



Accentuating English Language as the Sole Medium of Pedagogy in South Africa: Issues and Perspectives

Odeku Kola O*

Faculty of Management and Law, University of Limpopo, South Africa

*Corresponding author: Odeku Kola O, Professor, Department of Public and Environmental Law, School of Law, Faculty of Management and Law, University of Limpopo, South Africa, Tel: +27 (0) 15-268 2947; E-mail: kooacademics@gmail.com

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Abstract

South Africa is a multilingual country where eleven official languages are constitutionally entrenched and guaranteed. These languages have equal footing in all activities, including as a medium of teaching and learning at schools. This is the reality and the owners of these languages are very cautious of them and as such guide them jealously. This article argues that while it is constitutionally expedient to recognize and protect the eleven official languages, especially the indigenous ones, all of them cannot be used at the same time as medium of teaching and learning. Against this backdrop, this article emphasizes that English, which is one of the official languages recognized in the South African Constitution and at the same time widely understood by other groups and worldwide should be singled out and be adopted as the medium of instruction and education in all schools.

Keywords: Language of instruction; Pedagogy; Education; Competency; Learners

Introduction

One of the important tools being used to teach, facilitate and deliver quality education to learners is an acceptable language of instruction and education. Against the backdrop, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 recognizes the right to languages as the key to achieve this and as such, this right is contained in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution and for this reason, it is a fundamental human right which must be protected, realized, fulfilled and enjoyed [1]. Section 2(2) of the Constitution confirmed the inherent nature of this right and provides that “everyone has the right to receive education in the official language of their choice.”

However, the issues surrounding language for pedagogy have constantly generating fierce debates in South Africa post-apartheid era where the Constitution has enshrined and recognized eleven languages as official languages [2]. It is

worthy to point out that during the colonial and apartheid periods, both Afrikaans and English were considered as official ‘languages’, while other indigenous South African languages were considered as ‘mother-tongues’ or ‘vernaculars and as such they were considered intolerable for facilitating teaching and learning in any educational institutions [3]. Then, colonial and apartheid languages were used as toll of discrimination and segregation to deny indigenous South Africans from accessing education and this was successfully accomplished using the conquerors policies of compelling the use of their own languages for all official dealings including teaching and learning [4]. The introduction of constitutional dispensation in 1994 followed by the enactment of the Constitution in 1996 brought a new hope in the horizon in South Africa because all citizens enjoy equal rights and protection. While these constitutional emancipation and liberation are commendable, the fact still remains that, there are still some contestations on what language would be more effective to deliver teaching and learning out of all the constitutionally guaranteed eleven official languages. Interestingly, post-apartheid black South African political and educational elites are now clamoring for decolonization of education and the language of instruction for education by advocating and vehemently arguing that the language of instructions at schools should be the mother-tongues [3]. This agitation is intended “to decolonize all areas of the colonial matrix of power to release the fullness of human relations” [3]. It is the candid opinion of author that this uncontrolled agitation might result to narrowing the scope of South African students by limiting their relevance internationally and make them stay in their cocoon instead of taking the opportunity English language presents considered to be global language for effective pedagogic instruction in subjects like science, mathematics, technology, astronomic and so on.

This article accentuates that to use the eleven official languages as languages of teaching and learning at all educational institutions is a recipe for failure and disaster. Therefore, there is need to take a sustainable stand whereby English language is adopted as the language of instruction and education in South Africa [5]. However, this does not translate to or mean that other constitutionally recognized languages

should be discarded. This seminal article still advocate that they should continue to enjoy the status and rights accorded them in the Constitution to the extent of using them for communication and all other activities but when it comes to teaching and learning, concerted effort should be made to adopt and use English language. This article also shows that considering the universal usage of English language, it will be of immense benefit to South Africa to adopt English as the language of instruction, teaching and learning [6].

