RHODES UNIVERSITY

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION

(GENERAL EDUCATION THEORY AND PRACTICE)

CANDIDATE: PAULINUS HAINGURA

NO. 02H2884

SUPERVISORS: U. VAN HARMELEN

DR. W. HUGO

NOVEMBER 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Personal Profile

Given Name:	Paulinus
Family Name:	HAINGURA
Ms/Mrs/Miss/Mr:	Mr
Address:	P.O. Box 993 Okahandja NAMIBIA
Tel:	+264 62 502446 (W) +264 62 503163 (H)
Fax:	+264 62 502613 (W)
e-mail:	phaingura@nied.edu.na

Current professional position and responsibilities:

I am currently working as an Education Officer (EO) at the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED). I am responsible for the promotion and development of the Rumanyo language subject, through the design and development of innovative curricula and relevant teaching and learning support materials (LSMs). I am also expected to do research in my subject area.

Academic background and interests:

Academic background:

1997–1998	Technikon Pretoria (distance education), Pretoria, RSA • BTech: Education Management.
1988 – 1990	University of the Western Cape (full-time), Bellville, RSA • BA (German and History)
1984–1985	Rundu Senior Secondary School, Rundu, NAMIBIA • Education Certificate Primary (ECP) & National Senior Certificate (Std X)

Personal Profile

Experience:

Name of institution:	Max Makushe Secondary School
Address:	Private Bag 2100, RUNDU
Position:	Teacher
Duration of employment:	1/1/1986-31/01/88
Name of institution:	Rundu Secondary School
Address:	Private Bag 2078, RUNDU
Position:	Teacher and HOD
Duration of employment:	1/1/92-31/12/95
Name of institution:	Ministry of Education and Culture
(Directorate: NAMCOL)	
Position:	Instructor
Duration of employment:	1993 –1996
Name of institution:	Ministry of Basic Education and Culture
(Directorate: NIED)	
Tutor (Education Theory and Practice) BETD INSET Programme	
Duration of employment:	1993-1995
Name of institution:	Leevi Hakusembe Secondary School
Address:	Private Bag 2098, RUNDU, Namibia
Position:	Deputy Principal
Duration of Employment:	1/1/96-31/3/97
Name of institution:	National Institute for Educational Development (NIED)
Address:	Private Bag 2038, Okahandja, Namibia
Position:	Education Officer
Duration of employment:	1/4/97 to present date

Community and outreach interests:

I am a member of the Namibian National Teachers Union (NANTU). I served on its various structures. From 1996 I was serving on the highest decision-making body within NANTU, the National Teachers' Council (NTC). I am currently the chairperson of the Rumanyo Curriculum Committee. I am member of the NAMIBIA BOOK DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (NBDC).

Leisure pursuits:

Reading newspapers and magazines, watching TV (primarily news and sport), travelling and sometimes relaxing with friends and colleagues.

Personal Profile

The achievements of which I am most proud of: When I was appointed to work at NIED, i. e., on the national level. I am proud of the fact that I was accepted to do this Master's course in 2002. I am also proud of my achievements in the course so far.
Future dreams: To write papers for publication in various journals and newsletters; To write academic papers and present at meetings, seminars and conferences; To do a lot of reading to prepare for future studies towards a PhD.

A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

ABBREVIATIONS USED

BETD	-	Basic Education Teacher Diploma
CA	-	Continuous Assessment
CV	-	Curriculum Vitae
EFA	-	Education for All
HIGCSE	-	Higher International General Certificate of Secondary Education
IGCSE	-	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
JSC	-	Junior Secondary Certificate
OBE	-	Outcome-Based Education
SWAPO	-	South West Africa People's Organisation

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the contextual analysis

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the implementation of the Namibian education policy with particular reference to Senior Secondary education (Grades 11-12) in order to develop analysing skills that will facilitate better understanding of my professional context and enhance my ability to operate within a research environment. The main purpose is to look at the theory that underpins the curriculum and to find out whether that theory is carried through into practice. This contextual analysis is also designed to provide baseline data as I subsequently explore my area of research.

The specific objectives of the research are to:

- conduct interviews with teachers and learners which may reveal ideological differences on how these various actors perceive the curriculum;
- analyse specific areas within the curriculum that might reveal the type of theory underpinning the curriculum;
- assess the curriculum in order to identify objectives and goals that may affect the implementation of the intended curriculum.

The organisation of the study

This study is organised into specific criteria for evaluating the Senior Secondary curriculum. As part of the structure of my contextual analysis, I will begin with an introduction to the analysis followed by the methodology of how I collected my data. I will try and analyse the data collecting tools, in this case interviews and document analysis, by looking at their pros and cons. I will also talk about the difficulties that I encountered during my data collection. Thereafter I will present my analysis in accordance with my findings and provide a synthesis and conclusion.

Limitations of this research study

This study was mainly confined to document analysis and interviews. It does not attempt to research the curriculum aspects of classroom interaction. It was aimed at finding out whether the curriculum is a good one, i.e., what is taught and why it is taught. Limitations also existed with regard to my own background. I have conducted this research as a novice without being grounded in theory on research methods and techniques and without any major research experience. Given my status as a novice researcher I thus had little knowledge of qualitative research methods and techniques at the time of starting this research even though these were the methods and techniques used in the process of this research study. Another limitation of this research has to do with research methodology. This study does not attempt to generalise its findings due to the select group and the limited number of people interviewed. I visited only one school for my interviews because of time and logistical constraints. Finally, my research was slightly impeded by the fact that this research activity preceded the research methodology course, which I attended at Rhodes University, in August 2002.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

No curriculum operates in a vacuum. It is influenced by socio-cultural, historic and economic factors. This is true for the Namibian curriculum.

Namibia, often referred to as Africa's last colony and formerly known as South West Africa, gained its independence in 1990 after more than 100 years of colonial rule, first under German occupation and later under the South African apartheid régime (Holmarsdottir 2001:14).

Pre-colonial education

According to Ndilula, as cited in Holmarsdottir (2001:16) whether formal or informal, education throughout the world has varied according to the society for which it is designed. He is of the opinion that in the past children's education in Namibia was participatory in that they learned by observing their elders and participating in daily tasks and that they were always tested on their intellectual abilities during the evenings through the use of riddles and proverbs. Those deemed intelligent were able to outwit others through the clever use of this medium. Furthermore the informal nature of this pre-colonial education did not indicate a lack of education. In fact, the education was very functional and the curriculum was relevant to these societies in that it

satisfied the necessity of passing on knowledge from one generation to the next. “With the arrival of the missionaries and colonialists came a formal system of education replacing the indigenous form of instruction and socialization” (Ndilula, in Holmarsdottir 2001:17).

Education under the apartheid régime

Mbamba argues that the organisation of the educational system in Namibia remained basically the same under the South African administration until roughly 1948 when the Nationalist Party assumed power in South Africa and plans were made to organise the educational services in the country and centralise its administration. He is of the opinion that ultimately, in 1948 the South African régime developed an even more oppressive system of education. In 1949 the Nationalist Party government appointed a commission on Native education, known as the Eiselen Commission. For Mbamba the Eiselen Commission saw the aim of education for Africans as that of separate existence. The Commission stated that educational practice must recognise that it has to deal with the Bantu child, a child trained and conditioned in Bantu culture, endowed with the knowledge of a Bantu language, and imbued with values, interests, and behavior patterns learned at the knee of a Bantu mother. “These facts must dictate to a very large extent the content and methods of his early education” (Mbamba, as cited in Holmarsdottir 2001:23).

In 1951 the commission reported that “in order to ensure efficient co-ordination of planning, the control of Bantu education should be removed from the provincial administration and be vested in a separate department under the aegis of the Central Government” (Ndilula, in Holmarsdottir 2001:23). “This report laid the groundwork for Bantu Education, which culminated in the Bantu Education Act of 1953. This Act represented the first major application of the official policy of *apartheid* to education” (Mbamba, as cited in Holmarsdottir 2001:23-24).

The pre-independence education system in Namibia was characterised by gross inequality and a lack of equity. Few schools were built and the distribution of resources was unequal. Highly resourced schools with well-qualified teachers were reserved for white learners and black learners had to contend with poorly resourced schools with mainly unqualified teachers. As a consequence this state of affairs led to resistance and the subsequent demise of the apartheid régime.

SWAPO's educational plan

> The existing racist and apartheid system in Namibia forced upon our people by the racist régime of South Africa, was neither qualitatively, quantitatively, structurally nor ideologically appropriate. Accordingly, the prime objective of education in Namibia has been, to justify and maintain colonial domination and white supremacy and, hence, to keep the African majority of our people under perpetual servitude. With the beginning of the national liberation struggle in 1960, spearheaded by SWAPO of Namibia, the main aim became to overthrow the entire apartheid system and all its institutions. SWAPO felt the need to create a non-exploitative and classless society in which our people are free from all evils of exploitation and could co-operate for progress, justice, and equal educational opportunity for all.
>
> (Ndilula, in Holmarsdottir 2001:26-27)

In my view, the above statement made by SWAPO, as a national liberation movement, advocated radical transformation of the colonial education system. After independence, however, the SWAPO government introduced only some cosmetic changes in the Namibian education system. Although envisaging radical changes before independence the changes introduced by the government after independence have been evolutionary rather than revolutionary. However, some successes have been recorded, especially in the area of access as observed by Holmarsdottir:

> It is clear that SWAPO's educational programs are based on the socio-economic transformation of the Namibian society, which depends on the development of productive forces in the areas of knowledge, skills and cultural creativity among the common people of Namibia. Currently the SWAPO government has attained standards and accessibility far beyond those achieved during the decades of colonial occupation.
>
> (Holmarsdottir 2001:27)

METHODOLOGY

Choice of methodology

The choice of methodology, in this study, was dictated by the time-factor as well as the limited scope of the study. Time was too limited to adopt any approach other than document analysis and interviews. The nature of the study also needed document analysis as it was an evaluation of a curriculum. However, given the limited scope of the study, I was not able to do this in any depth.

Sources and methods of data gathering

While the study pertains to a contextual analysis by looking at the curriculum of my choice at the decision-making level, it is also concerned with the individual level. I, therefore, deemed it fit to interview teachers and learners, the ones who are experiencing the curriculum at the grassroots level. The data gathering methods used in this study are mainly based on document analysis as well as interviews with teachers and learners. The study emphasised the use of qualitative methods as opposed to quantitative in order to ascertain the degree to which the curriculum promotes the teaching of Namibian languages as a subject in a learner-centred way from within the constructivist epistemology. The ideal situation would be to make use of multiple methods of data gathering, known as triangulation. The primary purpose of triangulation is to validate the collected data (Gall, Borg & Gall; Yin; Patton, as cited in Holmarsdottir 2001:99).

Sampling

I made use of convenience sampling described by Gall, Borg & Gall (1996:227) as "… the type of sampling where … the researcher selects a sample that suits the purposes of the study and that is convenient". The sample, in this case, is convenient because it is located "… near where the researcher works" (*ibid.*).

