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CONTENTS

Language policy, classroom practice and concept learning in a Grade One Tshivenda classroom

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Abstract

The article examines language policy in the new South African curriculum framework, with specific reference to Tshivenda as a language of teaching and learning and its efficacy for classroom learning and development. The study is set against the background of a range of South African studies that have identified pedagogical and policy problems relating to teachers' use of English or indigenous 'mother tongue' instruction, the problems of 'translation' and 'code switching', and the problems associated with 'transition' from 'mother tongue' to English-medium instruction.

The present study, using empirical data from a Tshivenda primary school classroom, provides new knowledge about the unique relationship between language medium and concept learning and development. The study demonstrates, using empirical data, that the problems of language medium, even in situations where indigenous, 'mother-tongue' instruction is used, are inextricably related to the problems of pedagogy. Therefore, the study argues from the Vygotskian theoretical framework that for language policy development in South Africa to contribute to successful classroom practice and learning improvement, such policy needs to be integrated within the overall curriculum development initiatives.

Keywords: language, Venda, South Africa, Vygotsky, scientific concepts, socio-cultural, outcomes-based education

Introduction

This article examines language policy and practice in Venda primary school classrooms, within the context of the post-apartheid South African system of schooling. There is presently a dearth of research on Tshivenda as the language of classroom teaching and learning and the implications that this has on policy development in South Africa. Tshivenda continues to be offered both as a language

subject or learning area and as a language for classroom teaching and learning (or language of learning and teaching – LOLT) in the Foundation Phase (Grades One to Grade Three), especially in a more linguistically homogenous context of the Venda region in the Limpopo province of South Africa. The language is also used at this level in the few Venda primary schools located in Soweto, Johannesburg.

Although South African school policy encourages the continued use of previously marginalized indigenous languages as the language of learning and teaching, there is little research on the efficient and effective use of these languages for pedagogical purposes, especially at primary school level, where their use is widespread. Most studies on the use of language for classroom teaching and learning in South Africa have focused on teachers' employment of English as a medium of instruction and its associated pedagogical problems. For example, Macdonald (1999: 65) argues that African teachers whom she researched teaching through the medium of English tended to focus on form rather than on the essence of language expressions, and stuck to the formal and technical terms without clarifying them to their learners. Macdonald further reports that she found poor English language skills in the township[1] schools. In these schools, Macdonald reports poor teaching competence and inappropriate teaching methods that did not foster task-based use of English across the curriculum. The language constraints within these 'Black African'[2] classrooms, according to Macdonald, further impacts on teachers' ability to manage their time effectively, which results in a lack of coverage of the scope of work projected for the year.

Other related studies that have examined problems associated with the use of English as additional language for teaching and learning have found that teachers resort to translating English statements and ideas into the dominant 'home' language spoken by the majority of the learners in class. For example, Adler (2001: 73-93) reports on a number of studies that have found that most teachers in multilingual South African classrooms, in urban and rural contexts, tended to revert to the learners 'home' language or the primary language of learners widely spoken in the community where the school is located. This spontaneous use of the primary language – termed 'code switching', involving translation of meaning embodied in English second or additional language texts into the primary or common language spoken by learners, is viewed as a potentially positive resource for improving classroom teaching and learning of especially mathematics in most contexts within the South African schooling system. It is further suggested that further research on the viability of 'code switching' would be necessary and that policy could be better informed by taking into account the varying

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1   This refers to schools in areas formerly reserved for Black urban residence under the apartheid political system and the term contrasted Black urban residential areas during apartheid South Africa to the mostly White urban residential areas.

