

International Journal of Education Sciences (IJES)

Received on 15. 10. 2013/08. 04. 2014

REF. NO. IJES-443

(Always refer our Reference No. for all correspondence)

Analysis of South African Educators' Reasons for Teaching English Grade 7 L2 Learners

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KEYWORDS teacher satisfaction, medium of instruction, self-improvement, international, Vhembe District.

ABSTRACT The aim of the study was to investigate educators' reasons' for teaching Grade 7 Second Language (L2) learners and their level of satisfaction. A study was conducted among 102 South African educators from the Vhembe District within the Limpopo Province. The reason for the investigation was to find out if poor learner performance in general was caused by educators' lack of interest in what they teach. A questionnaire was administered to collect data on whether they were interested to teach the 7th graders or not and also provided reasons for their interests. The results revealed nearly all the educators were interested in teaching English as a second language as only 3% of them indicated lack of interest. Most of the reasons provided for their interest included enjoyment, challenge, medium of instruction, self-improvement and that English is considered an international language by most South Africans. The conclusion drawn from the study was that the educators' overwhelming interest in teaching English was a good indication of another factor influencing better teaching. The educators should therefore focus on other aspects influencing better teaching other than interest only.

INTRODUCTION

Second or foreign language English teaching poses many challenges for both teaching and learning. Therefore there are certain aspects which influence better teaching, one of them being

the interest and satisfaction of what educators do. According to Etsey (2005) teachers must be interested in what they teach and in the learners themselves when teaching, because lack of interest can never motivate the class to learn. . Aggarwal (1998) attests that best learning takes place when interest is aroused and interest can only be aroused by teachers interested.

As teaching entails transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the learner the teacher has to pass on the knowledge to the learners with passion and commitment. Teaching without interest will negatively affect learners to learn effectively because teachers who are not interested in teaching discourage learners from learning. The negative attitude that the teacher has easily spills over to the learners. Lockheed et. al., (1991) maintain that lack of motivation and professional commitment produce poor attendance and unprofessional attitudes towards learners which in turn negatively affects effective teaching and good learners' academic performance. However, teachers who are interested in what they teach motivate learners to learn even if the subject might be challenging.

Kyeyune (2003) warns that teachers' intolerant of learners' limited vocabulary creates learning problems for learners. Learners' vocabulary increases communication and if teachers are not helpful due to lack of patience proper communication might not be achieved. Based on (Bongolan & Moir, 2005) suggestion it is therefore imperative that teachers communicate with learners about academic, social and personal issues; encourage and motivate learners and address individual and diverse needs of English language learners in both academic skills and English language acquisition. These can only be achieved if teachers are interested and committed to helping learners.

According to Ejieh (2004), Childs & O'Farrell (2003) findings, language is of crucial importance in learning as it forms part of the main objective in the classroom. Language is tool used for communication and understanding between teachers and learners. The teachers must be willing to initiate communication through the use of language with the learners, failing which no effective learning will takes place. Fortune et. al, (2003) also view communication between learners and teachers as a basis for social and language development. Therefore, favourable circumstances have to be created to facilitate this development. The teachers should encourage learners to listen to English both in and outside of class where possible.

According to De Villiers (2012) the Department of Basic Education should train more primary school teachers as there is a shortage of those who specialized in scarce subjects including

English. Lovemore (2012) also adds that there are many challenges faced by teachers which include working under unfavorable conditions. These challenges affect teacher service they become less dedicated to their work and reduce the effectiveness of teaching. Most schools in the rural areas lack proper infrastructure as a result both learners and teachers are negatively affected. Lack of basic education facilities such as qualified teachers, sanitation (use latrins or pit toilets), electricity, water, libraries, laboratories and shortage of textbooks. (Aggarwal 1994 & Mercer & Mercer 1998) The unfavourable teaching conditions discourage teachers from performing to the best of their ability and some lose interest they also think of leaving the teaching profession. These conditions are detrimental to teacher commitment and learning.