DATA GATHERING TECHNIQUES

Document analysis

According to Smith (2002) documents are mainly written texts that relate to some aspect of the social world. These range from official documents to private and personal records. Most studies find some need to examine documents as potential data sources. Traditional historical research is of course almost totally dependent on historical documents. Smith is of the opinion that in the same way that the historical researcher has a central concern with the external and internal integrity of documents, for example their origin, authenticity and accuracy, so the non-historical researcher is also concerned with these issues. According to Smith documents, therefore, should be critically assessed and analysed. Smith (2002) also alludes to the fact that as a socially constructed text one can only do justice to a document by interpreting it in the light of its broad social context. He further argues that documents are often a valuable starting point before collecting new data or they may help direct you to the kind of things you will want to know about your interviews or observation. On the other hand, your interviews or observations may prompt you to seek out certain documents. He is of the opinion that documents might reveal that a lot of data you need has already been collected and can show you what you still need to collect. He summarises the advantages and disadvantages of document analysis and interpretation as follows:

Benefits

- a valuable supplement to interviews and observation when you want information from those who were there (eyewitness accounts) but who are no longer accessible; or when you want access to private or confidential exchanges – such as those found in letters
- data can be more credible than data collected in interviews or through observation because of the absence of a researcher effect on the data source; documents are non reactive
- convenience, especially those that are available electronically; can save time and money as there is little or no financial cost

Disadvantages

- documents can be misleading; some are written to provide a rosy picture or to enhance the writer's or someone else's reputation; some may even be deliberately intended to deceive
- often a document depends on one person's memory or point of view
- trivial data overload: sometimes there is just too much, especially if you don't know what you are looking for
- sometimes they are incomplete, may not represent the full picture or may contain typographical errors

(Smith 2002:2-3)

Small scale survey

Gall, Borg & Gall argue that:

> The term survey frequently is used to describe research that involves administering questionnaires or interviews. The purpose of a survey is to use questionnaires or interviews to collect data from participants in a sample about their characteristics, experiences, and opinions in order to generalize the findings to a population that the sample is intended to represent.
>
> (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:289)

In exploring learners' as well as teachers' opinions about the curriculum I embarked on a small scale survey. Before embarking on the journey of collecting data I decided to weigh the pros and cons of the questionnaire and the interview. Gall, Borg & Gall state that:

> Questionnaires have two advantages over interviews … the cost of sampling respondents over a wide geographic area is lower, and the time required to collect the data typically is much less. Questionnaires however, cannot probe deeply into respondents' opinions and feelings. Also, once the questionnaire has been distributed, it is not possible to modify the items, even though they may be unclear to some respondents. The major advantage of the interviews is their adaptability. Skilled interviewers can follow up respondent's answers to obtain more information and clarify vague statements. They also can build trust, and rapport with respondents, thus making in [*sic*] possible to obtain information that the individual probably would not reveal by any other data-collection method.
>
> (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:289)

I made use of the “standardized” open-ended interview. This type of interview according to Gall, Borg & Gall (1996:310) “involves a predetermined sequence and wording of the same set of questions to be asked of each respondent in order to minimize the possibility of bias”. For Patton (2002) it enables respondents to answer the same questions, thus increasing comparability of resources, as data are complete for each person on the topics addressed in the interview. It reduces interviewer effects and bias when several interviewers are used and permits evaluation users to see and review the instrumentation used in the evaluation. It also facilitates the organisation and analysis of data. Interviews also have some weaknesses. According to Patton (2002) standardised wording of questions allows little flexibility in relating the interview to particular individuals and circumstances as well as the fact that it may constrain and limit naturalness and relevance of questions and answers. Its strengths outwit the weaknesses and against that background I decided to use this technique.

Although interviews are extremely valuable sources of collecting data they are also time consuming, especially when it comes to transcribing. I decided to interview two teachers and three learners from a nearby Senior Secondary School to explore their views on the Pilot Curriculum for Formal Senior Secondary Education. I chose to use the interview technique as described by Gall, Borg & Gall that “… interviews are used extensively in educational research to collect information that is not directly observable. These data collection methods typically inquire about the feelings, motivations, attitudes, accomplishments, and experiences of individuals” (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:288).

Care was taken to limit the number to five people to enable everyone to contribute. This information was recorded and can thus be retrieved. Being aware of the time consuming nature in transcribing audio-taped interviews I kept the interview to 20 minutes. Given the limited scope of the research I could also not go into much detail.

ANALYSIS OF THE PILOT CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR FORMAL SENIOR SECONDARY EDUCATION

The curricula in the Namibian education system were designed using elements from multiple theories with behaviourist icons such as Bloom and Tyler taking the centre stage. The Namibian curricula still put much emphasis on objectives and aims using the "objectives model" of curriculum. Since the curriculum design and development of my subject area is, to a large extent, influenced by Bloom's Taxonomy I shall start by briefly commenting upon, just some of the web of ideas regarding the objectives model. Bloom clarifies the aims of his taxonomy by stating that:

> … this taxonomy is designed to be a classification of the student behaviours, which represent the intended outcomes of the educational processes … It should be noted that we are not attempting to classify the instructional methods used by teachers, the ways in which teachers relate themselves to students, or the different kinds of instructional materials they use. We are not attempting to classify the particular subject matter or content. What we are classifying is the *intended behaviour* of students – the ways in which individuals are to act, think or feel as the result of participating in some unit of instruction …
>
> (Bloom, as cited in Stenhouse 1981:57)

The above claims leave little doubt of the behaviourist origin and influence on Bloom's Taxonomy. Much criticism has been levelled at the "objectives model" of curriculum development. Much of this criticism takes its point of departure from the underlying behaviourist approach to education and the mechanistic, reductionist view of humans and the world within the objectives model. The deterministic nature of the objectives model of curriculum has raised the question; what are we educating for? Are we educating for the mastery of already available cultural tools or making possible creative responses which go beyond what is available and helps to develop it and individualise it? With its determinacy the objectives model is unable to address these concerns.

Stenhouse (1981) views education as a means to make us freer and more creative. He emphasises that education enhances the freedom of man by including him into the knowledge of his culture as a thinking system. The most important characteristic of the knowledge mode is that one can think with it. "… knowledge … is a structure to sustain creative thought and provide frameworks

for judgement" (Stenhouse 1981:82). Analysing various curricula documents Avenstrup states that:

> If we take the curriculum documents to include curriculum frameworks, subject syllabuses, assessment and examination manuals, regulations, guidelines and instruments, and modules used in the BETD … it is very clear that existing Namibian curricula were formulated in a transitional phase. Many documents reflect behaviourist, individual constructivist and social constructivist trends and elements, with all the contradictions, which that involves. Some documents, such as the Broad Curricula for Basic Education and for Senior Secondary Education lean more towards social constructivism, but not consistently.
>
> (Avenstrup 2001:11)

I partly disagree with him, especially with regard to the assessment of the Pilot Curriculum for Formal Senior Secondary Education. Apart from the rhetoric about social constructivism in the preamble and goals for the curriculum, the other information, especially on assessment, was taken directly from the Cambridge H/IGCSE syllabi. Although the curriculum boasts school based assessment in the form of projects and/or practicals in some subjects, in other subjects such as First Languages school based assessment forms part of the formal external examination. In the First Languages learners, therefore, are not given a chance to do course work to enable them to demonstrate certain competencies and qualities which are assessed by methods other than examination. Teachers are supposed to assess those skills which are not readily assessed by timed written papers, such as Speaking and Listening, through course work. It is interesting to note that even in the subjects where course work is allowed, teachers always force learners to choose alternative to course work papers.

Here, I shall briefly discuss the historical perspectives about our past assessment practices because our current assessment practices are still based on the traditional behaviourist theory. The old theory was served by a scientific measurement of ability and achievement. Assessment was an official event separate from instruction.

Currently we know that learning is an active process of mental construction and sense making. We have a new understanding that cognitive abilities are developed through socially supported interactions. Classroom routines and the ways that teachers and learners talk with each other

should help learners gain experience with the ways of thinking and speaking in academic disciplines. School learning should be authentic and connected to the world outside of school not only to make learning more interesting and motivating to students but also to develop the ability to use knowledge in real-world settings. In addition to the development of cognitive abilities, classroom expectations and social norms should foster the development of important dispositions, such as student's willingness to persist in trying to solve difficult problems. The different forms of assessment also have different purposes of assessment.

It is clear that assessment at grade 12 level is still located within the behaviourist epistemology. Only external examination marks are used to assess learners' performance. Continuous assessment (CA) is considered to be insignificant at this level. Swarts (2002) claims that assessment, located within the dominant scientific paradigm, has been concerned with measuring the product of learning and comparing an individual learner's achievement to the norm for any given set of learners. Assessment was summative – taking place after the learning experience, concerned with how many correct "facts" could be recalled and regurgitated rather than with attempting to identify the extent to which a learner understood or what s/he could do with knowledge. This traditional or "old" approach to assessment is no longer viewed as appropriate yet the current Curriculum Guide for Senior Secondary Education still advocates that approach. It is located in the positivist paradigm and there is no way it can guide teachers to change their practice. It disregards continuous assessment as the major shift towards learner-centred assessment practices. The absence of internal continuous assessment in many subjects at Senior Secondary level is a major flaw in this curriculum guide as it divorces assessment from the learning-teaching situation and emphasises only summative assessment at the end of the year.

Swarts (2002) regards assessment as an integral component of the learning and teaching process. She argues that in thinking about assessment, we consider how to gather reliable information about learners' acquisition of knowledge and understanding, skills, and attitudes in a range of subjects and within subjects. She further contends that no single assessment method can do justice to the breadth and depth of a national curriculum, nor can it provide an accurate enough picture of learners' achievement. Assessment practices must take into account the different ways in which learners learn, as well as the different ways of knowing, in order to cater for individual needs and styles.

The Pilot Curriculum Guide also clearly stipulates that internal assessment during the Senior Secondary course "should be of a continuous formative nature. It should have a diagnostic value in helping the learner develop a realistic self-image, and inform the teacher as to how the teaching and learning process can be developed" (Pilot Curriculum Guide For Formal Senior Secondary Education 1996:20). This is not consistently applied to all subjects. Most H/IGCSE subjects are only formally assessed in the form of external examination and no informal continuous assessment marks are added to the final examination marks. It also advocates the use of various assessment approaches e.g. diagnostic, formative, continuous, norm-referenced, criterion-referenced and summative. Course work applicable to some subjects in the Senior Secondary curriculum is welcomed but it is not done consistently. Many schools, due to the lack of qualified staff and equipment, select the alternative to course work examination paper.

It is unfortunate that even the new draft syllabi for Senior Secondary education, especially in the First Languages, are framed following Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives. Bloom together with Tyler are regarded as the fathers of behaviourism. For our eductionists to follow their model in drafting syllabi that will guide Namibian Senior Secondary education for the next 10-15 years is tantamount to reverting back to pre-independence practices.

In my view, there is a general lack of commitment and will among educationists and other implementers to follow the intended policies as stated in official documents. We cannot claim to make a paradigm shift towards social constructivism if our thinking and practices are still based on the thinking of behaviourist icons such as Bloom, Tyler and others.

This state of affairs is regrettable but is bound to occur as projected by Van Harmelen. She is of the opinion that the South African and Namibian educational reform processes reveal some of the problems associated with taking too simplistic a view of the relationship between society and education. She notes that:

> First of all, both societies are capitalist societies that are locked into the scientific value system that dominates capitalist economies. The values within this particular system are those of modernity, which are scientism, technicism, consumerism, all of which are linked strongly notion associated with individualism. Within this value system there is a strong belief in global economies, in the notion that progress is linked to economic development as economic growth [*sic*]. This value system fosters the belief that centralised, uniform systems are the best forms of control. Education in this sort of system is traditionally tightly structured and centrally controlled, examination-driven (as standardized, centralized examinations are perceived as a primary control mechanism) and is as a result prescriptive and rigid. Yet, the current thinking underpinning the new curricula in both these countries is located in a completely different world view.
>
> (Van Harmelen 2000:15)

The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) syllabus

Avenstrup (2001:11) claims that "the H/IGCSE syllabuses are individual constructivist in approach, but can also be taught partly within a social constructivist paradigm, especially where course work is included in assessment". Rowell, however, is of the opinion that the Namibian syllabi, especially with regard to First Languages, are prescriptive and are good examples of a closed system unable to serve an open system located within constructivism. She states that:

> Pre-independence schooling in Namibia was didactic and authoritarian. The form laid out in policy documents since independence has emphasized the centrality of the learner in the process of schooling and education. However, the legacy of previous years is embedded in prescriptive syllabus documents and assessment procedures, as well as in teachers' biographical experience.
>
> (Rowell, in Squazzin and Van Graan 1998:66)

Face-to-face interviews

I conducted five interviews, involving two teachers and three learners aimed at collecting information about how other stakeholders in education felt about the Pilot Curriculum Guide for Formal Senior Secondary Education. As Rumanyo (First Language) is not taught at any school in the Okahandja district, I decided to interview one English teacher and another teacher teaching any other subject at Senior Secondary level. I did not encounter any problem in arranging the interviews and both teachers turned up on time for the interviews. The principal was also co-operative, although he was informed at short notice.

