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TOWNSHIP EFAL TEACHERS AND THE SPEAKING SKILLS: THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THE ESPOUSED AND THE ENACTED

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ABSTRACT

This article examines, through the prism of the sociocultural theory's concept of mediation, the discrepancy between what South African township English Second Language teachers claim they do in their classes and what they actually do when teaching speaking skills. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and a case study design, underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm. Eight (8) EFAL teachers were drawn from two (2) township high schools that were randomly selected from two (2) separate districts. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and semi-structured lesson observations. The semi-structured interviews facilitated the participants' introspection from a professional perspective with a view to both questioning and ratifying the teachers' personal views, beliefs and the philosophical underpinnings of their professional practice regarding speaking skills. The thematic approach by Lacey and Luff (2009) was used for data analysis. The study found four major problems that influenced the process of teaching speaking skills: (1) a lack of actual learner speaking, (2) teachers' misconceptions of what a speaking lesson should entail, (3) speaking for the sake of not keeping quiet and (4) ignorance of curriculum requirements. The study found that despite township EFAL teachers claiming to develop speaking skills in line with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, their lessons indicate differently. This could be explained by the crisis currently facing the South African education system, with poor quality teachers and low levels of teacher effort often cited as major drivers thereof.

KEYWORDS: Speaking skills, proficiency, township, espoused and enacted, English First Additional Language

INTRODUCTION

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS; DBE, 2011) aims to guide teachers of English as a First Additional Language (EFAL) to help learners master English and use it proficiently to access and manage information for learning across the curriculum. In South Africa, the first additional language is the language learnt in addition to a learner's home language. EFAL learners need to be able to use English as a means of critical and creative thinking and for expressing their opinions. This article reports the findings of a study examining the discrepancy between what South African township EFAL teachers claim about their pedagogical choices and their classroom practices.

In South Africa, the term *township* is commonly used to refer to the disadvantaged urban residential areas that were reserved for the black African, Indian and coloured working classes

during the Apartheid era. These areas are underdeveloped and poor compared to the urban living areas that used to be reserved for white people under the apartheid regime. Even though official, deliberate racial segregation ended with the end of Apartheid in 1994, townships are still home to many of the black African, Indian and coloured working classes. Whereas there are townships for the three races mentioned above, these townships are no longer segregated. However, conditions within them are not comparable since they were intentionally designed to maintain the racial hierarchy determined by the Apartheid system, whereby the black African race was ranked last and, therefore, had to be the poorest and least resourced. This study focused on EFAL teaching in schools located in black African townships, all the teachers and learners who participated in the study were black Africans from those townships. All participants were home language speakers of the indigenous African language that was dominant in the townships where their schools were located. Henceforth, the term township will be used to denote black African townships.

According to Thobejane (2018), township schools are public schools that were built in shanty towns or human settlement areas designated for underprivileged non-white South Africans, mainly by the former Apartheid government of South Africa. Huchzermeyer (2011) avers that during the Apartheid era, black South African schools were segregated by race and were systematically underfunded and underresourced. To date, most black African township schools remain under resourced, underfunded, lacking infrastructure and overcrowded (Mojapelo, 2016). Hence, the context of this study is the perception that township EFAL South African educators lack the requisite training, knowledge, tools or time to support EFAL learners with limited English proficiency levels and that such educators are therefore incompetent (Nel & Theron, 2008; Nel & Muller, 2010; Mkhize & Balfour, 2017). In township schools, EFAL lessons are very often conducted in an African language due to the poor English proficiency of both EFAL learners and their teachers (Nel & Muller, 2010). Despite this pedagogical weakness being widely acknowledged in the literature, the CAPS focuses almost exclusively on the content to be learnt, completely neglecting teaching methods. Thus, according to the National Report of the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU; 2012) and Hofmeyer (2015), teachers fail to ensure high-quality education for learners because they either simply refuse to or are unable to do so.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of which the central construct is mediation (Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2014). Sociocultural theory is concerned with human activity and behaviour as well as how individual, social and contextual issues influence and underpin learning (Marginson & Dang, 2017). According to Vygotsky (1978), the social origins of knowledge construction lie in communication with others. Swain, Kinnear and Steinman (2015) contend that sociocultural theory locates an individual within the culture of their locale. This includes how an individual has to function socially and culturally within their group and locale. The relevance of sociocultural theory for this study resides in its articulation

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of the need for mediation, which refers to assisted performance (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). Thus, formal education provides for teacher-assisted or mediated learning.

