

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DEDUCTIONS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

5.1. Introduction

In this final chapter my intention is to consolidate the findings of the entire research project and its significance. I also present the conclusions drawn from the findings, highlight the contribution of the study to the existing body of knowledge on MOI policy implementation, and make practical suggestions for the implementation of the findings and for future research.

5.2. Summary

In post-apartheid South Africa, the language question, particularly in black education, remains heated and unresolved, mainly because of colonial language planning practices of the past, which were firmly grounded in English linguistic imperialism and linguicism, and the attitudes of speakers of African languages towards their own languages. Phillipson (1992:271-272) describes the typical arguments used in linguistic imperialist discourse to justify the exclusive use of English in high-domain fields such as education, particularly in developing countries in which the main language of communication is an indigenous language. These arguments focus on the intrinsic qualities of English (English is noble, has a rich vocabulary and easily adapts to change), its extrinsic qualities (English is a resource-rich language, with a rich and varied literature), and the use to which it is put (English is a language of modernization, science and commerce). Half-hearted attempts by democratic post-colonial states to break away from the trend of adopting colonial languages as the only official languages and media of instruction, have failed to achieve their goal in most African countries. In the South African education system, this has translated into high drop-out and failure rates for the majority of black learners.

The present study, motivated by the poor performance of black learners at matric level, particularly in rural provinces such as the Eastern Cape, and the fact that South Africa has promulgated a multilingual LIE policy, singled out the language question from a host of other factors which influence school achievement, as a topic for investigation. Using a mixed methods research design, the study utilized a survey questionnaire, classroom observations and focused interviews to establish possible answers to the following questions:

1. How do teachers understand and interpret medium-of-instruction (MOI) policies within their practice?
2. How do teachers implement medium-of-instruction policies (MOI) in their classrooms?
3. Why do teachers interpret the policies in the ways they do?

The key findings of the questionnaire were:

- Even when there was a match between the teacher's LI and that of his/her pupils, or when isiXhosa was the language of wider communication, in general the teachers' preferred medium of instruction was English.
- Several main reasons were given for pursuing an English-only policy. African languages were perceived as not having the capacity to serve as MOI; the teachers saw themselves as language role models; and school language policy determined MOI, as did teacher training and the tertiary LOLT. Other reasons furnished by the teachers were that English was the language of computers, promoted racial tolerance, and was the key to effective leadership.
- English was used most for assessment, for developing the English language skills of pupils, building learner confidence, making announcements, repeating and reformulating, and assessing pupil understanding. Some schools (51,9%) had not adapted their school LIE since the 1997 LIE policy changes.
- An English-only policy was employed in the following situations: in a multilingual desegregated (former Model C) urban school; in a rural high school where there was a mismatch between the teacher's HL and that of his learners; and in a rural high school where English was offered as a subject.
- Most of the teachers in the study (77,8%) were aware of the existence of a multilingual LIE; nevertheless they preferred English to indigenous languages as MOI and continued implementing the policy in the same manner that they had been expected to implement

language policy before 1997, that is, 63% employed English only and 37% code-switched in contexts in which indigenous languages were spoken widely.

- MOI policies were not implemented uniformly in urban and rural contexts. Several factors influenced teacher language choice(s) during lesson delivery. These were the learners' linguistic profiles, whether the teacher shared a home language (HL) with his/her learners, the subject being offered, the need to promote understanding of content, and the teacher's understandings, misconceptions, preferences and beliefs about the role of language in education. School policy, the availability of resources, assessment policy, and the need to make the curriculum accessible to learners also had a bearing.
- Classroom language practices of teachers in similar contexts could be remarkably different or dissimilar, depending on factors such as teaching competence, the teacher's LI, learner profiles, teacher's beliefs, conceptions and misconceptions about the role of language in teaching and learning, etc.
- Code-switching was a common classroom practice and the percentage of those using English only (48,1%) was outnumbered by those who code-switched (51,8%).
- The main reasons advanced for code-switching had to do with making the subject accessible to the learners. It aimed to make up for the learners' lack of English language skills, clarify/paraphrase difficult points for my pupils, facilitate concept development, and help with English words which were new and unfamiliar to the pupils.
- Some teachers endorsed the use of English as an LOLT, together with the learners' home language, even though they viewed English as a barrier to learning, and conducted assessments in English only.
- Even though some teachers believed that they used English mainly for teaching, isiXhosa was used extensively, especially in rural and township schools, through code-switching,

code-mixing, translation, repetition, and the use of township lingo in order to make the curriculum accessible to the learner.