Teaching and learning subjects through the second or foreign language medium poses challenges for both learners and teachers. The South African National Revised Statement Grades R-9 stipulates that learners in Grade 7 have to display high levels of competence in English. Consequently, the teachers have to be fully competent of the language of teaching before they attempt to teach. The research findings have on the other hand revealed that English as a medium of instruction in most primary schools has a detrimental effect on the mastering of academic content by learners (Basson 1994; Lemmer 1995; Bester & Cann 1996; Villegas 2000; Schwartz 2001; Weideman & van Rensburg 2002; Grandall et al 2002 and Chieng 2003). Teachers in second language classrooms have to be mindful of the fact that learners are faced with two challenges of learning content and the target language simultaneously. Hence the interest and teacher satisfaction regarding what they do is imperative.

In South Africa there are nine official languages, but English seems to be the most dominant language amongst them all. In most government offices documents are written in English and not in other languages. The job advertisements are done in English as well as the and job interviews. There is a demand for the use of English as a result of economic globalization which leads to pressure on governments to form international economic forces to ensure there is an English speaking workforce (Hu 2007; Enever & Moon 2009; Gimenez 2009). The (RNCS 2005) also stipulates that learners are prepared for further Education and Training and for life in the adult world. As English is the medium of instruction, the assessment of learners within the English classrooms should also be conducted in English. South Africa is no different it is also part of the global village and its citizens must participate in the world economy hence the use of

English. Even parents prefer schools where English is a dominant language because of the perception that it is associated with success. Therefore teachers of English should have a good command of the language in order to prepare the learners face the world.

However, Ehrenberg (1981) states that some teachers are incapable of differentiate between concepts and other things they wish learners to learn, such as facts, principles, attitudes and skills. This is an indication that some teachers might find teaching English challenging due to their lack incompetence. Nevertheless (Huegh et. al 2006) emphasise that teachers are supposed to be competent in the subject that they teach and not find it challenging to themselves. If primary school learners are not properly taught, this might cause them to struggle in high school. Although teaching English is not an easy task, but learning should entail negotiation between teachers' meaning and learners' understanding.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An explanatory or analytical study design was used to conduct the study. According to van Wyk (2009) explains the explanatory study identifies causal links between factors or variables that pertain to the research problem. The researchers in this study used the explanatory study design because they wanted to find out if educators in teaching English at Grade 7 level. Their interest serves as one of the aspects for better teaching. Lack of interest in teaching is viewed as one of the factors which contributes towards poor teaching and high rate of failure.

Population and Setting

The study was conducted in the Vhembe District within the Limpopo Province which is rated amongst the second poorest and lowest in terms of the National Matric Results in South Africa. It is located in the Northern part of South Africa. There are 533 senior primary schools and 533 English Second Language (L2) teachers. The population is composed largely of Tshivenda speaking followed by Xitsonga people residing in rural traditional villages, where the educators seemed to have very limited opportunity of using English out of the school environment.

Sampling

Random sampling was used for the study because a complete sampling frame was available before the specific sampling method was implemented. A sampling frame is a numbered list of all the elements in the population from which a sample is drawn(Botma et.al 2010).A list of all the clusters, circuits including the primary schools which have Grade 7 classes was obtained from the Vhembe District Regional Education Office. From that list the researchers wrote down the names of all twenty seven circuits and placed them into five separate boxes according to the clusters from which they belong. After which they randomly picked 100 school names from each box. However, the participants were 102 as there were more than one English teachers in two schools.

Research Instrument

The data collection instrument for this study included was a questionnaire. The questions included closed and open-ended items. The respondents answered the questions in writing. The instrument was first tested amongst three Grade 7 L2 teachers from the Vhumbedzi, Sibasa and Nzindi circuits. They confirmed that the questionnaire was valid and suitable for the study.

Data Collection

After obtaining permission to conduct the study, the researchers and assistance personally travelled to 100 schools where they distributed questionnaires and were collected soon after being filled in. This method ensured hundred percent return rate.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed to place information gathered in the numerical form and manipulating it according to the arithmetic properties to derive meaning from it (Monnette, 2005:486). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse data. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS version 19 was used to analyse the data.

Ethical Considerations

After the approval of the research instrument was granted by the Research Ethics Committee (DRIC) of the Tshwane University of Technology, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Vhembe Education Regional Office. Informed consent was sought from the participants. Participation in the study was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were

maintained throughout the study. The participants were not subjected to any harm. The participants were informed that they would not receive any remuneration in money or kind for taking part in the study. However, they were informed that their participation was highly appreciated because the information gathered was to be used to help the department to assist teachers with effective teaching strategies.