Sociocultural theory is closely related to the communicative language teaching approach, which is advocated by the CAPS. Therefore, teacher-mediated EFAL learning should enable learners to develop sufficient speaking skills to function independently in real-life situations (Hamamorad, 2016: 64). According to Karpov and Haywood (1998:27), Vygotsky postulated two types of mediation: metacognitive mediation and cognitive mediation. The roots of both types are in interpersonal communication. Thus, mediation is about the more knowledgeable other (MKO), in the form of a parent or teacher, helping those less knowledgeable with learning. It emphasises preparing second language learners, akin to the communicative language teaching approach (CLT), to exploit and manipulate the target language with respect to their communicative needs and in different communicative functions and contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980:29). One of the key features of CLT is its emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language (Nunan, 1991). The concept of mediation and CLT both form the basis upon which teaching speaking skills in English as a second language in township schools could be premised.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Espoused and enacted pedagogical practices

There is no shortage of literature contending that what people say is seldom an accurate predictor of what they do (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014a:178–209) and that the espousal of knowledge and intentions does not always translate into practice (Rusch, 2004:42). Many studies that adopted sociocultural perspectives have found that teachers of EFAL should recognise the knowledge, skills, cultural heritage and preconceptions that their learners bring to the EFAL classroom (Lantolf, 2001; Thorne, 2001, 2004, 2005; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Some studies have urged teachers to develop pedagogical practices of which the focus would be the exploration of the relationship between their learners' cognitive development and the social, cultural and historical contexts in which they learn (Engestrom, 2014). For instance, Ajayi (2015) found that sociocultural views alert teachers to the need to consider their learners' background experiences when choosing pedagogical approaches and materials. However, EFAL teachers "work within multiple and seemingly contradictory pedagogical traditions" (Bickmore, Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 2005:23) and authorities enact language teaching policy for teachers "within taken-for-granted frameworks of expectations, attitudes, values, and beliefs about what constitutes good learning, about how to teach and learn" (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005: 99). Accordingly, a mismatch between professed beliefs about language teaching and learning and actual classroom practice is not unique to Africa (Weideman, 2002:6). Indeed, there is often a discrepancy between intended goals and actual actions (Ajzen, Brown & Carvajal, 2004; Jerolmack & Khan, 2014b).

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Teacher cognition

The term 'teacher cognition' is used here to refer to "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think" (Borg, 2003: 81) about teaching speaking skills. Therefore, understanding teacher cognition is central to the process of understanding teaching (Borg, 2015:10). It follows that if African township EFAL teachers have not been well-taught themselves (DeKeyser, 2009; Nel & Muller, 2010), they may not develop adequate teacher cognition. Teacher cognition consists of dynamic permeable mental structures susceptible to change, depending on experience (Borg, 2003:88). According to Lortie (1975), the default teaching model is the apprenticeship of observation or teaching the same way one had been taught. However, research has shown that teachers' professional identities are influenced by a variety of factors including their knowledge of the subject matter, context (social, cultural, economic and political), family influences and the knowledge that they would have developed over time about how to teach particular topics (i.e., pedagogical content knowledge) (Shulman 1986; Beijaard & Meijer, 2017).

Classroom practice

EFAL teachers hold a wide range of beliefs about teaching and learning (Kuzborska, 2011; Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Lucas, Villegas & Martin, 2015). Classroom practice (what teachers do in the classroom) is said to be governed by what teachers believe. These beliefs often act as a filter through which pedagogical judgements and decisions are made (Farrel & Lim, 2005:2). They influence how teachers mediate the interface between learner, teacher and subject matter in a classroom context (Chen & Goh, 2011, Farrel & Ives, 2015).

Whereas speaking is widely seen as the most difficult skill for EFAL learners (Alonso 2014; Al-Hosni, 2014, Alharbi 2015; Ying, Siang & Mohamad, 2021), language teachers in South Africa are mandated by policy to embrace CLT, which generally targets learners' communicative competence (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014). What this presupposes is that learners have to be taught according to the four-component communicative competence framework as outlined by Canale and Swain (1980): strategic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and grammatical competence.