Cross-tabulations revealed that:

- Teachers gravitated towards the use of English-only as they gained more teaching experience.
- Generally, teachers assessed in English, even though they may have delivered lessons in code-switching mode.
- Irrespective of professional qualifications and teaching experience, those in possession of older-generation qualifications (UED code-switched more than those with more recent teaching qualifications (e.g. HDE).
- Less experienced teachers were more likely to code-switch than more experienced teachers
- School location was a factor in LIE policy implementation; urban-based schools preferred English, while rural schools chose English and the learners' LI.
- Teachers preferred English as LOLT and the LI was used when learners were experiencing difficulties with the subject.
- Generally teachers preferred English as LOLT, irrespective of their academic qualifications.

Classroom observations revealed that:

- There was a gap between teacher beliefs about LIE policy implementation and how the policy was actually implemented. IsiXhosa was used mainly as a language of instruction, although the rural high school teacher believed she was teaching in English mainly.
- An English-only policy was adopted in a multilingual urban desegregated context even though the teacher shared an L1 with most of the pupils.
- Grammatical correctness of utterances was not regarded as important by a Business Economics teacher in an urban-based desegregated school, and there was no attempt to overtly correct learner errors. In contrast, an expatriate teacher in a rural high school attended to learners' incorrect English.
- There was minimal classroom interaction (one-word answers, chorus responses and long silences) in some rural classrooms, even though the lessons were offered in code-

switching mode. The teachers did not create opportunities for discussion and application of knowledge and asked mostly close-ended questions. The chalkboard summary was captured in English only. Teacher-centred methodologies were used and there was extensive teacher talk. Learners were passive spectators and the teachers' questions were met with silences. Generally, proficiency and creative qualifications were not developed under these circumstances.

- IsiXhosa was employed mostly to give instructions to learners, to secure a response to a question, and to remind learners about how the current lesson was related to the previous one.
- Code-switching was employed to explain a concept introduced in English through an example given in isiXhosa.
- In a township school, English was employed as the main MOI; however, there was also liberal use of code-alternation, and classroom discourse was not constrained.
- In a rural school where there was a mismatch between the Geography teacher's LI and that of his pupils, English was employed as an MOI and the teacher used interactive teaching strategies. English was used to ask prompting questions, encourage and motivate learners, as well as stimulate debate and discussion. The teacher also attended to vocabulary development. There was vibrant discussion and debate in all his lessons.
- A teacher of English at a rural school used English only when conducting his lessons and employed isiXhosa occasionally to confirm learner understanding of what he was teaching. There was one-way communication mostly as he did not receive answers to the good anchor questions that he asked. Consequently, he provided the answers and meanings of difficult words and phrases after giving his pupils enough "waiting time" to respond.

Interview Findings

Focused interviews with key informants yielded the following results:

- Two teachers, one from a rural school and the other from a desegregated school, endorsed the use of English as an LOLT, despite the acknowledgement that English was a barrier to learning.

- Teacher A from the rural school supported the use of the L1 because learners were not proficient in English. They understood isiXhosa better than they did English, and did not understand questions phrased in English. The parents' level of education and the context of the school also did not support an English-only policy. However, Teacher A supported the use of English as an LOLT in rural schools.
- Teacher A was of the view that there would be no need for high school teachers to code-switch if there were more effective teaching of English in the Foundation and Intermediate phases, an indication that isiXhosa was seen by this teacher as a bridge to English.
- The learners' poor English language skills were cited as the main reason behind the extensive use of code-alternation (code-switching, translations, word-coinage) in rural contexts. Although teaching was done mainly in isiXhosa, assessment was conducted in English.
- Teacher B (from a desegregated school) viewed English as a barrier to teaching and learning, but supported its use as an LOLT for the following reasons. It was an international language, it had currency in the workplace, it boosted learner confidence and the teachers' English proficiency skills, and schools trained pupils to become better citizens through the use of English as an LOLT. Learners with limited proficiency in English should be given the necessary support.
- Teacher B believed that LOLT should be determined by context and that urban desegregated schools should use English as an LOLT since learners in such schools understood English because of their background.
- Although Teacher B viewed multilingualism as a challenge, if he were to teach in a different environment, he would code-switch. Because the assessment policy influenced teachers to conduct classroom-based assessments in English, he would conduct assessments in English.