Conceptual Clarifications

Colonial and apartheid regimes deliberately deployed and used their own languages as basis for classifying and dividing South Africans, particularly the black Africans majority [7]. As such, in order to continue to perpetrate their strong hold on the conquered black South Africans and deny them access to quality education, segregation and discrimination were strongly entrenched in most of their education policies [8]. During these eras, Afrikaans and English were defined as 'languages', while indigenous African languages were viewed as 'mother-tongues' or 'vernaculars.' [7]. Indigenous languages were viewed in derogatory terms and looked down upon by the apartheid regime as languages not fit for use for mediums of conducting national and reasonable businesses [5]. It is pertinent to point out that this article does not intend to portray English and Afrikaans languages as bad languages but entrenching them on the indigenous population without seeking their views or consents by the colonial conquerors was considered to be the problem and the main concern. That is the reason why till today, black Africans still view these languages as languages of conquerors and oppressors brought by the white invaders and settlers. Whereas, the indigenous languages originated within the country and is often the primary languages of the indigenous people, homelands and their communities [9]. Mother-tongue is referred to as one's primary best spoken language [10]. It is considered a source of pride to those who use their mother tongues to communicate, but in South Africa, the concept of mother tongue is stigmatized because the apartheid government derogated it with disdain. For instance, in the educational space during the apartheid era, any medium of pedagogy other than Afrikaans was classified as mother tongue education amongst the users. This was done deliberately to entrench and deepen segregation and as such a perfect strategy for dividing the indigenous people and their communities [11].

On the other hand, the global spread of English language as a lingua franca is gaining acceptance on a massive scale and being used by many countries to communicate as a first language and also to conduct teaching and learning [12]. In the words of Jenkins and Leung "speakers of English as a lingua franca represent the largest contemporary group of English users around the world." Nowadays, it is used in international communication across communities' language boundaries. For instance, in the United Nations gatherings, English is used as medium of communication, even though the members came from different cultural and language backgrounds. Consequently, because of its universal acceptance, this article

suggests that English should be the lingua franca in South Africa and prioritized as a language of pedagogy in schools. Other ten languages can and should also be used when appropriate, but when it comes to conducting pedagogy for all, English should be preferred and used [12].

Literature Review

Undoubtedly, one of the dominant and pervasive problems facing most of the previously colonized African countries is language and its inherent complications even after they have been liberated from the colonial rulers. Language is "a potent vehicle of transmitting cultures, values, norms and beliefs from generation to generation, and remains a central factor in determining the status or nature of any nation" [13]. Unquestionably, the attribute and character of a nation are easily reflected through its language. Language is a nation stigma and hence all nations are stigmatized by virtue of the languages they speak and understand.

In order for a nation to foster national integration, cohesion and development, there must be a language acceptable to all for purposes of administering and running of the country's affairs [13]. Therefore, while respecting multilingualism, it is important to point out that when it comes to medium of instruction, English should be preferred in South Africa because of its attribute of unifying the different languages in South Africa.

Language is the soul, spirit, identity, heritage and culture of people [14]. Even though the indigenous languages were suppressed as medium of pedagogy during the colonial and apartheid eras, the Constitution has now elevated most of these languages and they are presently recognized as official languages. As such, they can be used for teaching and learning in public schools [15]. While this is commendable, it is important to mention that it will be practically impossible to use all the eleven constitutionally recognized languages to teach at the same time [16]. For instance, assuming that students in a class are represented from the different language backgrounds, how would the teacher be able to use all the languages to teach at the same time [17]. Furthermore, foreign students who do not understand or speak any of the indigenous languages might form part of the students in the class room, how would they be able to receive teaching in language they do not understand [18]. More so, the teacher providing the teaching and learning might be a foreign national who is unable to speak or understand any of the indigenous languages [19]. Over and above, it is also almost impossible to have a South African teacher who would be capable and competent to speak and use all the eleven official languages as language of teaching and learning. Undoubtedly, this will be a herculean task to accomplish. It is against the backdrop of this that this article strongly advocates for the adoption of English as a medium of teaching and learning in all schools.

It is pertinent to reiterate that one is mindful of South Africa's historical discrimination against all other indigenous languages which deliberately suppressed and denigrated all indigenous languages through non-recognition, identity

change and cleansing and enforcement of Afrikaans as the medium of teaching. This resulted in the Soweto students' unrest and protest of June 12 1996, where several students protesting apartheid language policy were brutally murdered by the apartheid police [20]. The introduction of Afrikaans for pedagogy at that time was meant to be used as a weapon of domination and marginalization of the black African majority in order to reshape their thinking and identities [21].