The teachers were the first to be interviewed. I used the one-to-one interview method. I started each interview by briefly stating the purpose of the session as well as the promise that the whole exercise was confidential. The teachers were open and frank in that they were not that familiar with the curriculum and that they only taught from the syllabuses. One teacher did not even know that such a document existed. However, during our discussions some elements of learner-centred education such as group work, projects and practicals were loosely mentioned. On the question of whether the curriculum promoted gender equality both teachers answered in the affirmative. They clearly stated that no gender "stereo-typed" subject existed any more. Learners of both sexes were allowed to take any subject. The choice, however, is still being hampered by general prejudice and cultural beliefs.

In answer to the question about the provision of different assessment approaches in the curriculum, it was evident that both teachers focused on tests and examinations. One teacher even suggested that the Senior Secondary set-up was good as their school performed well in external examinations compared to the Junior Secondary set-up where continuous assessment marks were added to the final marks of learners. The teacher did not hide her dislike of the idea of continuous assessment in grade 12, as practised in Grade 10, using the pretext of maintaining high standards. She even questioned the reliability of the continuous assessment marks and was very happy that it was not used in grade 12 at all.

She said that:

> *At our school we usually have a very low performance at JSC level but we have very good performance at Grade 12 level. So, for me, I think we have better things done with the Senior Secondary curriculum than what we have with the Junior Secondary syllabus. I believe that the way things are planned in this syllabus make it possible for learners to perform better.*
>
> *(Teacher 1)*

Here, this teacher was trying to justify the exclusion of continuous assessment in Grade 12. She went on to state that the end of year examination system used in Grade 12 should be extended to the Grade 10 level to enhance performance and maintain high standards. Swarts, however, has a definite answer to her concern about standards when she states that the human cry across the globe has been to raise standards in education. "The concept of standards, however, is a highly controversial one. Whose standards are we talking about? Are we talking about standards and quality as defined by the World Bank …?" (Swarts, in Squazzin and Van Graan 1998:7). Standards in the Namibian context are used as a pretext by many educators to maintain the status quo. The education system in Namibia at grade 12 level is examination-driven and examination results are the only determinant of learners' performance. Swarts further states that:

> Normally standards and test scores/examination results are equated. When a large number of learners fail, the standards are assumed to be high. However, when a large number of learners are successful and achieving good grades, the standards are low/falling. Do we, as educators … ever critically reflect on these contradictions? Do we ask ourselves what tests/examinations are supposed to measure? Do test scores reflect what learners know and can do?
>
> (Swarts, in Squazzin and Van Graan 1998:8)

It seems as if it does not matter that curriculum guidelines say that children should learn to co-operate, learn to help in the neighbourhood and have respect for their elders, if all that is measured through tests and examinations is individual behaviour and narrow cognitive skills.

Teachers were mixed up between curriculum and syllabi and did not know which one was which one. One teacher responded on the question about whether the curriculum develop competence and lead to performance by saying that "the Pilot Curriculum as a book does not develop

competence. It depends on the person in charge of the class. He is the one who should develop the competence" (Teacher 2).

Many of the questions put to the teachers, however, were not well understood and the answers given were not satisfactory. I tried to highlight some of the questions but the lack of knowledge about the curriculum was evident in many of their answers.

In order to gain the learners' perspective about the curriculum I also interviewed three learners (two boys and one girl). The learners did not know anything about the curriculum. However, their answers provided me with insight as to how they experienced the curriculum. Their answers were mainly based on their actual experience in the classroom situation. They knew something about collaborative learning but they could not go beyond group work and working together on research projects. Most of the questions were not well understood by them either.

One learner, e.g., said that: "If you look at this curriculum, it brings many things at this school that learners can take part in e.g. debating, cleaning the environment, something like that". On the question about whether the curriculum leads to active and in-depth learning one of the learners had this to say: "You learn more like writing a CV which is more important when you want to apply for a job. There are many things in which you can take part in this curriculum. It covers all the major things needed in life." On the question about whether the curriculum promotes collaborative learning one of the learners said that: "Oh, that will mostly depend on how the teacher teaches the learners and see that the learner is not understanding a certain part in this lesson. So, which means like our English teacher … he is the best. We are always participating in his lessons". This means that neither the teachers no the learners understood what answers the researcher was expecting from them. They just spoke for the sake of speaking.

Problems encountered during the data gathering process

There were no major problems apart from the fact that my letter requesting permission to go to the school was signed at the last minute and the Regional Director had no time to answer my request in writing. The school principal thus used his own discretion to grant me permission to do my research. This situation could be prevented if such matters are regarded by supervisors as urgent and letters requesting permission are signed as quickly as possible so that they are sent

well ahead of time to the appropriate Regional Director. The other stumbling block was finding a school which offers the target language, in this case Rumanyo. As I was only interested in other stakeholders' opinions on the curriculum guide, this was not regarded as a major drawback. As it was not possible to find a nearby school offering my language I had to settle for an English teacher and a Science teacher. However, all the other arrangements as well as the actual interviews went smoothly.

ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNERS

My research focused on learners in Okahandja Secondary School. This happened because of the time-factor, which could not allow me to study my target group, in this case, learners from rural Kavango in Northeastern Namibia. I planned to do my field work in that region because I am interested in focusing primarily on how the curriculum supports the teaching of Namibian languages spoken in that region in general, and my own language subject in particular. My target language is spoken there and it would have been logical to do my research there. However, this was not possible in this case study. The contexts described here are for the Kavango learners, the subject in my subsequent empirical study. It should be borne in mind, however, that in many respects the contexts in Namibian schools do not differ much. Many of the socio-cultural and economic conditions described here are found in many parts of the country's rural schools. The same applies to the learning environment. However, since Okahandja Secondary School is an urban school many of the descriptions might not apply to its situation.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Most of the learners in the Kavango Region are from the previously disadvantaged communities and have access to schools with only basic amenities and facilities. They generally come from poor family homes and many of their parents rely on subsistence farming with little or no income. Some of these learners start attending school at an advanced age due to the fact that they are expected to look after cattle and to help with the household chores. Their only hope is to complete their education and start working to uplift their living standards and those of their extended family. The schools have high dropout rates due to financial problems as well as other factors. Frequent absenteeism (both learners and teachers) is experienced in many of the schools in that region and only a few 'gifted' learners manage to progress to tertiary level.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The learning environment has a great effect on the learning process. Many schools in the Kavango Region have basic physical facilities although most of the classes do not have enough textbooks, desks, chairs and tables. Many classrooms do not have enough furniture and many of classroom windows are broken. Teachers and learners usually experience problems of proper storage for furniture and other things in their classrooms. Many classrooms are dilapidated and learners are vulnerable to bad climatic conditions.

THE NECESSITY FOR TRANSFORMATION

Changing views of knowledge

Commenting on the South African view of what knowledge is and how it is acquired in the OBE model, Van Harmelen (2000) notes that knowledge is not permanent, but contested, provisional and changing. She notes that knowledge is not seen as unchanging 'truths', but as something that is constantly changing and being reformed as we gain greater understanding of and insights into our world. This helps us to move away from the idea that there is only one right form of knowledge. It also means that we need to see knowledge as being content, context and situational specific. Seeing knowledge as contested helps us to value different types of knowledge. Therefore we are able to move away from the belief that only 'book knowledge' or 'scientific knowledge' has value. In so doing we open up a wide variety of possibilities that will enhance our ability to identify and solve problems and to gain understanding of our world and our lives. Knowledge is constructed by the learner through social interactions in the many contexts of day to day living. "This view of learning accepts that learning is a process through which we seek to make sense in and for our own world. The meaning we make of and our shared understanding of the world and our lives is that which constitutes knowledge. 'To know' is to understand" (Van Harmelen 2000:7). These observations are also relevant to Namibia as confirmed by the following policy statements:

> … to address the problems we face and to lay the foundation for a self-reliant and prosperous Namibia we need to go beyond relying on what they [the learners] have read or been told. Indeed learning is more than memorising and repeating. Our children need to think independently and critically. They must master strategies for identifying, analysing, and solving problems. Most

> important they must develop self-confidence: their own sense that they have the ability to contribute productively to their society, to help it, grow, and to participate in governing it.
>
> (Toward Education for All 1993:119)

The shift was supposed to be from a behaviourist (transmission) approach to a constructivist (cognitive) approach to learning and a concern with how individuals construct and make meaning, apply and use knowledge. The direction for improvement is clear.

> Our teaching must be learner-centred and must aim toward an enlightened understanding of humankind, its culture, its traditions, and its history; a methodology that promotes learning through understanding and practice directed towards the autonomous mastery of living conditions; a general reorientation of the organization of school work with the view to fostering the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills by all pupils; continuous assessment of the learning process and its results; establishing a non-confessional religious curriculum where teaching about the roles of different religious and other philosophies of life in the history of humankind is introduced, promoting and protecting the fundamental equality of all learners and equity in their access to, their work in, and their benefits from the learning environment; and introducing and encouraging classroom practices that reflect and reinforce both the values and practices of democracy.
>
> (Toward Education for All 1993:120)

However, this shift will never take place if a lot of educationists are reluctant to make a paradigm shift. There is no way we can make a change if we still cling to behaviourism and pretend that we are changing. We can only change if we start in our small way to move forward and not to go back in any way whatsoever. Teachers, viewed by Damens (2001:1) as the "most important agents in the transformation of education", definitely have a role to play in this regard. However, I concur with Prawat when he claims that educators sometimes stand in the way of change.

> Teachers are viewed as important agents of change in the reform effort currently under way in education and thus are expected to play a key role in changing schools and classrooms. Paradoxically, however, teachers are also viewed as major obstacles to change because of their adherence to outmoded forms of instruction that emphasize factual and procedural knowledge at the expense of deeper levels of understanding. New constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, which many reformers advocate, are inconsistent with much of what teachers believe …
>
> (Prawat 1992:354)

SOCIO-POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC REALITIES

Prior to independence, schooling was the privilege of the few (education for elites) and the less fortunate ones failed, dropped out and/or repeated. When education was for the elite, it made sense to understand schooling, even at the primary level, in terms of selection. After all, schools had a major responsibility for determining who was to be part of that elite and who was not. Since that elite became smaller at each higher level of education, the selection process had to become more and more restricted (Toward Education for All 1993). Great inequalities existed in the distribution of educational opportunities, the provision of education and in education requirements across the population.

> In practice prior to our independence our schools had to make a dual selection. First they separated people on the basis of race. Then, within each group created by that segregation, there was a further selection of the few who would reach the higher levels of the separate education systems. The uneven allocation of resources ensured that a larger percentage of White than of Black children would be selected for further education.
>
> (Toward Education for All 1993:5)

Schooling emphasised the theoretical-academic nature of education and the curriculum was content-based and examination-driven. The content was to a large extent irrelevant to the Namibian context and was culturally insensitive. This necessitated the coming into being of the new Constitution underpinned by principles of justice, democracy, and unity as well as the new philosophy and new goals of equity, access and democracy – from education for a few to education for all (EFA).

SYNTHESIS

In drawing the threads together I would emphasise that the Pilot Curriculum Guide for Senior Secondary Education must be drastically changed to adhere to mainstream policy. It does not help to have all the “progressive” words in the preamble and goals of the curriculum advocating learner-centred education, while the remaining content is couched in behavioural words.