On the basis of the findings stated above, this study concluded that school context, teacher and learner profiles should be major determinants of school language policies in a multilingual country such as South Africa. These findings also suggest that it would be an educationally sound

decision to use local languages as fully-fledged media of instruction in the school system in order to facilitate learning, particularly in contexts in which the student profile was homogenous in terms of home language.

5.3. Deductions

Sutton and Levinson (2001:3) describe policy as both “practice” and “appropriation” and conceptualise appropriation as “a kind of taking of policy and making it one’s own.” The current multilingual LIE policy, which serves as a blueprint for schools to develop policies which take into account their own unique circumstances, is viewed by some scholars as a progressive policy since it is based on additive bilingualism (Heugh, 2000). Criticism of the policy has been directed at the manner in which it has been conceptualised and implemented (Alexander, 1989; Makalela, 2005).

The focus of this research was to uncover how high school teachers exercised their agency with respect to LIE policy in practice, which aspects of the policy they were implementing, which ones they were not implementing, and the reasons behind their language choices. I wanted to explore and understand how policy translated into practice, from the teachers’ perspectives. As curriculum implementers who use languages for a variety of purposes in the classroom, they gave valuable insights on the challenges of LIE policy implementation in a post-colonial/apartheid context. It appears that effective policy implementation is largely dependent on getting buy-in from the implementers of policy or raising their awareness about the intent of the policy prior to implementation. The provision of resources (e.g. textbooks and translation services) is important in ensuring that LIE policies are effectively implemented. Policy coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and support provided at classroom level would ensure successful implementation of the policy.

It was also my intention to understand constraints to effective LIE policy implementation, and ways in which these could be countered or eliminated for the benefit of both the teacher and the learner. The significance of the research lies in the fact that it underscores the importance of using languages for teaching and learning which are familiar to the pupils. Valuable lessons on LIE policy implementation can be gleaned from consolidated small-scale research findings in post-colonial states, including South Africa. These could help other African countries benchmark their

practices against those of their counterparts in order to improve the quality of their education and meet their development needs. This study has demonstrated that classroom-based research contributes to an in-depth understanding of LIE policy, showing how LIE policy plays itself out in practice, its effects on the people whose lives it is supposed to change for the better, its unintended consequences, and how those who must implement it can re-shape it through their actions.

5.4. Conclusions from the Findings

The research project was aimed at finding possible answers to three issues: teacher understanding and interpretation of LIE policy, implementation of the policy in urban and rural schools, and reasons/motivation for implementing LIE policy in the manner that the teachers did.

The following conclusions were drawn from the study findings:

1. Policy implementation is context-bound. The fact that LIE policy is unevenly implemented in both rural and urban contexts calls for a more flexible approach to LIE policy implementation in both urban and rural contexts, with contextual factors such as school situation, learner and teacher profiles being major considerations. For example, the development of teaching-learning materials should take into account the languages spoken in the wider community.
2. Curriculum development teams at school level should focus on language and its impact on school achievement. This would create a platform for teachers in similar contexts to share teaching-learning materials and experiences and learn from one another. On-going professional development of teachers that focuses on integrating research, learning theories, language learning and teaching methods, would enhance curriculum delivery and expand the learners' ZPD.
3. English was identified a barrier to learning in both urban and rural schools. This is a widespread crisis in contexts where English is an LOLT and will not be solved by "teaching more English". Using languages that learners are familiar with alongside English, which would be offered as a subject, would be a more practical solution to the language question during the twelve years of schooling. Literacy is at the heart of each learner's academic success. Teachers and pupils need on-going language support

programmes (in their MT and in a second language) that are based on identified language needs regarding teaching and learning in each school or district.

4. Using a foreign language as an LOLT stifles the development of proficiency, adaptability and creative qualifications, thus compromising the quality of education provided to the majority of black learners who are mainly taught in code-switching and code-mixing mode.
5. In order to ensure the successful implementation of LIE policy, support at operational level is of the utmost importance. For example, multilingual materials could be developed and shared across provinces.