It is against the backdrop of promoting inclusion that this article points out that the plight of the teacher in using and promoting multilingualism and multiculturalism in multiracial schools in classroom is unimaginable because of the difficulty in impressing different racial groups during pedagogy. Therefore, an English-only discourse, if agreed upon, would have created an enabling learning environment for the teachers, the learners, role players and stake holders.

Challenges of Using the Eleven Languages as Medium for Pedagogy

It is apparent that an attempt at multilingual mode of teaching instruction is unrealistic. Where this has been enforced, students are unable to make adequate progress in science and mathematics subjects that would unlock the potentials of learners to be professionals in critical skills needed in South Africa [22]. To a large extent, English is perfectly suited for the requirements of science and technology while the indigenous languages are not [23]. The reason for this assertion is that African languages were not developed to embed and integrate scientific and technological terminologies into their vocabulary [24]. It is against the backdrop of this that one submits that African languages are underdeveloped in scientific and technological terminologies because they have not been prominent in these fields. Whereas English is well developed and well suited for these feats and purposes [25].

The Constitution of South Africa is "heralded as intellectually progressive and politically enlightened because of the significance it attaches to human rights and its acknowledgment of multilingualism in the African context" [7]. Human and fundamental rights are well enshrined and protected in the Constitution, particularly the right to language and to receive basic education in any of the eleven languages.

However, pointing out the disadvantages in using and recognizing all the constitutionally prescribed eleven languages as official languages Makoni emphatically asserted that "the South African Constitution, by recognizing nine African languages as neatly divided is socially alienating and cognitively disadvantaging to the very people it is intended to serve" [7]. This assertion is well founded because using eleven languages may be confusing and disadvantageous especially when it comes to communicating serious issues or teaching students from different languages and cultural backgrounds in a class [25]. Hence, a common language understood by all would serve a rewarding purpose and a unifying force. Using a common language for teaching and learning would facilitate understanding and cognitive because teaching and learning

will take place in the classroom without anyone being alienated or left behind.

More importantly, cultural and linguistically differences between educators and students can have negative effects on the education of learners [26]. No matter how experienced an educator is, there is bound to be conflict of culture and language and this might result to contestation on which of the languages is the best for pedagogy. Consequently, English as a common language would best address this problem and unite all the different cultures and languages. Understanding the multilingual nature of learners and educators during teaching and learning would enable educators to be sensitive to the needs of the learners and as such would be able to provide culturally responsive instruction. In this regard, English language fits perfect to this assertion.

The Significance of English Language as a Medium of Instruction and Pedagogy

English is adjudged a language of wider communication worldwide as it serves many purposes as a lingua franca, facilitating communication across and between ethnic groups; a language of instruction in many tertiary institutions-having students from diverse linguistic backgrounds [27]. It is also a principal language of the United Nations and often used to conduct international trading and negotiations [26]. According to Kadenge and Nkomo, "English enjoys prestige and international status as a sophisticated language which is capable of handling formal and advanced knowledge, and can facilitate its development and communication. It is this international pedigree which has probably endowed the language with such dominance and prestige" [28].

In order to use English for pedagogy, it must be learnt as a subject by a person or student who does not come from the cultural background where English is the first language [29]. Pundits have suggested that the surest and most reliable ways of attaining academic and socio-economic successes is through the learning, understanding and speaking of English language [22]. English in this respect serves as a means of attaining socio-economic success, public schooling and career advancement.

Proficiency in English entails that the student has full understanding and mastery of writing, reading, speaking, and listening. To be declared competent, it requires a teacher who has strong skills in English language and the ability to impart English language to the learners. This is essential in order to lay very strong foundation for learning since it will be used to conduct other subjects that a learner will be taught in the class room [30]. This will prepare learners for success in any of the subjects they will be offering in the course of their educational careers and thereafter, careers in the workplaces.

English is gaining ground, and as such, recognizing it as the sole official language will fit perfectly to the overall advantages that will flow from this, especially when it comes to teaching and learning. Kamwangamalu, observed that "if anything has

changed at all in terms of language practices in South Africa, it is that English has gained more territory and political clout than Afrikaans in virtually all of the country's institutions, including the legislature, education, the media, and the army" [31].

