second language, methods of teaching, attitudes of the teacher who is teaching the language, just to name a few. Al-Nasser (2015) claims that, Saudi students face significant challenges learning English because of their negative attitude towards English (Al-Nasser, 2015). Similarly, Ama (2022) states that the learners' attitude towards their learning of the second language often results in learners not taking their learning of the target language seriously, particularly if their attitude is negative. The negative attitude prevents the learners from studying the second language as much as they study the other subjects. They only study it in the classroom during the presence of the teacher. Second language learners, who have negative attitudes about the language, do not for example bother themselves to study pronunciation, new words, and writing in the target language (Ama, 2022).

The review of literature further indicates that the attitude that an individual has on the subject that he/she is learning determines whether the individual will be successful in the subject or not. Anderman and Kaplan (2008) state that attitude is a very important aspect in classroom performance. They further state that the performance of students in a language is greatly influenced by the students' attitude towards the target language and culture. If the student has a negative attitude, then the student will put little effort to learn the target language and therefore be limited in their language acquisition. Similarly, if the student lacks self-confidence or has a negative attitude towards learning the target language, the student will lack motivation and be limited in the language acquisition process.

Ama, 2022, Alrashidi, and Phan (2015) state that the teaching/learning of the second language can also be affected by the location of the school. In rural school contexts for example, the second language is not spoken in the learners' environment. This could be their home environment or school environment. In such a situation the second language learners lack an environment that enhances the speaking of the second language outside the classroom and this makes the learning of the language difficult. Again, schools in urban areas normally expose their students very early to the target language. English for example is normally introduced to the learners at pre-school level. Also, an attempt is made to provide the learners with an environment that is going to enhance the speaking of the language. In the case of the teaching of English as a second language in most countries, private schools start teaching students English as early as preschool level whereas public schools start the teaching of English in the first grade, with others starting in the fourth grade depending on the policy on the medium of instruction (Ama, 2022; Alrashidi, & Phan, 2015). In Eswatini for example, the medium of instruction for the first 4 grade levels is siSwati, the mother tongue, which means learners only get to be exposed to the second language (English) when they get to grade 4.

Another challenge with the teaching of the second language is the inadequacy of teaching/learning materials. What has been observed about this is that there are many instances in schools where there will be shortages of textbooks, or other books that learners require for the learning of English. In rural areas where English is not spoken in the learners' environment, there is always the unavailability of audio tools which should be used. These are very important as they give the learners the opportunity to hear native speakers of the language communicating in the language. This is where learners can get the opportunity to hear the correct pronunciation of words, sentences, and appropriate vocabulary (Ama, 2022).

Teachers' best practices in the teaching of the second language

Literature that is related to this study reveals that despite that the teaching of the second language is an old concept, best practices on the teaching of the subject have, however, not developed. A study that was undertaken by Kuhlman (2017) reveals that after making the realisation that second language best teaching practices were limited, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in collaboration with the National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NASDFL) formulated a list of best practices on the teaching of the second language which they termed effective practices (Kuhlman, 2017). Some of these practices according to the study are that both teachers and learners should ensure that they speak, read, and write using the targeted language. What this means is that the whole learning process should be undertaken using the target language (Kuhlman, 2017; Swanson & Abbot, 2015). The study also suggests that teachers should always ensure that they communicate to learners in the target language, and also that the communication should be clear so that it can be understood by the learners.

Another best practice according to Swanson and Abbot (2015) is ensuring that authentic cultural texts are used for the teaching of both listening and reading comprehension passages. This will ensure that learners are exposed to the language both in speech and also in reading. Such exposure will give them the opportunity to hear the language being spoken by native speakers, thus they will be exposed to the correct pitch, intonation, and pronunciation. Teachers should also design communicative activities where learners are paired, grouped either into small groups or large groups so that they undertake an activity that will require them to communicate in the target language. This will give them the opportunity to practice the language and get vocabulary from the people they will be communicating with.