5.5 General Recommendations

The following are general recommendations which flow from the findings and conclusions discussed above:

1. Teacher training should focus on use of languages for learning across the curriculum.
2. Learners should be allowed to answer examination questions in the language of their choice and should not be penalized for doing so. This recommendation is made in the light of the fact that teaching in most L2 classrooms is accomplished through code-alternation (code-switching, code-mixing, translation, etc).
3. Initial professional teacher training should focus on language education modules, particularly in the training of Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers (e.g. multilingualism in education, using the LI and English as LOLT, and language across the curriculum).
4. Language consciousness-raising, especially during pre-service training of teachers, irrespective of area of specialization, would be one way of changing or influencing language attitudes.
5. There is an acute shortage of GET Band (Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phase) teachers in South Africa who speak indigenous languages and can write teaching-learning

- materials in indigenous languages. To ensure that additive bilingualism is realized in the school system, the Ministry of Education should prioritize the pre-service and in-service training of primary school teachers who speak local languages. These teachers would also be actively involved in producing teaching-learning resources in indigenous languages.
6. Research could bridge the gap between policy and practice, and for this reason, teacher training programmes should have a strong research component; current ground-breaking research on language issues could be integrated into teacher training programmes, irrespective of field of study.
 7. A mismatch between the teachers' and learners' home languages, particularly in rural schools, should be avoided at all costs. Teacher placement policies that take into account teachers' and learners' LI would give the teacher an opportunity to tap into the learners' home languages and make the curriculum accessible. The use of indigenous languages in the school system would enable teachers to act out their many roles as mentors, facilitators, assessors, curriculum implementers, and counsellors efficiently, thus making it possible for learners to experience an enriching academic environment.
 8. A centralized teacher deployment policy would be preferable to ensure that languages other than English and Afrikaans were employed, and that teachers could make use of the valuable strategy of code-switching when necessary without experiencing guilt feelings. In multilingual urban contexts, the strategy of code-switching could be employed with caution because of the learners' profiles; for example, to stimulate classroom interaction, learners who spoke the same LI could be grouped together and the reporting done in English only.

5.6. Recommendations for Further Research

Emergent research on LIE policy implementation could focus on the following themes:

1. Longitudinal studies on the effects of using more than one language for teaching various subjects in the school system, or facilitating learning in multilingual/multicultural classrooms.

2. Innovative teaching strategies that promote a deep learning/active approach to learning, and how these can be employed to enhance learning through languages that are familiar to teachers and learners.
3. LIE policies for monolingual and multilingual/multicultural classrooms.
4. Code-switching in multilingual contexts.

1.7 Contribution to Expansion of Knowledge

The major limitation of this study is that its findings cannot be generalized to other contexts because of the sampling strategy and research design chosen. Lessons drawn from the study may only be applied to contexts that are similar to the one in which the study took place.

The findings and recommendations of this study should be made available to education policy makers, teachers, and language research agencies and considered in relation to the context and other factors. They should be acted upon where possible in order to improve learner success and retention in the school system.

The study has made an important contribution to the expansion of knowledge on the topic. It has uncovered that English, which has been uncritically accepted by many teachers as a language of prosperity in South Africa, is a barrier to learning in both rural and urban contexts and that teacher characteristics and contextual factors can either lead to the successful implementation of the policy or thwart its intended effects.

The study has also demonstrated that the LI is a valuable and readily available resource which promotes cognitive understanding. Alignment between teaching and assessment can be achieved by adopting a flexible approach to assessment in contexts where teaching has been in code-switching mode. For example, learners could be allowed to answer questions in the languages in which they are proficient, i.e. the languages that were used during lesson delivery. Assessment-based inferences drawn by teachers from learner performance would be more valid than currently is the case in L2 contexts.

The third important contribution that the study makes is that context in policy implementation is of utmost importance as it influences and directs classroom practice. However, variations with respect to classroom practice are possible even within similar contexts because of school contextual factors, teacher and learner profiles.

Fourthly, a lack of knowledge about the history of language planning in South Africa leads to misconceptions and negative attitudes or intolerance towards other languages and this in turn influences teachers' language practices.

Fifthly, the hegemonic status of English in post-colonial states remains unchallenged. However, in rural and township schools in South Africa, the reality is that LI is used extensively to promote understanding of content, an indication that context shapes policy and that African languages can be used as LOLT.

Sixthly, successful LIE policy implementation is largely dependent on coordination at the different levels of the education system.