Take for an example, in South Korea, "English is regarded as a major subject in the national curriculum and it is also one of the key subjects in the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT)" [32]. Being a dominant language of education in South Korea, students' achievement in English subject at schools and at CSAT has influence on their future. Competency in English is a key component in job markets. Ability to speak and write English is linked to opportunities and as such, it opens doors for job seekers who possess strong comprehension of English language. Because of its importance in the employment markets, the requirement for English competence has surged in South Korea job markets and many fields in job markets require English competency for placements [32]. The implication of this is that most of the companies require good English proficiency as a basic requirement for job opportunity. Globalization is the current world outlook and from all indications, English seems to be considered as a global language that had transcended its original owners such as the USA or the UK.

With regard to teaching and learning, English is today's dominant language of science. As a matter of fact, science is advancing immensely due to having a dominant global Language-English. English language is a choice language for scientific communication and this is evident in many scientific works that have been published worldwide in English language [33].

English language as a medium of pedagogy could serve as unifying element that enhances students' ability and enabled them to access education, employment, economy and law not only locally but globally.

Lessons from Elsewhere

Unlike South Africa, Namibia specifically stipulates English as the official language and language of instruction. Similarly, even though Nigeria has four official languages recognized but the country has taken cautious political and educational decisions to entrench English as the main official language in the country and language of learning [34]. The effect of adopting English as the sole language of pedagogy is apparent. Nigerians are well educated and are able to integrate into most of the developed countries in areas of any skill or expertise because of the opportunity of receiving education in English Language.

Namibia

Namibia, similar to South Africa also experienced entrenched draconian colonial and apartheid rules before she attained independence in 1990 [35]. During the oppressive rules, English and Afrikaans were the two dominant languages but after independence, English was made an official language

by virtue of Article 3 of the new country's constitution. The Constitution specifically provides that "the official language of Namibia shall be English." This notwithstanding, in terms of Article 3(2) the constitution also recognizes other languages and gives "permission to use languages other than English for legislative, administrative, and judicial purposes, as well as medium of instruction" [36]. This is why Namibia is regarded as an official monolingualism. This conscious decision was taken by Namibia to suppress Afrikaans as medium of instruction because of the brutal experiences they encountered under the apartheid regime. So, English was adopted by the country at independence based on the ideology that Afrikaans should be relegated because of the oppressive dispositions of the owner of the language. In the words of Frydman, "the decision to establish English as the sole official language in Namibia was based on an ideology informed chiefly by the sociopolitical circumstances of the country. Oppressed and divided by South Africa's apartheid regime, Namibians sought liberation and unity. English, they believed, would be the vehicle to achieve these ideals. If Afrikaans was the language of oppression, then English was the language of resistance and liberation" [36].

Frydman asserted thus "the aim of introducing English is to introduce an official language that will steer the people away from lingo-tribal affiliations and differences and create conditions conducive to national unity in the realm of language" [36].

Therefore, English is the first language of Namibians when it comes to conduct national businesses and education while other languages are regarded as the second languages. It must however be pointed out that mother tongues and indigenous languages are not relegated, they are equally important and each tribe and indigene is protected under the constitution to use its own language to communicate. But, with regard to all national and official issues including education, English is the dominant official language for pedagogy and other official domains and activities. Therefore, even though Namibia is a clearly multilingual country, English serves as the only official language and it is constitutionally recognized and guaranteed.

Nigeria

Likewise, in Nigeria, English language is the sole dominant official language used to conduct all official businesses including delivery of pedagogy in the classrooms. English language is the national language which also functions as a national socio-political identity.

In Nigeria, English is recognized as the official dominant language of the education domain and teaching and learning activities right from the kindergarten up to the tertiary education.

Even though Nigeria is a multilingual country comprises of different ethnic groups, English language is the lingua franca especially when it comes to conducting official activities including political, economic and educational developments. To this day, English language is the only unifying solution to the diverse cultural and languages. English is widely

communicated and practiced and occupies prominent place and function at the workplace, in the media and as a medium of instruction in schools while the three crucial indigenous languages are also recognized but they are not being used as medium of instructions in schools except when one of them is being taught as a module during the course of pedagogy [37].

More importantly and in support of English language as a medium of pedagogy, the teaching and learning of English is compulsory module that a learner must be found competent at all levels of schooling up to tertiary level. This is why English still occupies pride of place in Nigeria, especially in the formal school system.