CLT ascribes various roles such as facilitation, resource organisation, guidance, motivation and counselling to the teacher (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:85). However, many teachers misconstrue these roles. For instance, some teachers believe that the mere act of speaking—even in the learners' mother tongue—is indicative of the success of a learning activity, while others prioritise the execution of the communicative task over linguistic accuracy (Dewi, Kultsum & Armadi, 2017:64). It becomes difficult to appreciate learners' ability to execute a communicative task if their tasks lack linguistic correctness. Savignon (2018:5) contends that conceptualisations of CLT should look beyond face-to-face oral communication since the

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communicative principles that apply in face-to-face oral communication also apply to other communication modes. For instance, in reading and writing, readers and writers co-construct meaning through interpretation and expression activities that together, make up the process of negotiating meaning in that mode. Savignon (2018:6) further argues that teaching for communication and metalinguistic awareness, which is knowledge of the rules of syntax, discourse and social appropriateness, are not mutually exclusive. Thus, Savignon (2018:5) emphasises that ultimately, the goals of communicative EFAL learning depend on learner needs in a given context.

METHODOLOGY

A Qualitative case study

This study took the form of a bounded qualitative case study with sociocultural underpinnings, using the interpretivist paradigm. This case study has clear boundaries of place and time, which is a defining characteristic of case studies (Schoch, 2020:247). Qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings and interpret them in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Erickson, 2011:43). Interpretivism considers differences like culture and various other circumstances such as location in time, all of which lead to the development of different social realities (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020:41) and are all crucial aspects of what this study sought to explore. According to Gray (2004:369), the case study method is most appropriate when a 'how' or 'why' question is being raised about a current set of events over which the researcher has no control. Thus, a case study design was appropriate since the present study explores the inconsistency between what township EFAL teachers claim they do in their classes and what they actually do when teaching speaking skills, a phenomenon over which the researcher has no control.

Sampling

Eight (8) Grade 11 EFAL teachers—four (4) per school—were purposively selected from two (2) township high schools that had been randomly selected in two (2) districts of the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. Each teacher taught a separate class. All the teachers were university graduates with various qualifications in EFAL teaching. All eight (8) teachers were IsiZulu mother-tongue speakers and had EFAL teaching experience ranging from four to 17 years. Two (2) teachers had taught EFAL for four (4) years, three (3) had 10, 11 and 12 years of experience, respectively, while the remainder had 15 to 17 years of experience. Their ages ranged from 27–51 years.

Data Generation

Data were gathered through semi-structured individual interviews and semi-structured lesson observations. Observations and interviews are highly effective data generation methods for

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studies that explore the qualities or essence of lived experiences. Each of the eight (8) Grade 11 classes was observed twice over two (2) school terms. The researcher was not a participant observer. Field notes were also taken supplemental to the demands of the observation schedule. Data from observations were later compared with data from the interviews. Pseudonyms were used and school names were not disclosed (to ensure participant anonymity) and participants were assured that data would only be made available to the researcher (Louw, 2014; Hancock, & Algozzine, 2015), thus encouraging participant honesty and reliability. To avoid data distortion, interviews were audio-recorded and lesson observations were video-recorded, then transcribed and analysed. To avoid disrupting lessons, the teacher interviews were conducted during the lunch hour, after school or on weekends.

In-depth semi-structured observation with an agenda of issues on which to focus helped to illuminate the issues, events, behaviour, settings and routines in a way that was neither predetermined nor systematic (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017: 102). Being observed allowed participants to practise introspection from a professional perspective, with a view to both questioning and ratifying their personal beliefs, practices and philosophical underpinnings—thereby eliciting authenticity (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003:109). For the interviews, a few predetermined open-ended questions were used to ensure that all respondents were given the same questions, thereby enhancing the comparability of responses and ensuring that the data were complete for each respondent (Cohen et al., 2017:364). Follow-up questions were then derived from each participant's responses. For ethical considerations, confidentiality, trustworthiness and transparency, participants were informed that they had the right to decide whether or not to participate in this study and that declining to participate or withdrawing from the study would not affect them in any way.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interview transcripts were read to identify major themes, which were then clustered into categories and easily retrievable sections (Lacey & Luff, 2009). The observation data together with the field notes collected during observation were then read and matched to similar data from the interviews. Next, the coded data were provisionally categorised around a particular emergent theme in line with Aizawa and Rose's (2019) concept of an inductive meaning-making process. Iterative re-coding that was based on, among others, sociocultural precepts such as mediation and the general principles of CLT resulted in better-defined categories and well-defined themes. By following coding patterns, the researcher identified areas of commonality in the data.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This study sought to answer the following question: To what extent do ideas espoused by township EFAL teachers about speaking skills align with their classroom practices? Interviews elicited strategies teachers believed they used in teaching speaking. According to Ur

