

EDITORIAL: TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH LANGUAGES

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‘Language and literacy are fundamental to learning across the curriculum.’ It is necessary for the young child to understand the language of learning and teaching in order for the lessons to have meaning and to enable the child to participate in them (Janks 2014: 11).

The acceleration of globalisation in recent years has evidently resulted in migration as people seek job opportunities in countries with stable economies. As a result, children from diverse cultures and languages need to be accommodated in schools where the classes have become more diverse, and thus the language of learning and teaching may be learners’ second or third language. Hence, the learners are expected to cope with the language of learning and teaching as well as the sociocultural factors which impact the teaching and learning of the curriculum.

One of the listed outputs in the memorandum of understanding for a collaborative research project between Unisa and the Zhejiang International Studies University, Hangzhou, China, was to arrange a conference in July 2018. The title of the conference was: *1st International Conference on Teaching and Learning Through Languages in the 21st Century*. This special issue was arranged to include articles presented at the conference as well as relevant articles from outside contributors. The five articles potentially contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of education in different contexts, with particular emphasis on the role of languages in the education of learners. The articles cover a range of topics, as follows:

The article titled *A comparative study on teaching and learning Chinese characters by primary school non-native Chinese learners in South Africa and China*, authored by Nel, Krog and Lebeloane, resulted from the collaborative research project mentioned above. With Mandarin being introduced as a second additional language in South African schools and China having to cater for non-native Chinese learners in some schools, this afforded ideal grounds to conduct comparative research. The emphasis was on identifying common factors in the teaching and learning of Chinese characters in an effort to incorporate them and to arrive at an eclectic approach.

In the wake of South Africa’s history of inequality and its adverse effects on the diverse population, children from underserved communities still have little access and support to language and literacy development. Hence, Carolus and Moonsamy postulate that early intervention and support will improve children’s literacy acquisition and scholastic progress. In their article titled *Emergent literacy and language support for ECD children from underserved communities in Gauteng, South Africa: a collaborative approach*, they propose a collaborative approach (with speech-language therapists) regarding intervention and support of learners’ literacy language and literacy skills (emergent literacy) in early childhood development centres, as well as these students’ parents and teachers.

In the article titled *Reading comprehension skills of standard four pupils: a comparison of private and public schools in Botswana*, by determining the reading comprehension of

standard 4 pupils in public and private schools in urban and rural settings in Botswana, Lethsholo found that private school pupils performed better, urban private school pupils could extract information and make inferences better, and rural private school pupils could interpret information better. The implication is that the learning environment in public schools needs to be enhanced, that a strong critical analytical reasoning foundation be set, and that reasonable class sizes be maintained.

Although learners should be learning in their first language, English second language (ESL) secondary school learners in Zimbabwe learn in their second language. In order to make content comprehensible and achieve academically, teachers are expected to capacitate ESL learners to acquire cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Where teachers are not capable in developing CALP skills in ESL learners, these learners will not be able to develop discourse patterns in content area disciplines, in this case geography teaching and learning in the ESL classroom. In their study titled *Difficulties in geography teaching and learning in the ESL classroom in Zimbabwe*, the authors found inadequate teacher preparation, inadequate accommodation of ESL learners' language needs and lack of skills to use instructional media to develop CALP. It is recommended that teachers need pre- and in-service training to develop CALP in content area instruction for ESL learners.

Pfeiffer and Van der Walt were propelled to conduct a longitudinal study (with pre-service teachers at Stellenbosch University) on the challenges that designers of academic literacy programmes for culturally and linguistically diverse students (pre-service teachers) are faced with. In their article titled *Ethno-linguistically diverse South African students' writing*, the importance of good writing and ways of translanguaging as a way to assist multilingual students are emphasised, taking into consideration their second language background and the mental structures of students' home language.

All in all, the articles in this special issue reflect the importance of the role language plays in education in different countries, ranging from teaching Mandarin as a foreign language in South Africa and China, to the acquisition of literacy and support in ECD centres in South Africa, to reading comprehension in standard 4 pupils in public and private schools in Botswana, to the teaching and learning of geography by ESL learners in secondary schools in Zimbabwe, to diverse cultural and linguistic university students' challenges regarding good writing skills at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. The contributions these authors have made are a call for continued research in the different areas of language teaching and learning in the education fraternity throughout the world.

REFERENCES

JANKS, H. 2014. Globalisation, diversity, and education: a South African perspective. *The Educational Forum*, 78:8-25.