2   This term is reproduced from the original text referenced and will continue to be so used in the present article for the sake of consistency, to denote mostly indigenous populations during the apartheid political system. However, terminologies such as 'black' and 'African' do not necessarily carry similar meanings in the present; post apartheid, political dispensation in South Africa.

needs of mathematics teachers working in diverse contexts of practice:

> Teachers' varying uses of code switching across contexts suggests that language-in-education policy needs to engage more seriously and explicitly with what multilingual practices like code-switching can and do mean in the day-to-day realities of diverse classrooms contexts. In particular, in the context of mathematics education reform, policy research and development needs to embrace the specificity of demands on teachers who work in contexts with limited English language infrastructure. (Adler 2001: 93)

The phenomenon of 'code switching' or resorting to spontaneous translation of English texts into the primary language of the teacher and learners has been noted in several South African bilingual and multilingual classrooms where the LOLT was English and not the primary language spoken by teachers and learners. These practices of 'code switching', 'translation' and 'code mixing' – as the phenomenon is variously referred to – have been criticised for the negative, albeit unintended, consequences on pupils' learning. The practice overstretches the teaching and learning time available to the teacher and his or her learners, usually reduces concepts and ideas from one language context to the other, often misrepresenting the original concepts and essentially engaging learners in learning through one language while assessing them in the other, resulting in a mismatch that further contributes to poor schooling and learning failure (Fleisch 2008: 109).

Muthivhi's (2008) study in rural South Africa found that teachers translated ideas and concepts from English to Tshivenda incorrectly and that their lessons did not facilitate the learning and development of subject matter concepts and knowledge on the part of their learners. The teaching time was almost doubled as a result of translation activities and switching from English to Tshivenda, to say the same thing again. Most of the translation and code switching activities were not motivated by the need to explain difficult concepts to learners and to facilitate their learning and understanding, but by the teacher's lack of proficiency in the LOLT, English, and an inability to explain ideas exclusively in that language. Further, the translation and code switching practices did not facilitate discussion and learner participation in the lessons. More importantly, reverting to the primary language of learners to explain ideas in English texts did not facilitate concept learning and development on the part of learners, but rather impeded it, as concepts were often mistranslated, taking on new and inaccurate meanings.

Fleisch (2008: 104-106) also discusses studies that address the problem of transition from mother tongue to English. It is clear from his discussion that the majority of schools where children start off learning in their indigenous, 'mother tongue' and make the transition to English in the second to third – or fourth – year of schooling seem to experience problems associated with the change of language medium. However this problem seems to be related to the instructional activities carried out in the learners' mother tongue, before the transition is made, as much as it also involves the increased cognitive demands of the subject matter, which learners are expected to master in a language they have scarcely mastered. The problem seems therefore to be

twofold: effective use of the language medium or effective mother-tongue instruction on the one hand and effective pedagogy on the other hand.

This article seeks to contribute to knowledge about the relationship between language, especially the use of the indigenous South African languages as mother-tongue instructional media, and the pedagogical challenges this presents for the teachers. These challenges regarding the use of mother-tongue instruction in South Africa, especially regarding the use of Tshivenda as LOLT in the present study, have far-reaching consequences for curriculum development.

Against the background of the problems and challenges relating to the use of the South African indigenous languages as languages of classroom teaching and learning, the associated problems of transition to English, English-medium instruction and the 'translation' activities outlined above, the article examines how Tshivenda mother-tongue instruction policy may not achieve its intended purposes if it is not systematically integrated within the overall curriculum development initiatives. That is, the present study employs empirical data to demonstrate the theoretical point (derived from the Vygotskian theoretical framework discussed below) that the problems of the language of teaching and learning (LOLT), even when this involves teachers' and learners' mother tongue, are not separable from, and unrelated to, the problems of pedagogy. As a result, language policy development that is not integrated within overall curriculum development initiatives is not likely to produce substantive levels of classroom teaching and learning success.