Another effective practice according to the study by Swanson and Abbot (2015) is that teachers should focus their teaching on meaning and not on form, so that instead of focussing on the correctness of grammar, learners focus on their ability to make utterances in the target language and also to find meaning from what others will be saying in the target language. Teachers should also ensure that they develop the practice of providing appropriate feedback and should always involve the learners in the feedback process.

In addition, the feedback should be provided timely so that it meets the learners' needs (Swanson & Abbot, 2015).

With regards to learner participation during the teaching of siSwati a research study conducted by Mhlongo, and Oloyede (2009) at the University of Eswatini, which was aimed at exploring the classroom social climate of the siSwati as a first language class and siSwati as a second language class revealed that the teaching of siSwati as a second language required a favorable classroom environment as this ensured that learners benefitted from it. The study also indicated that students demonstrated interest in learning siSwati as a first language as opposed to siSwati as a second language. Learners of siSwati as a second language tended to be frequently off the task and not actively participating in class, yet those studying siSwati as a second language did not participate as they are always afraid of making mistakes since they are not proficient in the language. The teachers were of the shared view that learners studying siSwati as a second language were in most cases observed to be lacking interest in the classroom activities.

Research approach

In this study, the qualitative research approach was used. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) qualitative researchers are designed to provide the researcher a means of understanding a phenomenon by observing or interacting with the participants of the study. Therefore, researchers are interested in exploring and/or explaining the phenomenon as it occurs in their natural setting. This means that qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. One of the greatest strengths of qualitative methods is that it has the potential to generate rich descriptions of the participants' thought processes and tend to focus on reasons "why" a phenomenon has occurred (Creswell, 2003). It was on the basis of this that the research adopted the qualitative research approach.

Research design

The case study research design was adopted for this study. Since this is a design that assists in the exploration of a phenomenon within some particular context and it provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their context (Baxter & Jack, 2010), the researcher felt that it would be appropriate for this study. This is because the study intended to explore the views of teachers on the teaching of siSwati as a second language to urban school learners (phenomenon) using an interview guide (tool).

Sampling and sampling procedures

The sample for the study was nine (9) teachers, who were selected from three (3) schools, (three (3) from each school). While the three (3) schools were randomly selected, the nine (9) teachers were selected using purposive sampling. The simple random sampling technique was selected because it gives all members in the population equal chances of being selected; the method is also unbiased (Omona, 2013). Purposive sampling was also preferred for the selection of the teachers because it is appropriate in instances where the researcher wants to select/ recruit the participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon that is being investigated (Palinkas, 2015). The teachers were purposively selected because the focus was on teachers of siSwati as a second language in urban schools.

Data collection instruments

An interview was used for collecting data from the teachers. This was done on the premise that interviews provide in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic (Grey, 2014). It offers the possibility of gaining insight into the interviewee's world and a deeper understanding of the interviewee's everyday experiences (Creswell, 2007). The interviews in this study enabled the provision of detailed information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints on the topic that was under study. Thus, they were suitable for this study as they provided rich

and detailed information about the teaching and learning of siSwati as a second language amongst urban language learners.

Discussion of Findings

Teaching methods for the teaching of siSwati as a second language

The findings of this study were that teachers in various schools use different teaching methods which they think accommodate all the learners who study siSwati as a second language. The study found that most of the teachers used the discussion, question and answer, lecture, demonstration, role play/dramatization, direct instruction, and group work. Most of the teachers pointed out that these teaching methods were key when teaching siSwati as a second language. They further singled out the discussion, question and answer as well as group work as the best/effective methods of teaching siSwati as a second language.