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(1996:120), there are four characteristics of a successful speaking activity. First, learners should talk a lot; this means that the learners and not the teacher should do most of the talking. Second, participation is even; classroom discussion should not be dominated by a few talkative learners. Third, motivation is high; the discussion topic should be interesting, to get all learners involved in the discussion. Finally, language is of an acceptable level; learners use the type of language that is relevant, easily comprehensible and at an acceptable level of language accuracy. In the ensuing discussion, it emerged that these characteristics were seldom a part of the lessons observed. Based on the interviews and observations, four (4) challenges that undermined speaking lessons emerged: a lack of speaking in a speaking lesson, misconceptions about how to teach speaking, speaking just to avoid silence and ignorance of curriculum requirements.

Each teacher's main response in the interview about their teaching of speaking skills was juxtaposed with the teacher's subsequent observed classroom practice. Sometimes several challenges manifested themselves in a lesson. Although participants were explicitly requested to teach speaking skills, their lessons covered non-related topics such as grammar, advertisements or writing. Their understanding of a speaking lesson, therefore, appeared contrary to the CAPS EFAL FET (2011: 21) view:

> Speaking instruction needs to recognise a wide range of informal and formal speaking situations, from casual conversation to formal researched debate and presentation. Speaking clearly, fluently, coherently, confidently and appropriately should be the aim of teaching speaking.

Observed lessons showed no evidence of mediation or assisted performance (Vygotsky, 1978) because the teachers failed to focus on specific speaking skills as outlined in the CAPS. Unless appropriate intervention is offered, it is highly unlikely that future speaking lessons would be appropriately mediated by these teachers. Although the interview responses reflected the teachers' appreciation of the need to teach speaking skills, their ignorance of the individual speaking skills and the relevant pedagogy to mediate them was conspicuous in their classroom practices. Township EFAL teachers must understand that learners need to learn how to speak accurately and appropriately in order to become proficient.

In the classes where learners were involved in some speaking, only a few actively contributed to the discussion due to various factors, including the teachers' cognition. The cognitive dimension of teaching refers to what teachers know, believe and think (Borg, 2003:81). This dimension eventually influences their instructional practices which generally derive from, are filtered by and cannot be separated from teachers' beliefs (Özdemir, 2019). Therefore, the observed lessons manifested teachers' calibre of instructional practice as it was influenced by cognition. According to sociocultural theory, an individual should reconcile with the culture of their locale (Thorne, 2005). This speaks to an individual's active participation within their group. In the context of these classes, the learners were the aforesaid individuals. They were

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supposed to have been inducted by their teachers into a culture of active participation within their group. Thus, the teacher, as the more knowledgeable other (MKO) (Vygotsky, 1978), should have mediated learner participation. This was not done in these EFAL lessons.

Teachers' misconceptions of the requirements of a speaking lesson led to lessons that were devoid of sensible speaking tasks as outlined in the CAPS. The general assumption among the participants seemed to be that speaking lessons are opportunities for learners to merely speak. This led to many instances where learners spoke for the sake of speaking. Hence, many learners might be speaking a lot in EFAL classes without necessarily improving their proficiency in spoken English. Overall, these lessons should have helped learners view language as social practice and an integrated way of seeing, understanding and communicating about the world (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009) yet did not reach that objective.

A detailed interpretation of the findings organised in terms of the four challenges identified above is now presented.