Conceptual background

The theoretical framework within which the problem is analysed proceeds from the assumption that language is an important part of thinking and that its acquisition in school constitutes a crucial achievement in the development of the child (Vygotsky 1981). As Bruner (1985) states, in his interpretation of Vygotsky's idea about the developmental acquisition of language:

> [Language] is mastered at first in collaboration with an adult or more competent peer solely with the objective of communicating. Once mastered sufficiently in this way, it can then become internalized and serve under conscious control as a means of carrying out inner speech dialogues. (Bruner1985: 25)

What Vygotsky and Bruner are arguing for in this quotation is the importance of language both as a means for social communication and as a means for learning, what could be called 'deep-level learning'. The concept of *internalization* in Vygotsky's theory (Vygotsky 1978) is a key concept for understanding children's developmental learning and acquisition of language skills and procedures, which initially were encountered in their relations with their socially significant others, in their own domain of activity. The mode of language use that children encounter in their communities and in their home would, subsequently, be integrated by the child into his or her own mode of using language for communicating with others and, more crucially,

for communicating with herself and controlling her own actions – including the actions of thinking and problem-solving.

Language, from the present theoretical perspective (Vygotsky 1978, 1981) is therefore acquired, first as an external tool for thinking used to influence and regulate the actions of others, that is of children or learners during social relations at home or in classroom teaching and learning. Language, in this sense, is not viewed as only a container of ideas and thoughts but, essentially, as an integral part of the content of human thoughts and ideas. Vygotsky explained the relationship between thought and language (speech) in terms of the unity that their development involves:

> The structure of speech is not simply the mirror image of the structure of thought ... Speech does not merely serve as the expression of developed thought. Thought is restructured as it is transformed into speech. It is not expressed but completed in the word. (Vygotsky 1978: 251)

Language development can therefore be viewed as inextricably related to the development and growth of knowledge and never as a separate process from thought. The development of language for the purpose of classroom teaching and learning can therefore not be viewed as a process that is separate from the development of knowledge itself. That is, school curriculum and language are two aspects of the same process, one of which cannot be complete without the other.

Vygotsky's fundamental distinction between school-specific – scientific – concepts and spontaneous – everyday – concepts relates to the qualitative differences between the content and procedures of knowledge acquired in school on the one hand and the procedures and content of the knowledge acquired during children's spontaneous or everyday situations on the other hand. The language used in these different learning and knowledge acquisition situations is similarly different in fundamental ways. In everyday situations, language acquisition takes place through

> [A] process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models and a process of trial and error, without a process of formal teaching. It happens in settings that are meaningful and functional ... (Gee 1987: 4; in McNamee 1990: 289)

This mode of language acquisition follows the same procedure as that involved in the acquisition of concepts in spontaneous, everyday life situations and differs fundamentally from the procedure that should essentially comprise language learning and concept development in school. That is, language development in everyday life situations differs in fundamental ways from when it develops during the activities of formal school teaching and learning. Language in the latter situation is used more deliberately and is mainly a subject for its own reflection. Learners learn to look back, for example, on the validity, accuracy, adequacy or otherwise of their statements and answers to the questions and problems of the learning tasks and, as a result, probe their own thoughts expressed in and through language. Language in everyday spontaneous situations arises not in the deliberate activity of learning associated with the reflective activities of formal schooling, but is spontaneously acquired and generally

lies beyond the child's deliberate control and volitional activities of reflection.

Vygotsky articulated this abstract, reflective and inner-directed regulatory role of language in the course of children's school learning:

1. The child learns word meanings in certain forms of school instruction not as a means of communication but as part of a system of knowledge.
2. This learning occurs not through direct experience with things or phenomena but through words. (Vygotsky1987: 27)

Methodological approach

The analysis of the Grade One classroom teaching and learning in the present study applies the conceptual system outlined above, to determine the adequacy and effectiveness of the use of Tshivenda for learning and teaching, i.e.:

• Do the practices of classroom teaching and learning through Tshivenda emphasise the everyday, spontaneous modes involving the 'outer-directed' communicative forms of discourse characteristic of everyday language and learning activities?
• Does the use of language during classroom teaching and learning emphasise the everyday modes of learning involving the direct relationship that words have to the concrete phenomena of children's experience in their everyday, spontaneous situations?
• Do the practices of classroom teaching and learning emphasise the school-specific concept relations and 'systematicity' of knowledge (as opposed to its discreteness), embodied in and expressed through language?
• Do the uses of language during classroom teaching and learning emphasise the school-specific modes that emphasise relations among words, making language the subject of its own enquiry and subsuming the subject matter knowledge in a system of concept relations.