RESULTS

The study gives a picture of the teachers' interest in teaching English Grade 7. The findings are presented in a figure form as well as a table from. The figure presents the percentages scored regarding their interests while the table presents percentages for their reasons of interest to teach English at Grade 7 level. The discussion of the results follows after the presentation of interests first followed by reasons for interest.

Figure 1: Participants' interest in teaching Grade 7 (n=102)

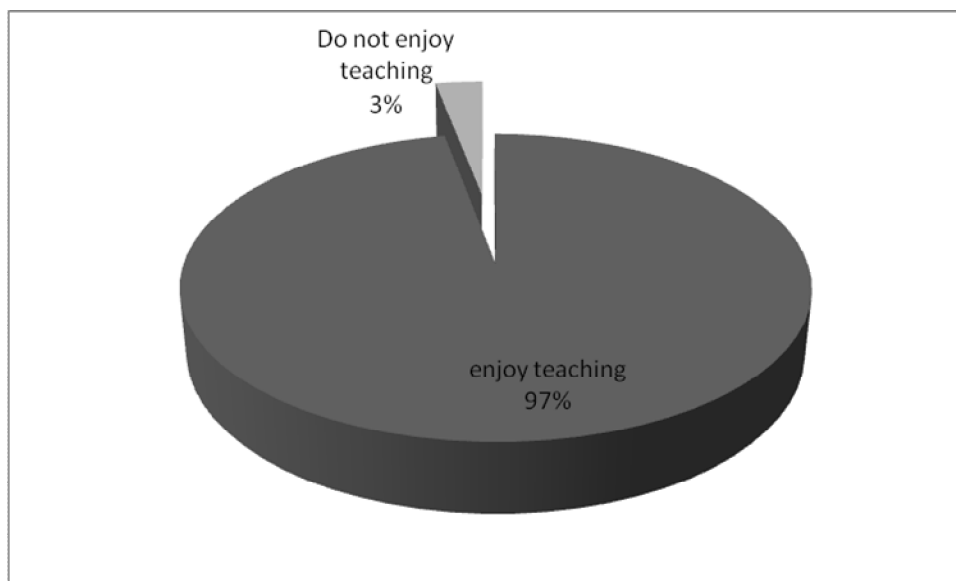


Figure 6 shows that most of the participants (97%) enjoyed teaching English Grade 7.

Table 1: Reasons for interest in teaching English Grade 7 (n=102)

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
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Enjoy teaching and to help learners improve their communication	34	38.2%
Exit and challenging Grade	20	22.5%
Medium of instruction	11	12.4%
For self improvement	10	11.2%
International language	8	9%
Specialised in English	2	2.3%
Use it for assessment	1	1.1%
Shortage of staff	1	1.1%
Lack of resources	1	1.1%
It is difficult	1	1.15

Table 1 shows that the major reasons for teachers' interest in teaching grade 7 classes include enjoyment (38.2%), challenge (22.5%), medium of instruction (11%), self-improvement (10%) and use of the international language (8%).

DISCUSSION

6.2.1. Teaching interest and reasons

As regards to whether Grade 7 English teachers had interest in what they taught or not, the study found that most of the teachers enjoyed teaching English at Grade 7 level. It was encouraging and interesting to discover that the majority of English teachers had interest in what they were doing. The fact that most learners and teachers in South Africa are second and/ or foreign language speakers of English did not stop teachers in the study to enjoy teaching it. The findings are in line with what (Aggarwal and Etsey 2005) that teachers must be interested in what they teach.

The reasons they advanced for their interest ranged from the quest to assist learners improve communication, that Grade 7 is a challenging and an exit class, medium of instruction, English is an international language and that they used it for assessment. However, the negative reasons advanced were the difficulty of English language, lack of human resource and lack of resource material for teaching. Three teachers in two schools told the researchers that they were no longer

interested in the profession and were pursuing other fields of study. The negativity expressed by the teachers confirm what (De Villiers 2012 and Aggarwal 1998) found that lack of resources is unsupportive of better learning.