Lack of speaking in a speaking lesson (Mrs Gamedze and Ms Fakude)

Six (6) of the teachers provided apt examples of lessons in which learners were silent. In addition to the fact that their understanding of a speaking lesson was flawed, their lessons also demonstrated that they seemed to lack the pedagogical content knowledge regarding 'what' and 'how' to teach. Instead of aspects of speaking, the teachers taught poetry, advertisements, writing, grammar, listening or reading, respectively. Much as the teaching of speaking skills does not necessarily have to be formal all the time, one would expect a dedicated speaking lesson of special forms to be given focused instruction. To a great extent, formal and informal speaking can be integrated with reading, writing and language practice, and speaking may even give written text an oral form. No instructions focusing on speaking skills were given in these lessons.

A language classroom is the milieu within which the teacher's knowledge finds expression in their pedagogical practice but the lessons observed completely contradicted these teachers' proclaimed understanding and knowledge. For instance, while Mrs Gamedze claimed she used *"activities such as debates, dialogue, conversations … panel discussion, talk shows and quiz … and then … when we do poetry or literature … short stories, they discuss in groups …"*, this was not realised in any of her two (2) lessons that were observed for this study. In both lessons, learners only spoke because they had to answer her questions, not because they were being introduced to a focused speaking skill, as one would expect in a dedicated speaking lesson. In a speaking class, teachers are required to create communicative and interactive activities by giving learners opportunities to practise the target language (Achmad &Yusuf, 2014). Consequently, mediation of the speaking skills, as conceived by Vygotsky (1978), was either compromised or completely non-existent since learners were not assisted in mastering a particular speaking skill. There was no mediated speaking performance. Furthermore, despite

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the fact that learners' participation could be affected by several factors emanating from factors around the teachers, learners and others like the classroom environment, types and contents of activities (Le, 2019), the six (6) lessons discussed here were simply not adequately planned for the teaching of speaking skills.

During the interview, Ms Fakude initially appeared to understand the concept of group work, only to show confusion when she later said that, after group discussion, the learners "*are going to give me feedback … Each person from the group is going to give me feedback on what their findings, their understanding of the short story or poem was all about. It's a group feedback … they give feedback individually in a group*". Given that group work entails learners collaboratively finding a solution to a common challenge, it makes sense that feedback is given by an individual on behalf of the group. When individual members of a group are made to give individual feedback, it defeats the purpose of the collaborative nature of group work. Moreover, in her poetry lesson, Ms Fakude remained the sole provider of information, learners were not allowed to share their thoughts. There was no speaking among learners nor was there any discussion between the teacher and learners. As Le (2019: 84) notes:

Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary (linguistic competence), but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language (sociolinguistic competence). (Le, 2019: 84)

Since Ms Fakude did not act according to what she had initially professed during the interview, it could only reflect her cognition, which underlies her instructional practice (August & Calderon, 2006). Nevertheless, it is not clear why Ms Fakude did not teach speaking skills in the observed lesson. Udu (2017: 59) states that difficult topics in English are often taught carelessly or simply shunned by teachers and consequently, "the learner is denied cognitive knowledge of the richness of the content of the subject in question".

Misconceptions about how to teach speaking (Mrs Mthethwa and Ms Ngcobo)

The two (2) teachers' discussion epitomised the above-mentioned phenomenon. Mrs Mthethwa's assertion that *"we get learners involved in … ehm … like ehm … they are given activities like speeches, both prepared and unprepared speeches*" suggests that she knows some of the curriculum requirements for speaking skills. However, her theoretical knowledge and intentions did not translate into adequate classroom practice. Ajzen, Brown and Carvajal (2004:1108) note that there is often a discrepancy between intentions and actions. According to the CAPS (2011), the teaching of speaking skills must take cognisance of the relevant features and conventions of oral communication texts. Some purposes of speaking activities outlined by the CAPS are to present a speech without preparing beforehand, to arrange logic promptly and to employ speech techniques at short notice. Mrs Mthethwa's lesson militated against the realisation of any of the above-listed purposes. No apparent speaking or speech techniques were foregrounded in this lesson. Learners were only given a topic on teenage

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pregnancy to discuss in groups and were then left on their own without the teacher even checking if they were using the target language. From a sociocultural perspective, a language learner learns to speak by taking discourses from "other people's mouths" and "other people's intentions" (Bakhtin, 1981:294) "and later tries out these discourses as appropriate" (Liu, 2011:81). When learners are not listening to one another and the teacher's role is limited to controlling noise levels (as was the case in this lesson) very little learning, if any, ever takes place. Speaking requires a classroom environment where learners can practise speaking the target language freely, where all learners are involved in healthy discussions and work is done through cooperation and mutual understanding (Qamar, 2016:293).