The article posits that an adequate use of language for classroom teaching and learning would foster the learning and development of conceptual forms of knowledge and learning and facilitate the transformation of children's spontaneous modes of learning and concepts. The analysis of language and its role in pupils' learning and development is viewed from the perspective of current language practices and curriculum policy, which are in turn the products of societal history and culture. The data used here emanates from a larger study conducted in the two primary schools in Venda, South Africa, during the years 1996 to 2000. These were the early years of the implementation of the new, outcomes-based education curriculum in South Africa. The specific lesson excerpts used here were obtained during the year 1999, three years into the implementation of the new curriculum in Grade One.

Several diverse lessons were observed in the two neighbouring primary schools, in Grade One to Grade Seven. However, the present analysis focuses only on the lesson excerpts from a Grade One lesson. This lesson is representative of the general

approach to teaching and learning in the grades that had already begun implementing the outcomes-based education curriculum framework. However, the Grade One lesson, contrary to the majority of the other similar grades studied, manifests a more advanced level of classroom practice, involving transformation from the former, traditionally teacher-centred approach of apartheid schooling to a more learner-centred and activity-based approach under the new, OBE curriculum.

The lesson observations during the data collection process involved the researcher sitting in class, usually at the back of the classroom, taking as many notes as possible on the teachers' presentation of the lesson, the learners' responses to the teachers' questions and the general classroom interactions. The notes obtained during these observations became the raw data that is interpreted from the theoretical perspective outlined above.

Language as instructional medium in a Grade One literacy lesson

The excerpt from the Grade One literacy lesson below demonstrates problems of classroom teaching and learning that have their origin in both the teaching methods employed and the use of language as an instructional medium. The lesson is particularly relevant for the present discussion in that it involves the teacher teaching her six-year-old Grade One learners about language structure at the same time as she was teaching them to read and write. The teacher teaches word sounds, how to form words that sound differently using different consonants and how words combine into a sentence. Children also learned how to write the sentences involving the use of these words at the same time as they participated in the learning activity. The lesson conforms to the requirements of the new outcomes-based education curriculum, which the teacher applies confidently. The excerpt below, which was preceded by the listing of the different consonants beginning with 'tsh', demonstrates the way in which the teacher uses language during the lesson and the extent to which this has facilitated pupils' learning of the subject matter concepts.

> The teacher asks the pupils to give the words that begin with each of the following sounds, 'tshi', 'tsha' and 'tsho', already written on the board:
>> T. 'Right, give me the words that begin with *tshi, tsha and tsho,* so we write them on the board.'

> Pupils raise hands. The teacher nominates pupils one after the other as they give the requested words. The teacher writes all the words on the board as each of the nominated pupils say them: *Tshinakaho, Tshilidzi, Tshililo, Tshifhiwa*, *tshinoni*, *Tshivhidzo*, *Tshimangadzo.*

> The teacher asks the pupils if they can tell her why she begins with a capital letter when writing some of these words on the board. Pupils raise their hands and the teacher nominates one pupil. The nominated pupil answers:
>> P: 'Because names begin with capital letters'

> The teacher agrees to this, expressing an appreciation of the given answer:
>> T: 'Did you hear what she said? She says, because names begin with capital letters. I really did not realize that she could give the correct answer. Lets proceed.'