According to Avenstrup (2001:17) assessment in learner-centred education must take stock of the breadth and depth of what the learner has learned in school as far as possible in authentic assessment. What the learner has learned in school will build on and relate to what the learner has learnt from experience in the community. If learning is to be assessed in depth, formalized assessments should be few and far between, but thorough in terms of assessing skills, knowledge and competence. He notes that the current tendency in Namibia to over-elaborate objectives and competencies and to demand continuous assessment from inadequately prepared teachers covering several often unrelated subjects, is clearly counter to a constructivist approach. It breaks down knowledge into small units in a reductionist approach, instead of providing opportunities for learners to construct knowledge in a holistic way. It results in inconsistent and unreliable assessment because teachers cannot go in depth with a field of learning, and are 'stretched thin' conceptually and practically. One reaction to such inconsistency is to revert back to former practices of frequent testing based on measuring easily testable behaviourist objectives, instead of going into how authentic assessment can be made manageable in the Namibian context. For Avenstrup (2001) the way ahead would be to relate assessment more to curriculum goals and not so much to discrete syllabus objectives. He argues that authentic assessments would then be less frequent but in the form of real, or more adequately designed, assessment situations where discrete skills are needed for the larger task. It would also involve much more self-assessment, and making time available for each learner to look at assessments and to use them as feedback into their own learning process and similarly, for teachers to use them for feedback into the teaching process. He concludes by stating that the extreme emphasis on testing and examination, which is current practice in Namibia has to be changed. It is moving teaching back into the old behaviourist modes instead of forward into authentic teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored some issues that require attention from policy makers as well as implementers. In Namibia policy advocates change in education but this change does not reach the implementers. It is unacceptable that twelve years after independence education at senior secondary level still remains centralised and examination-driven, despite the direction of policy to the contrary.

To be compatible with and to support the social constructivist model of teaching and learning, classroom assessment must change. Firstly, its form and content must be changed to better represent important thinking and problem solving skills in each of the disciplines. Secondly, the way that assessment is used in classrooms and how it is regarded by teachers and learners must change. A broader range of assessment tools is therefore needed to capture important learning goals and processes and to more directly connect assessment to ongoing instruction.

The reality in Namibia today is that, although policy makers, innovators and researchers rely heavily on constructivist theories as the basis for curriculum innovation nation-wide, there still remains a big gap between the constructivist ideas and the actual teaching practice.

REFERENCES

Avenstrup, R. (2001). *Learner-centred education in the Namibian context : A conceptual framework*. Research report, National Institute for Educational Development, Okahandja.

Damens, P.K.J. (2001). *Second language evaluation in Namibia : Toward identifying criteria.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of the Western Cape, Bellville.

Gall, M.D., Borg, W.R., & Gall, J.P. (1996). *Educational research : An introduction*. New York : Longman.

Holmarsdottir, H.B. (2001). From policy to practice : A study of the implementation of the language policy in Namibian primary schools. *Education in Africa,* 9(7), 1-162.

Ministry of Education and Culture, Namibia. (1993). *Toward education for all*. Windhoek : Gamsberg Macmillan.

Ministry of Education and Culture, Namibia. (1996). *Pilot curriculum guide for formal senior secondary education.* Okahandja : NIED.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). London : Sage.

Prawat, R.S. (1992). Teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning : A constructivist perspective. *American Journal of Education,* 100(3), 354-395.

Rowell, M.P. (1998). Language for teaching and learning in the classroom : Some observations. In T. Squazzin & M. van Graan (Eds.), *Education reform and innovation in Namibia : How best can changes in classroom practice be implemented and supported?* Proceedings from the 1998 NIED Educational Conference (pp.66-73). Windhoek : Gamsberg Macmillan.

Smith, C. (2002). *Document analysis or review : Using documents as sources of data.* Unpublished lecture notes. Education department, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

Stenhouse, L. (1981). *An introduction to curriculum research and development*. London : Heinemann.

Swarts, P. (1998). Welcoming remarks. In T. Squazzin & M. van Graan (Eds.), *Education reform and innovation in Namibia : How best can changes in classroom practice be implemented and supported?* Proceedings from the 1998 NIED Educational Conference (pp.7-10). Windhoek : Gamsberg Macmillan.

Swarts, P. (2002, March). *Welcoming remarks.* Induction workshop for the localisation of the senior secondary curriculum. National Institute for Educational Development, Okahandja.

Van Harmelen, U. (2000). *Learner-centred education and the Namibian reform process.* BEd (Hons) lecture notes. Education department, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

Appendix A

Interview schedule for learners

1. Does the curriculum lead to active in-depth learning?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

2. Does it provide opportunities for collaborative and participative learning?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

3. Does it relate to the realities of learners educational and development needs and to those of the classroom situation?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

4. Does it promote gender balance?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

5. Does it aim to make learning relevant and meaningful to the learner?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

6. Any further comments.
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

Appendix B

Interview schedule for teachers

1. Does the curriculum lead to active in-depth learning?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

2. Does it develop competence and lead to performance?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

3. Does it provide opportunities for collaborative and participative learning?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

4. Does it relate to the realities of learners educational and development needs and to those of the classroom situation?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

5. Does it provide opportunities for integrated cross-curricular teaching?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

6. Does it promote gender balance?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

7. Does it adequately measure learner's achievement and progress?
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……

8. Does it aim to make learning relevant and meaningful to the learner?

……
……
……
……

9. Does it provide opportunities for the use of a variety of assessment approaches?

……
……
……
……

10. Does it promote relevance?

……
……
……
……

11. Any further comments.

……
……
……
……

A CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASES OF BEHAVIOURISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

ABSTRACT

There are two major epistemologies, conceptions or definitions of knowledge embodied in a variety of contemporary classroom methodologies. Both are regarded as key epistemological positions influencing current curriculum development in Namibia. Educators need to understand both perspectives to make genuine choices in their practice, and to create a classroom that is philosophically coherent. They need to understand positivist epistemology, the theory regarded as the foundation for traditional practice, in order to be able to pinpoint its shortcomings when they explain the need for change. They also need to understand constructivist epistemology because it lies at the core of critical theory and is central to the education reform process, currently under way in Namibia.

INTRODUCTION

Defining what knowledge is or what it means "to know" remains a hot topic in education these days. There are different epistemological positions to knowledge, each claiming to be the one that best defines knowledge, and how it is acquired**.**

This paper will briefly examine the epistemological bases of behaviourism by first focusing on materialism, realism and empiricism. Secondly, the paper will look at the strengths and weaknesses of behaviourism. Thirdly, the paper will discuss the epistemological bases of constructivism by briefly examining the radical, social and critical epistemological versions of constructivism. Then finally, the paper will look at the strengths and weaknesses of the constructivist epistemology.

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASES OF BEHAVIOURISM

> Behaviourism is not generally considered a philosophy in the same sense that idealism, realism, pragmatism, and other such thought systems are. It is most often classified as a psychological theory, a more specialised and less comprehensive theory than a systematic philosophy. At the same time, behaviourism has been given increasing attention and acceptance in the field of education, so that in many instances it has extended into areas ordinarily considered the domain of philosophy. These extensions include theoretical considerations dealing with the nature of the human being and society, values, the good life, and speculations or assumptions on the nature of reality.
>
> (Ozman & Craver 1986:164)

For Ozman & Craver (1986), behaviourism has its roots in several philosophical traditions. It is related to realism, largely in terms of the realists' thesis of independent reality that is similar to the behaviourists' belief that behaviour is caused by environmental conditions.

According to Van Harmelen (1995) the term behaviourism is both ambiguous and conceptually complex. To define it as a single theory is impossible. She maintains that behaviourism ought rather to be perceived as a network of theoretical perspectives held together by the common belief that personal experience is understood and exhibited as behaviour or actions that result from our interaction with our physical and social environment. She further indicates that behavioural theories fall broadly within the ambit of empirical philosophies that hold all knowledge as personal knowledge and that knowing is necessarily evident and grounded in sense-perpetual encounters with particular objects and events.

This paper attempts to show some of the connections of behaviourism with past philosophical systems and how these have influenced modern behaviouristic theory.

Realism's impact on behaviourism

For Ozman & Craver (1986:165) behaviourism, although primarily connected to modern realism and its advocacy of science, however, has some similarities to classical realism. The behaviourists believe that we can understand human behaviour by meticulous study of particular

behaviours and that human "nature" can be explained by behaviour. In addition, there is no internal reality of the human hidden from scientific discovery for the behaviourists, because what is real is external, factual, and observable behaviour capable of being known.

> Thus one of the realist elements of behaviorism includes going from particular, observable facts … to 'forms,' or the laws of behavior. Behaviorists think the human traits of personality, character, integrity, and so forth are the results of behaving in certain ways. These traits are not internally determined by each individual but come about by behavior patterns developed through environmental conditioning. The emphasis on reinforcement shows another realist leaning toward the discernible, factual, observable aspects of the universe.
>
> (Ozman & Craver 1986:165)

Behaviourism further holds that we should stop accentuating the mind, consciousness or soul as the causal agent of behaviour and look rather to the facts of behaviour or that which is observable and empirically verifiable (Ozman & Craver 1986:165-166).

The influence of materialism on behaviourism

For Ozman and Craver (1986:166) materialism has its roots in Greek philosophy, but as it exists today it is essentially the theory developed along with modern science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to them, materialism is the theory that reality can be explained by the laws of matter and motion. It is clear that behaviourism is a kind of materialism as behaviourists view human beings in terms of their neurological, psychological, and biological contexts. Behaviourists also maintain that body is material and behaviour is motion.

> For the materialist, human beings are not partially supernatural beings above nature ... but rather they are a part of nature; and even though they are one of the more complex natural organisms, they are capable of being studied and are governed by natural law just as any other natural creature.
>
> (Ozman & Craver 1986:165)

Empiricism as an epistemological view of behaviourism

The powerful role played by behaviourism in education is the result of the domination of logical empiricism as the theoretical position articulating modernity, the dominant paradigm of the twentieth century. Logical empiricism holds the belief that experience is the 'only source of knowledge'. In this definition experience refers to data one receives through various sense organs, providing the recipient of that data with 'evidence' of the existence of a world of real objects outside themselves (Aspin 1995:21). A more powerful and longer-lasting articulation of empiricism is John Locke and David Hume's central thesis that all knowledge is derived from experience. At birth, Locke views the mind as blank like an empty cupboard or like a blank sheet of paper (Aspin 1995:29).

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF BEHAVIOURISM

Behaviourism has been successful because it worked. Van Harmelen maintains that behaviourism has been successful because of being situated in the dominant worldview of modernity. It relates to that worldview which we either understand best or which we can relate to because it is a shared view. It provides and allows for an orderly and comprehensive education theory. It is easy to organise in that the same 'recipe' can be used on a macro level, through the development of a national curriculum, and can also be used on the micro level, to develop syllabuses, weekly programmes and lesson programmes. It is easy to assess whether learning has taken place and gives the idea that assessment is 'objective' and has the appearance of fairness (Van Harmelen 2000:13).

For Van Harmelen (2000) one of the weaknesses of behaviourism is the view that knowledge is true at all times. For her knowledge is contested, provisional and changing. Knowledge is not seen as unchanging 'truths', but as something that is constantly changing and being reformed as we gain greater understanding of and insights into our world. Seeing knowledge as contested helps us to value different types of knowledge. The other weakness of positivism is its long-unchallenged view that regards knowledge as facts waiting out there for us to discover and record. Current conversations about the nature of teaching and learning differ dramatically from those 20 years ago. Traditional views of knowledge based on a reality out there and in terms of which acquisition of knowledge involved simply finding a match between what we know and

reality, have been criticised. The belief that something is true if and only if it corresponds to an independent reality has been held up for scrutiny. Constructivism, by contrast, holds that knowledge only exists when a person examines information and assigns meaning to it, that knowledge consists not of facts in themselves but of the sense that people make of facts. "A constructivist curriculum, however, prioritises students applying their intelligence to data to construct their own understanding" (Hinchey 1998:52).