It is pertinent to point out that even though pundits continue to critique English as a lingua franca, English continues to be acceptable by the majority in Nigeria because of its neutrality considering that Nigeria has an estimate of about 450,000 languages [13]. English continues to occupy place of pride and dominance in Nigeria because it is the language that is not fraught with suspicions in any formal or literate context in the country [13].

According to Ugwuoke "as a language of wider communication (LWC), English is used for phatic communion, ceremonial purpose, instrument of keeping records, information dissemination, self-experiment and embodiment of thought among the various linguistic groups in Nigeria. The common linguistic basis that constitutes a requisite for the existence of any nation is provided by English. So with English as the common tongue to all the ethnic groups, the collective sentiment of belonging together despite the individual or ethnic differences is forged. Related to the discussed is fact that Nigerians or collective identity is stamped on national institutions through the medium of English" [13].

Furthermore, Nigeria continues to intensify its approach towards the use of English as medium of instruction in all aspects of life and that is why English still "remains dominant as the language of virtually all aspects of national life: politics, administration, business, sports, diplomacy, communication, media, education, creativity, literacy, constitution, law, just to mention a few" [13].

Synthesis

The number of people who understand and speak English language in South Africa seems to be increasing on a daily basis. This is not to suggest that other languages have been abandoned. When it comes to conducting official businesses, South Africa is leaning towards the use of English language more than other languages. Even in the parliament and courts, the use of English to communicate and transact is now becoming the norm despite the fact that citizens have rights under the Constitution to use any of the constitutionally recognized eleven languages. Adopting English language as the official national language will foster a common language acceptable to all. In Nigeria and Namibia, English language is the official language for all purposes and it also the language of education, instruction and learning. English language is taken very seriously to the extent that in most households,

parents use English to communicate with their children in order to inculcate the culture of learning and understanding of English in them since it is the language they will use throughout in all their activities in these countries. This does not mean that parents do not speak indigenous languages and mother tongues with their children, but English is prioritized because of its official and national status. English is taught at schools from kindergarten up until tertiary levels. As a matter of fact, in Nigeria, in order to qualify and be found competent to be admitted to tertiary institutions, the learner must be competent in oral and written English. Apart from the benefits that accrue to English as a global language, it is best suited for countries that have different competing languages such as South Africa and Nigeria. Students in Nigeria continue to benefit from being well grounded in both oral and written English language, and as such, most times excel in mathematics, sciences and technology. Furthermore, many Nigerians are able to fit into any society and system where English language is the medium of instruction and education. Currently, South Africa seems to be at the bottom of the ladder when it comes to mathematics, sciences and technology education. This notwithstanding, most learners who have strong competency in English still excel in these subjects [38]. It is against the backdrop of this that there should be commitment on the part of the government to commence steps towards adopting English language as language of instruction and education.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, English is being spoken all over the world and many countries have adopted it as their lingua franca and some entrenched it in their constitution as the official national language. In South Africa, English is one of the official languages recognized by the Constitution. However, all the official languages in the Constitution have the same status. To this end, no language is superior to the other. They all enjoy the same protection under the constitution and owners of these languages have unhindered rights and freedom to use them to communicate, correspond and conduct all official and unofficial activities. This notwithstanding, this article demonstrates that English should be adopted as the sole official language and language of education while local and indigenous languages play complementary roles.

Multilingualism is encouraged, but when it comes to pedagogy, monolingualism seems to be an increasingly preferred and effective. Therefore, government should be proactive and find a way of redirecting narratives and debates on how to make English a dominant official language and language of instruction and education.

Recommendations

English is considered and recognized worldwide as principal language of instruction because of the unique position it occupies in the language space. Pursuant to this, it is recommended that it should be introduced and use as language of instruction and education from kindergarten,

primary, high and tertiary institutions throughout the academic journey of a learner. This is doable if resources are made available to establish learner's competency in English. This approach does not take away the learning of the mother tongues as languages and of course it is recommended that this should be enhanced and strengthened because of its value and cultural ties and belief.

When English is taught from the kindergarten, it carries with it a lot of benefits to the learners because learning of English at this early stage will lay a solid foundation for learners' competency and cognitive. By the time the learner gets to the tertiary institution, comprehension would have been strengthened because of the English competency foundation laid from the onset and this would enable comprehension during pedagogy when English is used for teaching and learning of those modules such as mathematics, science, technology and so on considered to have potentials to unlock job and career opportunities for black South Africans.

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