This first excerpt shows pupils listing the words correctly as the teacher asked. The teacher did not ask pupils to write these down for her to check their ability to write, although it transpired later on that the majority of the pupils could not write the words correctly. Already the lesson shows an apparent emphasis on the ability to verbalize the words correctly over writing. Pupils did not seem to have difficulty naming the words – nouns – as they were already competent in the language and could think of words in their language to describe them. It should be clarified here that the Tshivenda term for 'noun' is 'name', thus making no explicit distinction between the formal concept of 'noun' and the spontaneous concept of 'name'. Neither was this distinction clarified to the learners by the teacher during the course of the lesson. The activity whereby learners gave the words that were also nouns seems to involve an appropriate approach where learners' existing knowledge was engaged. However, whereas learners provided the apparently correct words or nouns, they probably did so without a clear understanding that these were 'nouns' and not 'names', in the sense in which they understood them from their everyday, spontaneous knowledge perspective.

This conceptual problem began to become clear when the teacher asked the reason why capital letters had been used for some of the words written on the board. The teacher agreed with the learner's answer that the reason was because 'names begin with capital letters' and showed an appreciation of the answer, saying: 'Did you hear what she said? She says, because names begin with capital letters. I really did not realize that she could give the correct answer …' This reveals a possible lack of substantive understanding, on the part of the teacher, of the subject matter concepts that should form the basis of the lesson. The teacher erroneously commended the learner's answer and acknowledged that she never thought the learner would be able to give a correct answer. This not only shows a lack of adequate mastery of subject matter knowledge by the teacher; it also reveals her low expectations of her learners' performance. Whereas the conceptual problems that characterize these teaching and learning practices are pedagogical in nature, it is also clear that such problems are not manifested only in situations where the medium of instruction comprises a foreign or additional language such as English. The teacher's inability to perceive conceptual errors in her teaching and her learners' learning contributes to the problem, in as much as the pupils continued to offer examples of nouns without realizing that these were supposed to constitute instances of a higher-order category and hence not an extension of their spontaneous concept of 'name'. The use of the term *dzina* – name – for 'noun' in Tshivenda translation does not seem to help in this case, as it further blurs the conceptual distinction (between everyday and scientific concepts) that 'scientific' terminologies should highlight.

As the teacher introduced the words, she referred to them as *madzina* (singular, *dzina* – names). The topic was 'nouns', which in Tshivenda comes out as 'name', a term also used in everyday situations with reference to names of people and objects. As a result,

pupils mainly gave the names of people. The concept of name, in the everyday life experiences of these learners, applies mainly in the naming of people or as names of people and hence there is a reproduction of this process in learners' classroom performance. That is, learners' responses were based on their everyday, spontaneous understanding of the concept 'name', which refers directly to objects and events in their everyday life situations.

The conceptual difficulties continued in subsequent episodes. For example, after some time, as pupils continued to give the words that began with 'tshi', and they came to the word '*tshinoni'* [bird], the teacher asked why it was that this word did not begin with a capital letter. Pupils raised hands and the teacher nominated a pupil who gave the answer:

   P: 'Because *tshinoni* [bird] is not a name.'

The teacher agreed and continued to ask more questions. Again the teacher failed to lead her pupils into a correct and accurate understanding of the concept 'noun' or its related concepts such as 'proper noun' and 'common noun', necessary for pupils' effective mastery of the subject matter of the current lesson. That is, the noun *tshinoni* could have been described as a common noun, *dzina-zwalo*, to emphasise the fact that it is a noun, but with specific characteristics that identify it as common noun, which in turn means it does not begin with a capital letter.

The lesson episode that follows demonstrates how pupils learnt through a rote method, which did not take into account the meaningfulness of the task problems. It also reveals the teacher's apparent lack of understanding of the concepts underlying the content of the lesson. The teacher asked pupils to give the number of sound patterns in each of the words written on the blackboard. However, the teacher did not clearly explain the criteria on the basis of which pupils were to determine these patterns. The result was that teaching and learning involved pupils relying on guesswork to give correct answers to the teacher's questions. Meanwhile, the teacher did not seem to be concerned with checking the pupils' understanding of the answers they offered. This point is crucial because it illustrates the underlying disposition of the teacher with regard to the knowledge she teaches. The teachers' approach to teaching would be manifest in, and through, the language of classroom teaching and learning. The more abstract and theoretical the approach, the more abstract and conceptually oriented the language modes would be.