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASES OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

According to Terwel (1999:195), the constructivist movement, has its roots in a long-standing philosophical tradition (von Glasersfeld 1991). He notes that although constructivism in education can be seen as a recent branch of the cognitive sciences, there is, nevertheless, a direct link to the pragmatism of Charles S. Peirce, William James and John Dewey. He notes that the constructivist movement in recent cognitive psychology has re-emphasised the active roles students play in acquiring knowledge and the social construction of knowledge has been an important principle in the socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky & Wertsch, in Terwel 1999:195). With reference to von Glasersfeld, Ernest states that:

> The clearest exposition of constructivism is due to von Glasersfeld, who distinguishes two basic principles. The first is common to all constructivist positions: 'knowledge is not passively receives [*sic*] but actively built by the cognizing subject'. Acceptance of this principle, coupled with a rejection of an epistemologically sceptical principle results in the weak form called 'information processing' constructivism. This is largely based on the metaphor and sometimes the conscious model of the mind as computer. The mind as computer actively processes information and data, calling up various routines and procedures, organising memorisation and retrieval of data.
>
> (Ernest 1993:1)

Bodner (1985) emphasises that constructivist epistemology is focused on the learner's own construction of knowledge. This does not, however, mean that there is no accepted knowledge, rather than that. For learners to be able to make claim that they 'know' they need to have constructed their own meaning, to have made sense of the information. Piaget and Vygotsky see actual processes of making meaning somewhat differently and

this is what essentially distinguishes the radical constructivist approaches from the social constructivist approaches.

The radical epistemological version of constructivism

Von Glasersfeld's principle of radical constructivism addresses the nature and status of a learner's knowledge as the cognitive activity of making sense of experience. Knowledge therefore, is inescapably subjective. For Taylor (1993) this principle proposes that the individual learner's purposeful and subjective interpretations of his/her experiences of the physical and social world constitute the genesis of the individual's knowledge. This knowledge results, therefore, from a process of making sense of experience, and is an inherently purposeful problem-posing and problem-solving cognitive activity. For Taylor the individual's personally constructed knowledge remains viable for as long as it enables her/him to make sense successfully of his/her experiences. Determining the viability of one's own knowledge, according to him, is akin to a process of self-evaluation. This principle evokes an image of the learner as a self-regulated and autonomous thinker whose knowledge results from reflection on personal experience. This principle of radical constructivism proposes also that the individual learner's knowledge constitutes 'a conceptual lens through which his/her experienced world is observed and interpreted. It is not possible … to know the objective world as it really is … or to prove that any knowledge represents an absolutely true account of objective reality" (Taylor 1993:11).

The social epistemological version of constructivism

> … the social principle of constructivism extends epistemology beyond the individual's construction of subjective knowledge, acknowledges the central role of language in knowledge construction and radically reconceptualises the concept of the objectivity of … knowledge … While rejecting the absolutist notion of objectivity the second principle proposes that knowledge is constructed *intersubjectively*, that is, socially negotiated between significant others … This principle explains how independent cognising beings can hold highly compatible meanings and social perspectives.
>
> (Berger & Luckmann, in Taylor 1993:12)

Taylor (1993:12) is of the opinion that this principle is supported by modern linguistic theory that rejects the traditional objectivist notion that spoken and written language contain meaning that can be transmitted from person to person. Rather, the symbolism of communicated language

evokes subjective meaning in the hearer or reader that is dependent upon prior knowledge of the conventions of language (Lakoff; Lakoff & Johnson, in Taylor 1993:12). For Ernest (1993:2) social constructivism regards the individual subjects and the realm of the social as indissolubly interconnected. Social constructivism sees individuals and the larger social arenas as interconnected.

The critical epistemological version of constructivism

Critical constructivism is a social epistemology that addresses the socio-cultural context of knowledge construction and serves as a referent for the cultural reform as well as posing more questions through conversation and critical self-reflection. It looks at constructivism within a social and cultural environment but adds a critical dimension aimed at reforming the environment in order to improve the success of constructivism applied as a referent. A critical constructivist perspective, according to Taylor (1993:14), combines practical and emancipatory curriculum interests, and focuses pedagogical attention on the nexus between the subjective and intersubjective constitution of the classroom learning environment.

> In relation to pedagogical reform, a critical constructivist perspective adopts not only the radical and social constructivist perspectives on learning, but addresses also the constraining ideology that governs the curriculum and prefigures covertly the objectivist epistemology of much professional pedagogical practice. A critical constructivist perspective on pedagogical reform is concerned, therefore, with facilitating teachers' and students' critical awareness of the hidden curriculum of professional pedagogical practice which they perpetuate unwittingly, and which serves to disempower them from developing as autonomous intellectuals.
>
> (Taylor 1993:14)

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

In this paradigm, learning emphasises the process and not the product. How one arrives at a particular answer, and not the retrieval of an 'objectively true solution', is what is important. Learning is a process of constructing meaningful representations, of making sense of one's experiential world. In this process, students' errors are seen in a positive light and as a means of gaining insight into how they are organising their experiential world. The constructivist perspective has a tendency to privilege multiple truths, representations, perspectives and realities. For Ernest one of the weaknesses of radical constructivism is its view that learning is an individual enterprise.

> Its cognizing subject that appears to be near-hermetically sealed in a privately constructed experiential world of its own. Its representations of the world and indeed of other human beings are personal and idiosyncratic. Indeed, the construal of other persons is driven by whatever representations best fit the cognising subject's needs and purposes. Such a view makes it hard to establish a social basis for interpersonal communication, for shared feelings and concerns, let alone for shared values.
>
> (Ernest 1993:4)

The individualistic emphasis of radical constructivism is rejected by Van Harmelen (2000). She is of the opinion that knowledge is constructed by the learner through social interactions in the many contexts of day to day living.

SYNTHESIS

Hinchey (1998:39) maintains that positivists conceptualise knowledge as a thing and as verifiable information born of scientific investigation. Certain facts, truths, relationships exist in the world and if we apply ourselves to exploring the world methodologically, we can discover them. Knowledge is there, waiting for us to find it. Van Harmelen (2000) views this as a very narrow and incorrect interpretation of the concept knowledge. She contends that knowledge as a concept includes information, concepts, values and attitudes.

CONCLUSION

It is very important for every educator to understand the different epistemologies in order to be able to apply these theories of knowledge in practical teaching. The task of the behaviourist teachers is to become somewhat expert in what is known, and then pass information along to their students. The traditional hierarchy of teacher as the autocratic knower and learner as the unknowing, controlled subject studying to learn what the teacher knows begins to dissipate as teachers assume more of a facilitator's role and learners take on more ownership of the ideas. Cognitive psychologists, building on Piaget's ideas, have drawn our attention away from the traditional view of the mind as a 'black box' where we can accurately judge what goes in (stimulus) and what comes out (response).

As educators, in my view, we are constantly being challenged not to simply demand change for the sake of change. We are asked to critically examine the previous education system by looking at its strengths and weaknesses. We also need to be *au fait* with constructivism the theory guiding the reform process in our country. We are therefore, equally tasked to critically examine its strengths and weaknesses to make sure that we understand it well. We must guard against what Ernest (1993) regards as an "over-enthusiastic" or "uncritical" embracing of it or a failure to recognise its limitations. This view is strongly supported by Van Harmelen. She emphasises that:

> Current educational reform processes require teachers and learners to accept a theoretical shift. This means we are being asked to reassess critically the existing belief systems in which our practice is located and to adopt a new set of beliefs and practices. Lest, however, we simply exchange one set of educational 'myths' for another we need, firstly, to subject the origin of our existing beliefs to a critical scrutiny, and secondly to be convinced that the new theory we are asked to adopt will in fact be 'better' through an equally critical appraisal.
>
> (Van Harmelen 1998:25)

For Olivier (1998:39) to change a paradigm is disconcerting to all of us who learned well the old ways of seeing and now find ourselves challenged by new definitions of phenomena we thought we understood and/or by having our old definitions criticised.

REFERENCES

Aspin, D. (1995). Logical empiricism, post empiricism and education. In P. Higgs (Ed.), *Metatheories in philosophy of education (pp.21-49).* Johannesburg : Heinemann.

Bodner, G.M. (1985). Costructivism : A theory of knowledge. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 63(10), 873-877.

Ernest, P. (1993). *Putting the social back into constructivism.* Broederstroom : PMDE pre-conference proceedings.

Hinchey, P. (1998). *Finding freedom in the classroom : A practical introduction to critical theory*. New York : Peter Lang.

Olivier, C. (1998). Paradigm shifts and educational transformation in South Africa : Experiences from the Learning for Sustainability Project. In T. Squazzin & M. van Graan (Eds.), *Education reform and innovation in Namibia : How best can changes in classroom practice be implemented and supported?* Proceedings from the 1998 NIED Educational Conference (pp. 66-73). Windhoek : Gamsberg Macmillan.

Ozman, H., & Craver, S. M. (1986). *Behaviourism in education : Philosophical foundations of education* (3rd ed.). Columbus : Merill.

Taylor, P. C. S. (1993, April). *Critical constructivism : Towards a communicative rationality in the high school mathematics classroom.* American Educational Research Association, Atlanta : Georgia.

Terwel, J. (1999). Constructivism and its implications for curriculum theory and practice. *Curriculum Studies*, 31(2), 195-199.

Van Harmelen, U. (1995). Behaviourism, empiricism and education. In P. Higgs (Ed.), *Metatheories in philosophy of education* (51-67). Johannesburg : Heinemann.

Van Harmelen, U (1998). Is learner-centred education child-centred? In T. Squazzin & M. van Graan (Eds.), *Education reform and innovation in Namibia : How best can changes in classroom practice be implemented and supported?* Proceedings from the 1998 NIED Educational Conference (pp. 25-34). Windhoek : Gamsberg Macmillan.

Van Harmelen, U. (2000). *Introduction to education theory and practice*. BEd (Hons) lecture notes. Education department, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

Von Glasersfeld, E. (1995). *Radical constructivism : A way of knowing and learning.* London : The Falmer Press.

ACRONYMS USED

ADEA	-	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
BICS	-	Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills
CALP	-	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
EMIS	-	Education Management Information Systems
INSET	-	In-service Training
LOI	-	Language of Instruction
LOLT	-	Language of Learning and Teaching
PRESET	-	Pre-service Training
USA	-	United States of America

LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORY INFORMING THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

This paper offers a critical analysis of the theory which informs the study. As the present study focuses on language in literacy and education and in particular the Lower Primary phase and on training teachers for this phase, a number of relevant publications were consulted which included observations, views and findings on issues such as the medium of instruction, the role of the mother tongue, languages of wider distribution (international languages) such as English, French and Portuguese as well as the implementation of various language policies.

Namibia, Africa's last colony, attained independence in 1990. Historically it is a multi-ethnic multi-cultural and multi-lingual country like any other country in Africa or elsewhere in the world. Soon after independence, Namibia selected English as the official language of government and education. This represented a recognition on the part of the Namibian government for English as a world language and also that the ability to read, write and understand it was a key to science and technology and to the world of business and diplomacy. Equally important was the belief that English would promote national unity. However, according to Grant (1996:4), there were also concerns about "the status of the indigenous languages over the hegemony of English".

For Legère, Trewby & Van Graan (2000:2) "the Republic of Namibia's 1,6 million inhabitants speak linguistic varieties belonging to three major language phylae, namely Niger-Congo, Khoisan and Indo-European". The 1991 population census speaks of Kavango languages or Caprivi languages, thus avoiding the names of the languages as they are known by the inhabitants of those regions and used in Namibian schools. For instance, in Kavango there are at least five linguistic varieties, namely, Rukwangali, Rumbunza, Rushambyu, Rugciriku and Thimbukushu. The Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) statistics, however, contain a detailed list of names (see Tables 1& 2 on pp.7-8).

LANGUAGE AND THINKING

For Vygotsky language is critical for cognitive development as it provides the categories and concepts for thinking and means for expressing ideas and asking questions (Vygotsky 1989:82, 94). Davalos and Griffin (1999:542) offered convincing evidence that we use words to construct our interpretation of experience, conversely our experience shapes our language and in the culture of schools a concept does not exist until it has been named and its meaning shared with others. Language enables learners to interact with more capable peers and adults and later with written material, thus giving them a chance to share the accumulated knowledge of their environment (Parrila 1995:169). Danesi (1988:452) comes to the conclusion that formal training in the mother tongue is “an important factor in the development of global language proficiency in minority-language children and those children who have not developed a 'threshold' level of proficiency in their mother tongue will experience all kinds of learning difficulties".

LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND EDUCATION

> Language in literacy and education is an area in which language policies often result in exclusion. This holds true whether we are talking of the use of an indigenous official language in formal or non-formal school system. An obvious starting-point for a discussion of the problems and prospects of African languages in education is the historical antecedents, which continue to affect the fortunes of these languages in African education today.
>
> (Bamgbose 2000:48)

Bamgbose is of the opinion that the Christian missionaries established the tradition of using an African language as the medium of instruction for at least the first three years of primary education, and thereafter to continue teaching it as a subject. According to him the British administration generally endorsed this policy, while the French administration overruled it. Other European powers had the same policy as the French. “Belgium was an exception in that it allowed mother tongue instruction in the Congo. Of the British territories in Africa, only one country … did not have a practice of mother-tongue education and that is Sierra Leone” (Bamgbose 2000:49).

LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

For Costa and Marzano (1987:29) teaching and learning are predominantly linguistic phenomena; that is, we accomplish most of our learning through the daily exchange of words in classrooms. Language skills pervade every area of the school curriculum (Cummins 1984:132) and all academic and cognitive variables are strongly related to the four general language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). For Cole and Chan (1994:30) all the first-order-teaching principles, that form the basis of all competent teaching, deal with communication in the classroom. Good communication enhances a teacher's task of information organisation and control, class management, motivation and reinforcement, and the encouragement of independent learning. To be a good communicator requires more than just fluency with words; the teacher must be able to present messages in ways that learners can understand. Communication in the classroom is based on the meanings of thousands of words exchanged between teachers and learners, and unless the teacher and the learner understand each other, communication and education, *per se*, will be fruitless (Mwamwenda 1995:167). With reference to Vygotsky's theories, Parrila states that:

> Language gives us the control of our actions by breaking the stimulus-response chain; helps us to distance ourselves from the experienced reality and reflect upon it on a conceptual level; and finally literacy skills that we acquire in school open up the whole new world of dialogues, ideas, experiences and possibilities beyond the space and time limitations of out [sic] physical existence. The intellect is formed at school in the first place, by securing learning with insight.
>
> (Parrila 1995:181)

For Gunter, Estes and Schwab (1995:97) to know a subject is to participate in a specific way of thinking, to become disciplined in thought with other people whose thought processes are no different from one's own. In order to learn with insight, the learner requires from the teacher an accurate explanation of concepts and problem-solving skills. In the process of concept development, learners learn to think about their own thinking and to understand how concepts originate. A limited knowledge of the language of teaching and learning undoubtedly contributes to a lack of academic involvement (Feuerstein 1979:51) because language as a means of communication carries the whole teaching procedure. In the so-called English-medium classrooms, teachers are often compelled to use an African language (code switching) in order to

enhance communications and understanding. In a research carried out by Davids it was found that "in one class the learners did not know the English word for a mug. The teacher had to fall back on the mother tongue … and immediately the learners responded" (Davids 2000:113). Vinjevold (1999:220) also reports on the general use of the mother tongue in so-called "straight-for-English" schools.

Young refers to Appel and Muysken (1990:105) who state that "… children can reach high levels of competence in their second language if their first language development, especially usage of certain functions of language relevant to schooling and the development of vocabulary and concepts, is strongly promoted by their environment". Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa (1976) made a distinction between "surface fluency" and "conceptual-linguistic knowledge". Cummins (1984:137) formalised these differences in terms of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) as the manifestation of language proficiency in everyday communicative contexts and of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) as the manipulation of language in decontextualized academic situations. It is important that learners should learn to think and function in their first language up to CALP level and then they can transfer to the new language the system of meanings they already possess in their own language (Young 1995:67; Luckett 1995:75). For Cummins (1984:6) this model suggests "… that strong promotion of literacy in the minority language (mother-tongue) is likely to be an important component of any educational programme that aspires to reverse the pattern of minority student school failure".

According to Luckett (1995:75) the Threshold Project (1990) showed that many black learners suffer the ill effects of subtractive bilingualism. The learners could not explain in English what they already knew in their first languages; nor could they transfer into their first languages the new knowledge that they had learnt through English. Luckett (1995:76) comes to the conclusion that they have failed to achieve CALP in either language and recommends that learners should not be forced to use a second language as the medium of instruction before they have achieved CALP using their first language as the medium of instruction. This crisis is real, as confirmed by a Malian scholar, Kassim Kone, who writes:

> So far in Africa, we have failed to educate our people. Much of this is due to Africans educated in the Western system, and from the Western perspective,

> who have learned to understand, speak, read and write in languages other than their own. Our being educated in another language is not a problem in and of itself, but the most serious problem resides in our inability to communicate to our … daughter or niece, son or nephew, the farmers, the herders and the fishermen … what we have learned at school. If you happen to be educated and you are African, ask yourself: 'How much of what I have learned can I translate in an understandable way to the people who speak my mother tongue?'
>
> (Kone, as quoted in Hutchison 1998:1-2)

African languages as a subject

Bamgbose notes that unlike the use of African languages as a teaching medium, there is greater tolerance for the teaching of these languages as a subject in the curriculum. There are, however, a number of problems concerning teachers, materials, methodology, status and attitudes. Teachers of African languages are not given the same rigorous training in methodology as compared with teachers of English. "… in several countries, no special training is required for a person to teach an African language as a subject" (Bamgbose 2000:53). This statement holds true for Namibia as reported by Legère, Trewby & Van Graan, that one misconception prevalent in pre-independent Namibia "… unfortunately still persists to date, that speaking a language qualifies anybody with a minimum of training for teaching in lower primary grades" (Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:8). Bamgbose further notes that:

> The prestige of teachers of these languages is also low among colleagues on the teaching staff as well as students. In fact, quite often, students make fun of African language teachers. What is even worse is that the self-esteem of the teachers is also low as they struggle to 'redeem' their image by striving to show that they can teach some other subjects as well. This way, they will not be labelled exclusively as teachers of African languages.
>
> (Bamgbose 2000:54)

The Lower Primary phase

There is sufficient evidence these days to show that mother tongue tuition in the early years of school is essential for full cognitive development. Our mother tongues and cultures are passports to reaching our potential. Recently African researchers have studied the issue of the medium of instruction in Lower Primary in various sub-Saharan countries. Their papers resulted in a background document which underlines:

> Linguists and educational psychologists agree that the use of the mother tongue as language of instruction in the early years of education has proven advantages, especially where the development of cognitive faculties is concerned. Conversely, it has been demonstrated that classroom use of a language which is not the language already spoken by the child results in cognitive and pedagogical difficulties.
>
> (ADEA 1996:5)

For Dutcher despite the hundreds of research studies on acquisition of first and second languages, many myths and misconceptions continue to persist about children and language learning. According to research:

> - Children require at least 12 years to learn their first language;
> - Children do not learn second languages more quickly and easily than adults;
> - Older children and adolescents are more skilled than younger children in learning a second language;
> - The development of the child's first language with its related cognitive development is more important than more exposure to a second language;
> - Children in school settings need to learn academic language skills, as well as social communication skills;
> - Children learn a second language in different ways, depending on their culture, their group, and their individual personality [*sic*].
>
> (Dutcher 1995:vii)

Bloch (2001), citing Bamgbose and Akinaso, notes that many mother tongue experimental studies have been carried out in several African countries. Most have concentrated on teaching through the mother tongue only for the first three years of primary school. "From a pedagogical perspective this is not ideal, as among other things, research indicates that the skills required in an additional language for academic learning take … five or more years to develop" (Ramirez, as cited in Bloch 2001:5). According to Gersten (1999) noted scholars in the field feel that learners should be taught all academic subjects in their native language for no fewer than five, and preferably seven years.

Languages in the Lower Primary education in Namibia

Table 1 The different Namibian languages

Language	Number of speakers	Percentage
Other European languages	5 299	0.4%
Setswana	6 050	0.4
Other African languages	8 291	0.6%
English	10 941	0.7%
German	12 827	1%
San	27 229	2%
Caprivi	66 008	5%
Otjiherero	112 916	8%
Afrikaans	133 324	9%
Rukavango	136 649	10%
Khoekhoegowab	175 554	13%
Oshiwambo	713 919	51%

Source: Population and Housing Census (1991:65)

Table 1 lists the names of different languages in Namibia. It is interesting to note that this list avoids mentioning the various languages spoken in the Caprivi, Kavango, Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshana and Oshikoto Regions. These languages are labelled as Caprivi, Rukavango and Oshiwambo according to the names of the ethnic groups residing in those regions. The languages spoken in these regions, however, have their own names as listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Home languages of learners

Language	Total	Primary Phase Grade 1 - 7	Secondary Phase Grade 8 - 12	Other
National	**528 928**	**396 252**	**130 577**	**2 129**
Afrikaans	37 588	24 664	12 184	740
English	3 2487	2 221	1 122	144
German	2 318	1 383	885	50
Khoekhoegowab	53 342	41 105	11 913	324
Oshikwanyama	121 473	95 004	26 291	178
Oshindonga	77 807	57 500	20 199	108
Other Oshiwambo languages	90 841	66 491	24 230	120
Other Caprivi languages	18 490	12 358	6 129	3
Other European languages	1 082	401	643	38
Otjiherero	38 770	27 313	11 142	315
Rugciriku	11 341	9 222	2 118	1
Rukwangali	28 171	23 106	5 062	3
San languages	3 930	3 667	237	26
Setswana	1 612	1 110	484	18
Shishambyu	2 805	2 203	602	•
Silozi	5 983	4 055	1 918	10
Thimbukushu	7 951	6 676	1 275	•
Other languages	21 967	17 773	4 143	51

(Adapted from EMIS Education Statistics 2001:40)

Table 2 contains a detailed list of home languages spoken in Namibia. Most of these languages have been confirmed after independence as the media of instruction and learning as well as subjects from Grade Four upwards. Some of these languages are currently also being taught at university level. The language currently called Rumanyo, that will be the subject of my research, is a merger between Rugciriku and Shishambyu (bolded on Table 2). Shaded on Table 2 are the names of the languages recognised for use in Namibian schools as well as tertiary institutions, spoken in the Caprivi, Kavango, Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshana and Oshikoto Regions.

In his opening statement as Minister of Basic Education and Culture, Mutorwa, summarised some of the important points as stipulated in the language policy for schools in Namibia:

> 1. The equality of all national languages regardless of the number of speakers or the level of development of a particular language;
> 2. All language policies must consider the cost of implementation, in particular the economic/financial cost;
> 3. The fact that language is a means of transmitting culture and cultural identity;
> 4. The fact that for pedagogical reasons, it is ideal for learners to study through their own language, particularly in the early years of schooling when basic skills of reading, writing and concept formation are acquired;
> 5. The need for learners to be proficient enough in English, the official language, at the end of the seven-year primary school cycle either to gain access to further education or to be effective participants in society;
> 6. The expectation that language policy should enhance the development of unity in society.
>
> (Mutorwa, in Legère 1996:8-9)

Swarts observes that:

> … for pedagogical reasons, studying in one's … mother tongue, particularly in the early years of schooling, will help the child acquire basic skills of reading, writing, and concept formation. It is this point that most of our communities fail to understand. In many cases where communities have opted for a different medium of instruction in their schools, we have failed them in that nobody from us as professionals took time to explain the implications of such decisions to them to help them understand the pedagogical advantages of a child learning in its mother tongue at least for the first three years of schooling.
>
> (Swarts, in Legère 1996:19)

Mutumba is rather critical of the current situation which he describes as follows:

> Some countries, such as Namibia, exhibit clear discrepancies ... between policy statements and their actual implementation process ... Although the language policy ideally supports mother tongue education, because of inadequate resources … it is difficult ... to implement mother tongue instruction in Grades 1-3. This is coupled with ... the reluctance of the elite group to promote indigenous languages ... The shortage of qualified teachers is a serious threat towards the successful realisation of the language policy goals.
>
> (Mutumba, as quoted in Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:46)

LANGUAGES OF INSTRUCTION AND LANGAUGE POLICIES – A SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH

Experiences from Africa

Among the most authoritative research carried out in Africa was that involving Nigeria's national policy on mother-tongue literacy and the Ife experimental Project.