The study revealed that the majority of the teachers' major reasons for interest in teaching Grade 7 English classes, was that they enjoyed helping learners improve their communication. The finding confirms what (Ejeh 2004), Childs & O'Farrell (2003 Fortune et al 2003) who found that language is of crucial importance in learning and that the main objective in the classroom is to achieve communication and understanding between teachers and learners. Fortune et al (2003) also view communication between learners and teachers as a basis for social and language development.

Twenty two percent of the participants indicated that they enjoyed teaching Grade 7 English, because it was an exit class to secondary level as well as challenging. The finding is consistent with what (Green & Soltis 1997; Fraser et al 1998 and Short 2000) found that learning English and concepts simultaneously poses difficulties for learners. It is fair for the teachers in this study to derive joy in assisting learners through their difficulties.

The moderate reasons include the use of English as a medium of instruction (11%), self-improvement (10%) and that it is an international language (8%). The reason regarding the medium of instruction seems to contradict the finding that English as a medium of instruction in most primary schools has a detrimental effect on the mastering of academic content by learners (Basson 1994; Lemmer 1995; Bester & Cann 1996; Villegas 2000; Schwartz 2001; Weideman & van Rensburg 2002; Grandall et al 2002 and Chieng 2003). The fact that teachers in this study found it necessary to improve their proficiency through teaching English, might assist in solving the problem that teachers in medium of instruction class rooms are ill prepared to improve learners' poor scholastic achievement (Ortiz 2001). Although not all the teachers would be presented with an opportunity to use English in international settings, they were aware of the proven record that well-resourced teaching best prepares learners in study beyond school. The findings in this study revealed the teachers were not deterred by the challenges faced by both learners and teachers while using English as a medium of instruction, they still enjoyed teaching it.

One comma one percent of the teachers indicated that they used English for assessment, taught it due to shortage of qualified staff, lack of resources for teaching English and that English

language was difficult. The finding in terms of lack of resources is in line with what (De Villiers 2012) alluded to that scarcity of specialized teachers needs to be attended to. These negative findings are a cause for concern and in line with the findings by (Ehrenburg 1981 and Webb 2002) who found that most teachers lack appreciation of the role of language in academic development. If teachers only use English for assessment it shows that no meaningful teaching takes place in the classroom. If teachers themselves confessed that English was difficult what more of the learners they had to teach. The finding is in line with what (Tiffen 1967 and Smittle 2003) found that most teachers exacerbate the problem of learning because they do not expand, monitor and self-evaluate their knowledge base to enhance teaching effectiveness.

Limitations of the study

The study sought to investigate the successful teaching of concepts in English by Grade 7 teachers in the Vhembe District within the Limpopo Province. The investigation also determined if teachers were competent to use English the medium of instruction while teaching. The investigation also sought to find out if teachers had mastered the concepts identified from the RNCS and text books, with the assistance of the two lecturers. The teachers were also observed while teaching to see if they were able to facilitate learners' understanding of the concepts taught.

The study findings were based on the results sampled from 102 teachers randomly selected from Vhembe District in the Limpopo Province. The results might be limited to conclude that the teachers were incompetent to teach English concepts through English as a medium of instruction. There are many Grade 7 teachers in the Limpopo Province comprising of highly diversified teaching experiences and backgrounds, but the study was confined to teachers in rural areas of Vhembe District. Other teachers might be better or less prepared for effective conceptual teaching in EMI classrooms. The findings might be only applicable to black grade 7 teachers in Limpopo and its comprehensiveness might not be adequate to present precise general conclusions.

CONCLUSION

The study found that the majority of teachers were interested in teaching English at Grade 7. They provided positive, moderate and negative reasons for their interest. It is interesting to find that teachers were still committed to helping learners from poor English background to communicate. The teachers' awareness that learners will use English in an international arena should be commended.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The study revealed the level interest of teachers' interest regarding the teaching of English. The findings inform those concerned about the teachers' level of commitment that it is not all doom and gloom. The study is also of importance to all the stakeholders in the education system particularly leaders who should provide the necessary resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for government to support the teachers by supplying the schools with the necessary resources. The revival of teacher training colleges with a view to produce quality teachers is also recommended. There is also a need to conduct in-service training programmes for current Grade 7 English teachers to help them improve their English proficiency.

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TABLES

Table 1: Reasons for interest in teaching English Grade 7 (n=102)

FIGURES

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