The spontaneous, empirical and everyday approach to classroom teaching and learning is associated with an emphasis on the communicative mode of language, the outer-directed modes of classroom discourse. The scientific and theoretical approach is associated with the deeper, reflective modes of learning that emphasize the conceptual forms of learning. The classroom practices of the Grade One teacher during the present lesson can be related to the former approach. The lesson excerpt below illustrates this point.

The teacher asks pupils to tell her the number of sounds that each of the words on the board has. The teacher reads out each word from the board and asks pupils to say how many sounds it has:

   T. 'Let's divide the sounds now. *Tshinakaho. H*ow many sounds are there?'

Few pupils raise their hands. The teacher nominates three pupils, one after the other, with each pupil giving an incorrect answer to the question. The fourth pupil responds to the answer correctly:

   P. 'They are four'.

The teacher agrees and repeats the answer to the whole class before proceeding to the next question.

The teacher sounds another word out as she writes it down on the blackboard:

   T. 'Tshililo'

Several pupils raise their hands. The teacher again nominates five pupils, one after the other, with each of these pupils giving incorrect answers. The sixth pupil gives the correct answer:

   P. 'Two'.

The teacher repeats the answer aloud. After this the teacher asks for the reason why they say the word *Tshililo* has two sounds:

   T. 'Why it is that we say there are two sound patterns in the word *Tshililo?'*

Several pupils raise their hands. The teacher nominates one pupil whose hand was raised to give the answer:

   P: 'Because *li* and *lo* are the same'.

The teacher repeats this answer to the whole class, confirming the answer. However, the teacher offers no further explanation or further probing questions.

The teacher goes on to the next word:

   T. *tshinoni.*

The teacher says this word at the same time that she is pointing at it on the blackboard with a stick. Several pupils raise their hands to be nominated. The teacher nominates a pupil by calling a name:

   T: 'Tshipuliso'.

The nominated pupil answers:

    P: 'Four'.

The teacher keeps quiet, not saying anything in response to the pupil's answer. The other pupils realize that the answer might not be correct and begin to raise their hands, competing for the teacher's attention. The teacher nominates several pupils, one after the other, with no one able to provide the correct answer. Some of the pupils nominated guessed that there are four sounds in the word, thus repeating the same error committed by the first pupil. Seven pupils in all are nominated one after the other, all of them giving incorrect answers.

Pupils come to be divided between those who say that there are two sounds and those who say that there are three sounds in the word *tshinoni*. Pupils begin to chant out their differing answers, arguing about which answer is correct. In response, the teacher instructs pupils to decide which of the two answers is correct by casting a vote:

   T. 'Lets raise our hands and vote'.

Pupils raise their hands in support of one or the other of the two answers, with the teacher acting as the voting adjudicator.

   T. 'Those who say there are two sound patterns are in the majority, which means that there are two sounds'

This episode began with the teacher asking how many sounds are in the noun *Tshililo*, which a learner identified as having two sounds. For the first time – and this may be the result of the new curriculum approach – the teacher asks a probing question as to *why* learners think that there are two sounds in this word. This constitutes a major transformation in the teachers' approach, as teachers rarely asked such questions in the past. However, the conceptual difficulties that characterize the lesson continued, as the teacher failed to clarify the nature of sounds and how to identify them. The teacher agreed with the learner's response that '*li* and *lo* are the same' without probing further as to how this is so and what principles account for this similarity.