According to the teachers who took part in the study all these methods allow learners to be practically involved in the learning of siSwati as a second language; they enable the learners to experience the learning of the second language. This view is in line with the theory in which the study is underpinned. This is because the theory that frames this study puts emphasis on the provision of experiences for people to learn (Kolb, 1984). In line with Kolb's theory, the teachers in this study ensured that learning was experiential. The Experiential Learning Theory involves studying in four phases connected with doing, sensing, observing, reflecting, thinking and planning, and looking at the teaching methods that the teachers said they utilized, the four phases of learning according to Kolb (1984) are considered. This study therefore found demonstration, role play/dramatization, direct instruction discussion and lecture methods of teaching are the most used methods by the various teachers in the three private schools of the Manzini Region of Eswatini.

Best practices for the teaching of siSwati as a second language

The study also found that in addition to utilizing the teaching methods that the teachers listed, they also engaged in a number of practices to ensure that learners were effectively taught as they learnt siSwati as a second language. The idea of coming out with best practices when teaching came out in the review of literature where Kuhlman (2017) stated that it is important that these practices be developed to ensure that teaching goes smoothly. One of the practices according to the teachers who took part in the study was grouping the learners so that they can do activities together. In these groups the discussion method, dramatization, role play, as well as listening activities were done by the learners. The motive behind grouping the learners was that such groupings gave the learners the opportunity to work together and to interact with each other; hence, they interacted with both the teachers and the other learners. The grouping of the learners also ensured that instead of being teacher-centered the lesson was learner-centered as the learners were involved. The learners were grouped for example when they undertook activities such as Ingadla, Sibhaca and Ummiso which are Swazi traditional dances. The groups ensured that these aspects of culture were effectively taught. Explaining this one of the teachers said that:

I let them dramatize and role play every topic that is taught in class and they do this in groups. This ensures that all the learners get involved in the lesson. I also assign them to discuss in groups or work in pairs to come up with the correct answers of tasks/exercises that they have been given.

The grouping of the learners is congruent with the study by Swanson and Abbot (2015) in the review of literature. In this study these authors state that grouping and pairing learners when they are undertaking an activity ensures that learners communicate using the target language, thereby getting an opportunity to practice the language that they are targeting.

Another best practice according to the teachers was engaging the learners on debates on the most current siSwati topics/issues. Through these debates learners get the opportunity to utilize the language and also to hear other proficient users of the language speaking it. The teachers said that they usually give rewards for debate groups that have done better than the other groups for motivation purposes. The idea of exposing learners to cultural aspects of the language also came out in the literature review. This is where Swanson and Abbot (2015) stated that it is a best practice to utilize authentic cultural texts for listening and reading purposes as this gives the learners the opportunity to hear the target language being spoken by a native speaker of the language, and it results in learners being exposed to the correct pronunciation, intonation, and pitch. The teachers in this study also felt that in order to develop the learners in their second language they took them on educational or field trips to various places. Such places include Swazi Archives, the Museum, Mantenga cultural village, Emsamo, for them to see some of the things they are being taught about. This was helpful in that when there is a lesson that is touching on some of the things that are found in these areas, the learners have some background knowledge about them.

In addition to engaging learners in drama, Swazi traditional songs and activities like Ummiso and Sibhaca teachers also engage learners in daily classroom activities as well as those that are Swazi culturally based. They ask learners to sing cultural songs and chants with other learners in the classroom. Explaining this one of the teachers said that in their school, they use special days like Culture Day where they meet with other private schools for example and play. Here learners are given the opportunity to dance, sing or recite poems in the siSwati language. During these activities learners are shown the Swazi regalia and how to wear it, what it symbolizes and at what stages of growing they are supposed to wear it. This keeps them interested, educated and brings them closer to the Swazi culture; in turn the foreign students get to know about the Swazi culture. Keeping the learners interested in the target language was also emphasized in the literature review where Ama (2022) and Al-Nasser (2015) stated that the learners' interest and attitude towards their learning of the second language often results in learners not taking their learning of the target language seriously, more especially if their attitude is negative. This is because the negative attitude prevents the learners from studying the second language as they view it as less important when they compare it to other subjects which they consider as important. The literature review further revealed that language learners who have negative attitudes about the target language do not, for example, bother themselves to study or to practice new words in the target language (Ama, 2022; Al-Nasser 2015; Anderman & Kaplan, 2008).