Ms Ngcobo's lesson on advertisements was anything but a speaking lesson. Very few learners were allowed to present their ideas as it became clear that well-spoken learners had been handpicked and prepared in advance for this lesson. In addition, both the learners and the teacher frequently used isiZulu. This contradicted Ms Ngcobo's claim in her interview that "*you find that learners will sometimes say to you … 'I can't … can I say it in isiZulu?' … and my learners know it's not allowed … you can't … it just cannot … please say it in English I'll help you"*. According to Al Hosni (2014) and Alharbi (2015), teachers should provide learners with authentic language in context. It would seem that in this lesson, deep-lying personal pedagogical beliefs about code-switching as a teaching strategy prevailed over learnt pedagogical theory (Inbar-Lourie, 2010). Fundamentally, teachers' beliefs play an important role in any approaches that teachers integrate and any innovation they bring to their daily teaching (Uddin, 2014).

Speaking just to avoid silence (Mr Thabethe and Mrs Ngoza)

Speaking skills should be targeted explicitly in EFAL classrooms since "simply doing speaking activities is not the same as learning the knowledge, skills and strategies of speaking" (Burns, 2012: 166). However, some teachers understood the speaking lesson to mostly entail allowing learners to turn every question or comment into a debate with no clear focus on developing a specific speaking skill. For instance, Mr Thabethe argued that "*although some will be shy but then they get to be saying something in the informal discussions or talk shows, that's when they get eh … the shy ones will get involved in one way or the other …*". His lesson had no clear speaking objective except to create space in which learners were expected to say something in English "*… and then once they say something like that you know they feel happy about that they have said something … so it's a way of encouraging them and getting everybody involved*". Admittedly, this approach could help build confidence in speaking abilities before moving on to more specific skills. However, a lesson should entail specific activities that bear some semblance to its main objectives. This lesson became chaotic as learners were simply trying to say 'something'. Learners made many linguistic errors but no attempt was made to correct them. However, Akhter (2007) argues that the teacher should evaluate how serious the error is and then take the necessary actions.

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The more proficient learners dominated discussions and there was no attempt by the teacher to create space for the less proficient ones, corroborating Tavil's (2010: 766) claim that "[a]ctive and confident students always participate, but the others who are less confident are not willing to speak". This illustrates the view that "many language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language in the target language" (Tuan & Mai, 2015: 8). Moreover, Al-Hosni (2014:24) observes that learners, particularly those with low proficiency and who rate themselves as poor English speakers become more anxious and reluctant to speak in the English class than other learners who perceive their English level as "very good, good, and OK". Most learners in this class displayed a low proficiency level.

Mrs Ngoza's lesson was similar. Lacking direction, her class became noisy as she initially let learners speak out of turn. She had earlier stated that "… *when they are doing their talk shows … it allows all of them to get into character … it allows them to speak out … even those that you know do not talk much in class, eventually you see them coming out of their shells … that's the most important thing to teach speaking … it's to allow them to speak in class*". However, many learners were not involved in the discussion. Some simply remained silent throughout the lesson while others fell asleep. Contrary to the teacher's assertion, there was no strategy to help the quiet ones speak nor was there a character for them to 'get into'. The role of a teacher in a lesson of this nature is to help learners acquire language and skills that they would not be able to learn on their own (Goh & Burns, 2012). That was not achieved in this lesson.

Ignorance of curriculum requirements (Ms Mvelase and Ms Mthwali)

Not all people understand and interpret issues the same way (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014b:236–247). Actions provide the most reliable evidence of one's understanding of a given issue or idea. Township EFAL teachers' lack of understanding of curriculum requirements as observed in this study is reflective of a common phenomenon that must be addressed if quality teaching and critical thinking are to be achieved (Berkvens, Van den Akker & Brugman, 2014). The miniature debates and arguments that take place during class discussions are not necessarily the adequate speaking activities that the CAPS envisaged. The assertions by the two teachers discussed here reveal their deeply held beliefs of what a speaking lesson should entail, which are contrary to the requirements of the curriculum.