> The Ife Project started in 1970 and was occasioned by the feeling that the nation's mother tongue education policy … produced no more than imperfect learners. To put this assertion to test the Nigerian State of Ife conducted an experiment on the use of the mother tongue as … LoI throughout the 6 years of primary education.
>
> (Akinaso 1993:264)

A comparative study of the Ife experimental project and the mainstream Nigerian schools was carried out. The students in the Ife project scored higher than their counterparts in the regular schools both academically and cognitively. The major lesson to be learnt from the project is that the hitherto unquestioned transition from a mother tongue medium to English at the beginning of the fourth year of primary education may not be the right policy after all. It is, however, necessary to note the remarks made by Akinaso regarding these results:

> … the results of the [Ife] project were compounded by a combination of several non-linguistic factors, including curricular changes; the use of new course materials; the use of experienced teachers for whom additional training was also provided; changes in classroom practices; and greater attention … to experimental classes.
>
> (Akinaso 1993:70)

In Mali, in 1985, a similar evaluation of cognitive benefits for students in mother tongue education projects was carried out. A comparative longitudinal study using relatively small samples was done. One hundred and fifteen students in the experimental schools were compared with 340 students in French-based schools at the same level (first grade) over six years. Accordingly 46.1% of the cohort in the experimental schools made it to the sixth grade, but this was true of only 7.5% in the French-based schools. Despite its methodological weakness this study points to the use of the mother tongue as a factor reducing the repetition of grades.

Although other factors may have contributed to the success of the pilot schools, the study proves that the use of the mother tongue in education is an important factor in academic success (ADEA 1996:5).

In South Africa, a bilingual transition programme, known as the Threshold Project, was studied in 1990. The mother tongue as the medium of instruction was replaced by English in the third year of primary school, which resulted in the experience that "pupils could not explain in English what they already knew in their first languages, nor could they transfer into their first languages the new knowledge that they had learnt through English" (*ibid.*). The principal conclusion of this study was that bilingual programmes in which a language other than the student's mother tongue is used before a certain age or a certain "cognitive level" is achieved are not likely to be successful.

Experiences from outside Africa

The issue of which language to teach in is not specific to Africa. Useful lessons can also be learned from experiences of other countries, such as Britain and the USA, even though the context differs. Both Great Britain and the United States of America have experienced a large influx of immigrants from all over the world. With immigration comes the issue of how best to achieve cultural and linguistic integration of the various ethnic groups into the social fabric. "Initially, both Britain and the USA chose total English immersion of immigrant children. However, by the 1980s, the flaws in the immersion theory became evident and the academic performance of immigrant children became a real concern" (*ibid.*).

From 1978 to 1981, the University of Bradford in Great Britain observed the effects of a yearly bilingual programme on five-year-old native Punjabi (an Indian language) speakers. A control group using only English scored much lower than children who were taught partly in Punjabi and partly in English. Linguists have demonstrated that language and thought are inextricably interwoven and that for their cognitive development all children need a language on which to pin and develop their thoughts (Cummins 1979).

LITERACY LEARNING

In this section I used the term "literacy learning" as opposed to "literacy teaching", the term favoured by Legère, Trewby & Van Graan, to refer both to literacy learning and literacy teaching.

Legère, Trewby & Van Graan (2000:47) the term literacy or functional literacy is often used interchangeably in Namibia, referring to reading and writing skills. Davies notes that:

> During the 20th century literacy has broadened its scope beyond reading and writing. The term 'multiple literacies' expresses one type of broadening by validating often unacknowledged skilled language practices. A plausible interpretation of the broadening to more and more domains is that literacy has extended its provenance from the apparently straight forward sense of demands of contemporary education. According to this interpretation, contemporary literacy and schooling are synonymous … Just as schooling used to mean becoming literate in reading and writing so present-day literacy means schooled in multiple literacies.
>
> (Davies, as cited in Limage 1998:353)

Cook-Gumperz, describes it as "a 'socially constructed phenomenon' which is formed through interactions in a variety of contexts and not the mere acquisition of decoding and encoding skills. To be considered literate will have different meanings in different contexts" (Cook-Gumperz, as cited in Jackson 1993:7). After having considered the different definitions of literacy Jackson (1993:3) summarises literacy as being "much more than the 'simple' acts of reading and writing; it involves notions of power, of culture and community and of social learning" (Jackson 1993:11). Jackson further refers to the meaning of literacy in a school context, where children engage in literacy events, of which reading and writing are only two of these events, in order to 'make meaning'.

LEARNER-CENTRED EDUCATION

Modern teaching and learning are characterised by a movement away from the behaviouristic process-product view of learning towards a more constructivist cognitive perspective with the emphasis on teaching learners how to think (Woolfolk 1995:240). Teaching and learning in Namibia is also moving towards constructivist principles as Legère, Trewby & Van Graan observe:

> Nowadays, the discourse around learning theories in Namibia seems to be dominated by constructivist viewpoints. What can be hoped for in terms of learning in the Namibian classroom is that learning takes place in a specific cultural context and that learners' knowledge of reality is constructed through new experiences and interaction which are linked to learners' existing knowledge. This only becomes knowledge when learners understand the nature of this reality.
>
> (Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:47)

For Vygotsky children learn when they learn within their zone of proximal development, which is the distance between their actual development and the level of potential development which usually realises under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, as cited in Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:48).

According to Bloch a learner-centred approach to early literacy learning is guided by the following research and pedagogical insights:

- Young children are active learners. They search for and construct their own meaning as they learn. The teacher's role is to facilitate, support and extend this learning process;
- Young children are naturally curious, playful, and imaginative. When allowed and encouraged, they use these qualities to explore and learn;
- Effective education begins with what children know, and builds on that. Young children know how oral language works, and are competent language users. They have learned to talk by talking;
- Literacy learning involves extending and expanding their linguistic ability and skills into other aspects of language;
- Reading, writing, speaking and listening are all aspects of language. Learning happens in an integrated way – knowledge in one aspect of language aids learning in other aspects;

- To understand how to read and write, children need to be motivated. Motivation comes through understanding why people read and write – what are these skills used for, what they achieve for people in their daily lives?
- Children learn to read by actually reading and to write by actually writing. The many complex skills that make up literacy are learned best when they are taught at the same time as children begin to apply them using reading and writing in purposeful ways (emergent reading and writing);
- Immature understandings and mistakes indicate learning and are an essential part of progress;
- Language learning happens best when it is communicative, participatory, and involves active learning;
- The practices of reading and writing develop through using reading and writing for relevant purposes. The development of African languages as written languages, and their use for young children's education contribute significantly to developing reading and writing habits in communities;
- The environment in which literacy learning takes place needs to be one where children see regular reading and writing happening and where they get the opportunities to behave like readers and writers. This means that there needs to be sufficient appropriate material for reading and for writing.

(Bloch 2002:11-12)

The position of English as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT)

Concerning the position of the ex-colonial languages in teaching and learning, Bamgbose (2000:45) reminds us that "the emphasis on the need for African languages must not be taken to mean that imported languages such as English and French do not have an important role to play in post-colonial African countries".

For Chick (1992:276) English has "to a large extent escaped the antagonism that is directed towards ex-colonial languages". Mkabela and Luthuli (1997: 53) note that, even in the new South Africa, African languages appear to be gradually ceding importance to English. African people have become sensitive about ethnicity and they feel that the enhancement of the eleven official languages will promote ethnicity and that English will bring about unity. De Klerk and Bosch (1998:43-45) refer to a world-wide steady shift in language allegiance in favour of English, which in extreme cases may result in the abandonment of the mother tongue. For Swarts (2001:49) "many resources are being devoted to the improvement of English teaching and learning in schools as English has been treated as being somehow 'more equal' than Namibian languages ..."

TEACHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

As far as preparing pre-service teachers to support literacy development, Morrow and Rand propose "a pre-service framework which is built on the knowledge base needed by teachers of early literacy" (Morrow and Rand, as cited in Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:48). As far as the expectations of the effects of pre-service teacher education are concerned, Craig and others propose that beginner teachers ideally need initial preparation and teaching strategies in the subject matter they will teach, verbal competency in the medium of instruction, some instructional materials, knowledge of how to use these materials and basic classroom management skills in managing both learners and the learning environment (Craig *et al*., as cited in Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:49). Judging from his own experience in Madagascar, Komarek is rather sceptical with respect to pre-service training (PRESET). He is of the opinion that in-service training (INSET) is cost-effective and sustainable because:

- it is not linked to significant recurrent costs and reaches a great number if not all of the teaching personal [*sic*];
- the infrastructure of in-service training already exists;
- at the opposite of pre-service training it is considered as politically unimportant and left therefore to regional educational authorities;
- adapted methodologies can be rapidly developed and applied.

(Komarek 1997:3)

Brown, however, has a different view on in-service training especially with regard to short face-to-face INSET courses. According to Brown "… many INSET courses do not achieve a great deal or that what they achieve is different from what is originally intended" (Brown 2000:41). Writing about a short face-to-face INSET course that he ran, Lamb records that "very few of the ideas presented on the course were taken up in the way anticipated by the tutors, mainly because of the mediating effects of the participants' own beliefs about teaching and learning" (Lamb, as cited in Brown 2000:41).

To be more effective he emphasised that such courses should confront participants 'with their routine practice and the values it is intended to serve' and that instead of tutors recommending ready-made solutions for pre-determined problems, "it should be the participants themselves who, on the basis of the expanded awareness of their own practice, determine the specific areas

of their teaching that they wish to develop and formulate their own agenda for change in the classroom" (*ibid*.).

Brown notes that "there is evidence to suggest that longer INSET courses … can be … as effective as initial full-time pre-service courses …" (Brown 2000:42). For Brown the strengths of the distance education mode are that:

> it is flexible in that there are no constraints of time or location, it usually costs less, it is accessible in that it can reach large numbers, it can be made specific to learners' needs, it gives learners who would not otherwise have benefited, a second chance, it is easier to ensure standardisation of materials therefore leading to better quality control and it encourages learner autonomy through self-directed learning.
>
> (Brown 2000:42)

Brown continues:

> … distance courses are not universally recognised and are often perceived as inferior because quality of education is hard to monitor; methodologically, there might be a tendency towards rote learning in the absence of discussion; there may be logistical constraints such as isolation of the learners and limited chances for feedback, thus relying too heavily on learner motivation.
>
> (Brown 2000:42)

In support of distance courses McGrath asserts that:

> provided a programme … exploits participants' own daily experience and working environment in such a way that they are encouraged not only to make connections between theory and practice but also to generate through reflection their own theories, it is more likely to be successful in promoting steady long-term change than a programme with comparable content which is delivered face to face.
>
> (McGrath, as quoted in Brown 2000:42)

CONCLUSION

The review attempted to indicate that literacy teaching and learning can be enhanced if early literacy is taught through the mother tongue. The most important conclusion from the research and experience reviewed in this paper is that when learning is the goal, including that of learning a second language, the child's first language should be used as the medium of instruction in the early years of schooling. Learning via the language in pre-school is not enough. The child requires at least 12 years to develop his/her first language – six years before formal schooling and six years within the school. For optimum results, the first language should be continued as the language of instruction through primary school as the child is learning the second language. If feasible, the first language of the student should be included among the subjects in secondary school when the language of instruction has changed.

The review confirmed the well-known fact that the first language is essential for the initial teaching of reading, and for comprehension of subject matter. It is the necessary foundation for the cognitive development upon which acquisition of the second language is based.

The review also indicated that for learners to acquire literacy skills prospective teachers must be prepared through a full-time course to have sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to interpret the syllabuses, select and relate literacy content and methods on the basis of a shared analysis of the learners. On the other hand, the review also highlighted the views of some scholars against PRESET as the only mode for training teachers to acquire skills. To them the in-service training mode is cost-effective in the sense that what is spent on a teacher educator today will take more than three to four years to be felt in the economy, whereas what is spent on a serving teacher, will almost immediately be felt in terms of better performance on the job.