Seventhly, implementing multilingualism in diverse linguistic backgrounds is a challenge, and teachers would need professional development on how to deal with linguistic diversity, particularly in urban contexts. The study has demonstrated that pedagogic expertise influences language use.

Lastly, teachers' voices are unheard in the language of instruction debate, particularly now that there is a policy which guarantees that learners must be taught in the language of their choice. This study offers a window through which policy makers can make sense of the challenges that teachers experience first-hand when they offer tuition in an L2 and/or use the LI partially as a MOI.

5.9 How the Triangulated Model of Enquiry can be Replicated

Although the triangulated model of inquiry has been strongly criticized because it is based on the positivist notion that a multiple data source is superior to a single data source (Silverman, 1985 in

Cohen et al., 2007 p.143), does not ensure consistency or replication (Patton, 1980 in Cohen et al 2007 p.144), does not bring objectivity to the study, reduce bias or increase validity (Fielding & Fielding, 1986 in Cohen et al., 2007 p 144), this study can be replicated through methodological and theoretical triangulation. Different methods are used in methodological triangulation to study the same object (Cohen, 2007). A survey, classroom observations and focused interviews were employed in this study. A different set of methods, such as focus group discussions, different types of surveys (confirmatory, exploratory, descriptive, and analytical), interviews and case studies, in whatever combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques, could be used to replicate the study. The study could be replicated by using theories other than the ones used in the present study to answer the research questions.

The between-methods triangulation, i.e. using more than one method to unravel a research puzzle, is strong on concurrent validity. Using video-recordings for classroom observations would strengthen internal validity because they capture accurately what goes on in classrooms. External validity could be improved by drawing representative samples in a quantitative design such as a survey. In the qualitative aspect of the design, the focus would not be on the representativeness of the sample, but on comparability and transferability or applicability of the findings to other situations. To ensure content validity in both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the design, the researcher would have to ensure that items or questions were sampled carefully. Constructs such as “sense-making” and “language policy implementation” would have to be articulated carefully to ensure that construct validity was not compromised. Within criterion-related validity there are two forms of validity: predictive and concurrent validity. The former refers to a situation in which the first round of research correlates highly with data acquired at a later date, while the latter refers to correlation between data acquired through two different instruments. Criterion-related validity could be guaranteed by making sure that the instruments used addressed the same issue.

The advantages of triangulation are that it avoids “methodological parochialism or ethnocentrism” (Smith, 1975 in Cohen et al., 2007 p.143) and avoids problems associated with “method-boundedness” (Gorard & Taylor 2004 in Cohen et al., 2007 p.142). Triangulation gives the

researcher more confidence about his/her findings when contrasting methods of data collection have been employed (Cohen et al., 2007).

5.9. Conclusion

This study presented teachers' perspectives on the language question in post-apartheid South Africa. It highlighted how South Africa's colonial history and apartheid contributed to the promotion of English and the devaluing of African languages, despite their extensive use in rural and urban contexts to make content accessible to learners. The study also brought to the fore the far-reaching consequences of using an L2 as an LOLT, viz. constrained classroom interaction, lack of proficiency and creative qualifications, passive learners, and learners' inability to use English as a communication tool to promote understanding and construct new knowledge.

The tension that exists between English and African languages in post-colonial countries will remain unresolved for a very long time in African education, if language policy architects, parents and influential others in these countries turn a blind eye to the negative and limiting effects of English linguistic imperialism on African countries. English, which is only one of the many languages in South Africa, is spoken by only 8,2% of the population (Makalela, 2005:155). Indigenous languages, which are spoken by the majority of the South African population, must be positioned, promoted and used for various purposes by those for whom they are first/home languages. This was possible with Afrikaans and history can only repeat itself if present-day African governments commit resources to the promotion of these languages.

Post-colonial democracies are faced with massive development challenges and a sound education system is one of the strategies that could be used to address development issues. It is for this reason that they must by all means avoid sentencing the majority of African learners to a life of under-achievement, failure and mediocrity by educating them mainly in an L2. The challenge for the South African government is to turn the tide of under-achievement in black education by educating learners in languages in which teachers and learners are proficient. The spin-offs would be improved classroom interaction and achievement levels, with learners going through similar academic experiences, improved proficiency, adaptability and creative qualifications in the home language and the L2, and teachers and learners enjoying the teaching-learning experience.