Both teachers clearly displayed some understanding of the basic precept of the curriculum: communicative language teaching. However, the fact that EFAL lessons should be communicative does not necessarily mean that every such lesson is a speaking skills lesson. Ms Mvelase's assertion that "*they debate almost every day when they are doing corrections and … participating helps them learn more because they get to listen to different sides of the argument … I encourage all of them to speak and listen to each other… to think before you just disagree with someone*" indeed meets some of the requirements for a speaking skills lesson, yet in effect, she set out to teach a listening instead of the speaking lesson that she had been

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requested to present. According to Goh and Burns (2012:19), the role of the teacher in a speaking lesson is to structure the learning experience of the learners so as to support the development of their speaking skills. In a speaking lesson, teachers could plan activities where learners can communicate with their classmates. However, Goh and Burns (2012: 5) argue that it is not enough to simply get learners to talk "because they are unlikely to learn new skills and language if there is little linguistic and background knowledge among them on which to draw".

Ms Mthwali expressed her understanding of the CAPS expectations of EFAL teaching (in general) when she explained that "*... you mix them together ... like you make groups of seven or ten and then ... the rules of a group system or group work ... everybody has a role to play, but then we work interchangeably ... the weak learner someday is going to be a leader ... as they take turns, so that way they are encouraged ... and the peers within the group, they also help them"*. However, she did not attempt to use the "group system or group work" that she outlined in her response during the interview. Her grammar lesson remained teacher-centred throughout.

Under Ur's (1996) four characteristics of successful speaking activities, this study demonstrated that none of these characteristics were adhered to in all the observed lessons. Indeed, how the teachers conducted their lessons in this study seems to suggest that they were either not aware of these characteristics or had long forgotten them.

It remains unclear why the teachers in this study chose to present lessons that were not focused on the development of speaking skills as they had been requested to, prior to the observations. However, it is evident that there is a need to further probe the teaching of speaking skills in township schools to unearth and address the possible causes of this challenge. There seems to be a need for ongoing township EFAL teacher refresher programmes at school and circuit/district levels. Township EFAL teachers could be taught how to make their teaching effective and relevant "through collaboration, within a carefully structured subject specific professional development programme (PDP)" (Moodley, 2013: 2). The four different types of challenges identified in this study are symptomatic of a growing dereliction with which issues of EFAL teaching are treated. Some of these challenges require teachers to acquaint themselves with certain policy positions so that their classroom practices become in line with official requirements.

CONCLUSIONS

The study established that the township EFAL teachers whose pedagogical practices were explored in this study were unable to fulfil the intentions of the curriculum regarding the teaching of speaking skills. This is evidenced by the discrepancy between what the teachers claimed to do in their speaking lessons and what was found when observing their lessons. Although all eight participants displayed the four challenges discussed above, the two teachers discussed under each of the four challenge areas represent the strongest manifestation of that

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particular challenge. Insuficient training, knowledge, resources or time to support learners with limited English proficiency levels (Nel & Theron, 2008) may account for the many missed opportunities for doing appropriate work on the speaking skills by the teachers in this study. Berkvens, Van den Akker and Brugman (2014:21) contend that a lack of understanding of a curriculum and its goals has become a global challenge that needs to be addressed in order to promote quality teaching and learning. Since teaching speaking skills is meant to enhance learners' ability to communicate in the target language (Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018), speaking lessons should be learner-centred. Therefore, the teacher should not only be a provider of information—as was seen in many of the lessons observed in this study—but also an organiser, facilitator and guide.

Generally, teachers who have undergone Pre-Service Teacher Education (PSTE) are expected to have the relevant skills and knowledge for their subject area. PSTE also covers policies that regulate the education system, education administration, structure of teaching, and teacher and learner diversity (Mashau, 2012). During the interviews, the participants generally displayed adequate theoretical knowledge about how to develop speaking proficiency in an EFAL class. However, this knowledge did not translate into classroom practice. Such an anomaly becomes a cause for concern, especially when almost all participants exhibited the same shortfalls. In addition, while the aim of the South African Department of Basic Education's In-service Training of Teachers is to enhance the quality of teaching and deepen teachers' subject expertise (INSET, 2013), virtually no evidence of the attainment of this goal was found in the lessons that were observed for this study. Accordingly, there is a need to revisit and rethink both the pre-service and in-service training of EFAL teachers.

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