The extent of the problem is manifested in the learners' inability to offer a correct answer to the question about the number of sounds the word *tshinoni* has. The teacher was again not able to offer her pupils what could be termed a pedagogically sound explanation to help them engage meaningfully with the problem. As none of the answers offered by the pupils were deemed to be correct, in what essentially appeared to be a trial-and-error answering process, the teacher led them to a voting process to decide on the correct answer. While, the voting activity may have a sound basis in terms of the teacher's interpretation of the OBE curriculum, the action in this instance did not seem to have a sound pedagogic basis: the action of deciding the correctness of opposing views through casting a vote (without further elaboration of the epistemic principles informing such a decision) does not result in pupils acquiring the necessary understanding of the principles that inform such a decision and therefore fails to produce effective learning and concept acquisition on the part of the pupils.

Although implementing a relevant, outcomes-based educational principle of extending classroom learning to include social knowledge and skills, the teacher did not choose what may be considered an appropriate lesson activity to integrate the socially significant knowledge about democratic decision-making processes. The teacher does not use the pupils' already existing language abilities, such as is manifested in their everyday knowledge of 'nouns' as involving the names of people in their real life world, to foster pupils' learning of the skill for determining the different types of nouns and for identifying the different sound patterns in words. As a result, the approach in this lesson does not emphasise the pupils' understanding of the formal properties of language through engaging them in learning activities that include and are based on their existing and spontaneously acquired knowledge of language. On the contrary, the teacher's approach emphasises the concrete and empirical approach to the teaching and learning of the formal properties of language. In this way, the knowledge of language, comprising the properties of the formal language in the curriculum, is assumed to be epistemologically the same as the knowledge of language that learners bring into formal school learning from their everyday, spontaneous activities.

Conclusion

The article has examined the problems of language policy and practice in the current

South African schooling system, with specific focus on the mismatches that seem to characterize policy and practice. The analysis of such possible mismatches reveals that Tshivenda continues to be offered both as a language subject or learning area and as a language for teaching and learning (or language of learning and teaching – LOLT) in the Foundation Phase (first three grades of schooling) in the more linguistically homogenous context of Venda schooling. While this policy seems to make good educational sense, there are contradictions and mismatches in terms of this policy on language and its implementation in practice. Teachers seem to think that an earlier introduction of English, even the use of English as a language of learning and teaching, would be more beneficial for their learners.

However, the analysis of the study has focused on the data that presents an instance of classroom teaching and learning of the language Tshivenda through the medium of the same language. Although it may be assumed that such teaching, making use of the learners' and teachers' mother tongue, would be unproblematic, the data from the present study suggest otherwise. Although this study does not militate against the use of Tshivenda mother-tongue instruction, and would in fact support mother-tongue instruction at the level of schooling at which the lesson was offered, it points to possible areas of serious concern that need urgent policy attention.

The data from the study suggests that there are serious pedagogic and language problems that may require simultaneous attention. The use of mother-tongue instruction to teach formal language as part of the literacy lesson did not foster successful learning and concept development on the part of learners. The teacher did not manifest a sound conceptual understanding of the content of her lesson, neither did she facilitate the learning of the concepts effectively. The fact that the language of instruction was the teacher's, and her learners' mother tongue, did not seem to help in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Rather, this fact seems to have contributed to the problems and difficulties – identified as a more abstract and formal knowledge of language (constituting the content of the subject matter of the Grade One Literacy Learning Area), which was (unintentionally) reduced to a form of knowledge that characterized the learners' everyday, spontaneous form of knowledge and its associated modes of learning.

The problems and difficulties identified in the analysis above suggest that language policy decisions, especially decisions on languages for classroom learning and teaching, cannot easily be made outside of the broader curriculum decisions, as has largely been the case with contemporary South African curriculum development initiatives. Further, these problems suggest that adequate resources need to be allocated for the purpose of developing the nine indigenous (previously marginalized) languages – of which Tshivenda is one – for the purpose of classroom use as languages of learning and teaching. Such development can also not, as suggested by the data above, reasonably occur outside of overall curriculum development initiatives. This includes, but is not restricted to, broad professional teacher development, especially

the 'training' of teachers in the appropriate epistemic methodologies of teaching school-specific, scientific knowledge and concepts.

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