For Anderman and Kaplan (2008) a person's attitude determines whether the individual will be successful or not and therefore the attitude is a very important aspect in the learning of the second language. These authors further stated that the performance of learners in a language is greatly influenced by not just the attitude of the learners towards the target language, but their attitude towards the culture of the language as well. According to these studies if the student has a negative attitude, then the student will put little effort to learn the target language and therefore be limited in their development in the language.

Challenges encountered by teachers when teaching siSwati as a Second Language in urban high schools.

The study found that as much as teachers utilize certain methods as well as engage learners in a number of practices to ensure that they learn siSwati as a second language effectively; they however encounter a number of challenges. One of the challenges was that learners do not understand the siSwati language. According to the teachers most of the learners who learn siSwati as a second language are not Swazis, so they find it difficult to understand the content, read, write, and to answer questions that they have been asked. SiSwati is a language that requires the learners to fully express themselves more especially in comprehension and continuous writing. Due to that some of the learners are unable to explain or express themselves well as a result of their incompetency in the language; they tend not to do well in the subject.

Teaching siSwati as a second language to these learners therefore is challenging as teachers have to start teaching them the basics of the language yet at the level where they are they are supposed to have some level of competency in the language and not struggling with the correct word order in sentences, pronunciation, and spelling which results in poor sentence construction and poor reading skills. Explaining this one of the teachers said:

Learners are unable to express themselves in siSwati. They do not have the right expressions and vocabulary. This results in their failure to comprehend what they are reading and to answer questions based on what they are reading.

The study also found that the learners' struggle with spelling, pronunciation and grammar, was attributed in part to the fact that the learners, since they are of foreign origin, do not get the opportunity to practice the language at any other time, other than when they are in class in the presence of the teacher. Outside siSwati classes they speak English as well as converse in English at home. For this teacher the challenge with teaching siSwati in urban schools is that learners of foreign origin do not make any attempt to speak in siSwati outside classrooms, hence they speak in English all the time. In this way therefore, the language to them is not a second but a foreign language because a second language is one that is spoken in the environment in which the learners' are. This challenge also came out in the literature review, where Ama (2022) and Alrashidi & Phan(2015) stated that in most cases, second language learners make an attempt to speak the target only when they are in their second language class. Also, the environment in which most of them live does not give them the opportunity to practice the language. This deprives them both the opportunity to hear the language being spoken around them and also to practice the target language.

The study also found that another challenge was that learners of foreign origin have a negative attitude towards the siSwati language; hence, they have no interest in learning it. The lack of interest results in the learners not taking the language seriously, hence, failing it. The learners' lack of interest is based on the premise that siSwati is not a universal language like English language, thus find it less important. This view again emerged in the literature review where Ama (2022) and Alrashidi & Phan(2015) unveiled that the learners' lack of interest and negative attitude on the second language results in their failure in the language. They do not take the language seriously; hence they do not study it as much as they study the other subjects. The view that the language is of less importance demotivates the learners and they do not give themselves time to learn it.

Conclusions

The study concluded that teachers utilize varied teaching methods for the teaching of siSwati as a second language. Most of the methods are those that encourage learner participation and involvement as well as centered on the learners; this enhances the teaching of the language. The study also concluded that teachers engage learners in activities that they view as best practices for the teaching of siSwati as a second language. The activities include engaging learners in cultural activities where they role play the cultural activities and visit places where some of the cultural are done to ensure that they develop in the language as well as develop an interest in the language.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study therefore recommends that schools should give learners the opportunity to speak the siSwati language outside of their siSwati classroom. This can be done by setting aside days in a week where all learners will be forced to speak in the siSwati language; just as it is done with English where learners are punished if they do not speak it at school, the same thing should be done for the speaking of the siSwati language so that learners can improve in the language.

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