REFERENCES

Akinaso, F.N. (1993). Policy and experiment in mother tongue literacy in Nigeria. *International Review of Education*, 39(4), 255–285.

Appel, R., & Muysken, P. (1990). *Language contact and bilingualism.* London : Edward Arnold.

Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). (1996). The role of African language in education and sustainable development. *ADEA Newsletter*, 8(4), 1-16.

Bamgbose, A. (2000). *Language and exclusion : The consequences of language policies in Africa.* Hamburg : Transaction.

Bloch, C. (2001, January). *Learner–centred education and mother tongue early childhood literacy education.* Workshop on the Upgrading of African Languages, NIED, Okahandja.

Bloch, C. (2002). *Material development : Literacy course book.* Workshop report, PRAESA, University of Cape Town.

Brown N. A. (2000*). Bridging the distance : An impact assessment of the English language teaching methodology component of the Namibian BETD INSET programme.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Exeter, Exeter.

Chick, K. (1992). Language Policy in Education. In R. McGregor & A. McGregor (Eds.), *Mcgregor's Education Alternatives* (pp271-292). Cape Town : Juta & Co. Ltd.

Cole, P.G., & Chan, L.K.S. (1994). *Teaching principles and practice*. New Jersey : Prentice Hall of Australia (Pty) Ltd.

Costa, A. L., & Marzano, R. (1987). Teaching language thinking. *Educational Leadership, 45*, 29-33.

Cummins, J. (1979). *Cognitive academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimal age question and some other matters*. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, ON, Canada.

Cummins, J. (1984). *Bilingualism and special education : Issues in assessment and pedagogy*. Clevedon, Avon : Multilingual Matters.

Danesi, M. (1988). Mother tongue training in school as a determinant of global language proficiency : A Belgian case study. *International Review of Education, 34*, 439-454.

Davalos, R.A., & Griffin, G. (1999). Empowering teachers and students to change through shared language. *Education*, 119(3), 542-550.

Davids, L.S. (2000). *The pedagogical advantages of mother tongue instruction in the formative years of schooling : The case of Khoekhoegowab.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Namibia, Windhoek.

De Klerk, V., & Bosch, B. (1998). Afrikaans to English : A case study of language shift. *South African Journal of Linguistics*, 16(2), 43-51.

Dutcher, N. (1995). *The use of first and second languages in education : Review of international experience*. Washington : The World Bank.

Feuerstein, R. (1979). *The dynamic assessment of retarded performers : The learning potential assessment device, theory, instruments, and techniques*. Baltimore : University Park Press.

Gersten, R. (1999). The changing face of bilingual education. *Educational Leadership*, 56(7), 41-45.

Gunter, M.A., Estes, T.H. & Schwab, J. (1995). *Instruction : A models approach.* Boston : Allyn & Bacon.

Grant, S.R. (1996). Toward identity and community in Namibia and the United States : A disturbing contrast. *Social Studies*, 87(2), 1-68.

Hutchison, J. (1998, April). *Approaching the question of language of instruction in African education.* World Bank Language of Instruction Seminar, Dar Es Salaam.

Jackson M. (1993). *Literacy*. London : David Fulton Publishers.

Komarek, K. (1997). *Cost-effectiveness and sustainability of contributions to MTT in Africa : The Malagasy experience and its strategical consequences.* Human Development Week, The World Bank.

Legère, K. (Ed.). (1996). *African languages in Basic Education.* Proceedings of the first workshop on African Languages in Basic Education. Windhoek : Gamsberg Macmillan.

Legère, K., Trewby, R. & Van Graan, **M.** (2000). *The implementation of the Namibian language policy in education : Lower primary grades and pre-service teacher education*. Report on language policy research. National Educational Research Association.

Limage, L. (Ed.). (1998). *Comparative perspectives on language and literacy*. Dakar : UNESCO Regional Office.

Luckett, K. (1995). National additive bilingualism : Towards a language plan for South African education. In K. Heugh, A. Siegrühn & P. Plüddermann (Eds.), *Multilingual education for South Africa* (pp.73-78). Isando : Heinemann.

Ministry of Basic Education, Sport & Culture, Namibia. (2001). *EMIS Education Statistics.* Windhoek : MBESC.

Mkabela, N.Q., & Luthuli, P.C. (1997). *Towards an African philosophy of education*. Pretoria : Kagiso Tertiary.

Mwamwenda, T.S. (1995). *Educational Psychology : An African perspective*. Durban : Butterworths.

National Planning Commission, Namibia. (2002). *Preliminary report 2001 population and housing census*. Windhoek : NPC.

Parrila, R.K. (1995). Vygotskian views on language and planning in children. *School Psychology International*, *16*, 167-183.

Skutnabb-kangas, T., & Toukomaa, P. (1976). *Teaching migrant children's mother tongue and learning the language of the host country in the context of the socio-cultural situation of the migrant family*. Helsinki : The Finnish National Commission for UNESCO.

Swarts, P. (2001). Language policy implementation in Namibia : Realities, challenges and politics. In R. Trewby & S. Fichtat (Eds.), *Language and development in Africa : Making the right choices (*pp. 1-245). Windhoek : Gamsberg Macmillan.

Vinjevold, P. (1999). Language issues in South African classrooms. In N. Taylor & P. Vinjevold **(**Eds.), *Getting learning right - report on the President's Education Initiative Project* (pp. 205-226). Wits : The Joint Education Trust.

Vygotsky, L. (1989). *Thought and language.* Massachussetts Institute of Technology : Haliday Lithograph.

Woolfolk, A.E. (1995). *Educational Psychology.* Boston : Allyn & Bacon.

Young, D. (1995). The role and status of the first language in education in a multilingual society. In K. Heugh, A. Siegrühn & P. Plüddermann (Eds.), *Multilingual education for South Africa* (pp. 63-70). Isando : Heinemann.

RHODES UNIVERSITY

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION

(GENERAL EDUCATION THEORY AND PRACTICE)

CANDIDATE: PAULINUS HAINGURA

NO. 02H2884

SUPERVISORS: U. VAN HARMELEN

W. HUGO

PROVISIONAL TITLE:

Developing literacy through the mother tongue:

Cases of three schools in the Kavango Region

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1. FIELD OF RESEARCH: General Education Theory and Practice

PROVISIONAL TITLE: Developing literacy through the mother tongue : Cases of three Schools in the Kavango Region.

2. CONTEXT

Soon after independence the Ministry of Education put in-service teacher education at the top of its priority list because of the large proportion of unqualified and under-qualified teachers at the time. Although various in-service training (INSET) courses were introduced, no major studies were undertaken to look at their impact on the classroom practice of teachers who have gone through them.

My interest in this field is partly as an Education Officer for the Rumanyo language subject developing curricula for Grades1-12. I am currently also involved (as one of the writers) in the writing of Lower Primary (LP) mother tongue (MT) literacy materials, sponsored by a German Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). After the production of these literacy materials I shall be involved in the training of teachers to enable them to use these materials. I am thus interested in finding out to what extent the current learning support materials (LSMs) contribute to the teachers' success or otherwise in achieving their teaching objectives. This study aims to explore whether attending various INSET courses changed the classroom practice of LP teachers. It also aims to explore whether the use of current LSMs enables teachers to achieve their teaching objectives.

This study was also accentuated by the claim made by Swarts (1996:13) that "… many Namibian teachers are neither equipped to teach literacy in the mother tongue in Lower Primary nor to facilitate the switch to English in Grade 4".

3. THE GOALS OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study is to explore, through a small sample of case studies, whether undergoing various INSET courses changed the classroom practice of serving teachers or made any difference at all in the way they teach. It also aims to explore whether the use of current LSMs enables teachers to accomplish their goals. It focuses on the following key questions:

- To what extent do these courses equip serving teachers with the know-how and skills to develop learners' literacy in the Lower Primary?
- To what extent do serving teachers apply the different literacy teaching approaches which they have learnt in the in-service courses?
- To what extent are the schools equipped with basic LSMs to promote literacy in the Lower Primary?

4. METHODOLOGY

This research will be based on and guided by the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm affords a researcher an opportunity to understand the situation of the phenomenon by putting himself/herself in the shoes of his/her subjects, in their life world, thereby learning through the process of interaction the subjects' perceptions, interpretations and the meanings which they give to their actions (Adler and Adler 1987; Cantrell 1993).

While I will use tables and may rank material, it is unlikely that I will use other statistical devices, my data will be qualitative rather than quantitative in line with Bassey's claim that:

> Sometimes interpretive data can be analysed numerically but more usually they are not open to the quantitative statistical analysis used by positivists. They are usually richer … than positivist data and, perhaps because of this quality, the methodology of the interpretive researchers is described as 'qualitative'.
>
> (Bassey 1999:43)

The proposed study will follow a qualitative approach. This is in line with Fraenkel and Wallen's suggestion that "if (one) may want to obtain a more holistic picture of what goes on in a particular situation or setting or … classroom or school then qualitative research methods will serve the purpose" (Fraenkel & Wallen, as quoted in Munganda 2001:100).

I will make use of the case study approach which allows for an in-depth search for, and an understanding of recurring patterns of events, regularities and the complexities of actions, and the collection of data in a context-specific situation (Adler & Adler 1987; Robson 1993). For Gall, Borg & Gall (1996:28) "postpositivist researchers develop knowledge by collecting primarily verbal data through the intensive study of cases and then subjecting these data to analytic induction".

The structure that follows should be viewed as propositional. As Stones (1988) observes, because social phenomena tend to be in a perpetual state of flux, a pre-structured research procedure would not fit in with the interpretive paradigm.

I plan to conduct my research in the Kavango Region. I will gather data through interviews and classroom observation. Semi-structured interview schedules will be developed to collect information from participants. As Cantrell (1993) and Stones (1988) observe, interviews allow for the collection of data in the subjects' own words, thereby affording the researcher an opportunity to discover subjects' perceptions, interpretations and the meanings, which they give to their actions. Stones (1988) suggests that interviews must be open-ended and conducted in an informal, non-directive manner, with the interviewer trying to have minimum influence on the subject. I also aim to observe dimensions of interactions, relationships, actions and events within the classroom situation.

For Bassey (1999:43) interpretive researchers "recognize that by asking questions or by observing they may change the situation which they are studying. They recognize themselves as potential variables in the inquiry, and so in writing their reports, may use personal pronouns".

The schools will be purposefully selected, the main criteria for selection being the setting of the school (rural/urban) as well as serving teachers who went through various in-service upgrading programmes to teach in the Lower Primary, even though Ekleben (1997:11) cautions that it is not necessary in case studies to select participants according to certain variables. The schools to be studied are situated in areas well known to me and my relationship with the schools and teachers

facilitated the study. This is in line with the observation made by Adler and Adler (1987) that an opportunistic membership role enhances the chances of collecting data because the researcher and the subjects share the same *weltanschaung* or world view.

I will analyse the data by using qualitative data analysis techniques looking for naturally occurring units and reducing them to natural meaning units to check for regular patterns of events and themes (Stones 1988; Robson 1993; Cantrell 1993). Data analysis will commence while the interviews are taking place. A more detailed analysis of the interviews will follow after I have completed the interviews, where themes and concepts are identified and explored, followed by a final analysis, which will focus on a comparison of different categories of themes and concepts, the identification of variations and connections between them and ultimately the integration of the various themes and concepts to result in an interpretation of the research area (Rubin and Rubin 1995).

The estimated time frame for the initial fieldwork is two weeks, beginning Monday, April 7 2003 until Thursday, April 17 2003. This should allow ample time in each of the three schools selected for observation and interviews.

I shall respect the participants to the study throughout the process, as I regard this to be very important during any research study. I shall follow the necessary ethical guidelines to ensure that participants to the study are not deceived, do not experience any form of distress, know what is going on during the research process and know that they are entitled to withdraw from the study at any time. In interacting with human subjects, I shall at all times gain consent before interviews are conducted and audio-taped. All participants will be assured of the confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of any information shared with me.

REFERENCES

Adler, P.A., & Adler, P. (1987). *Membership roles in field research.* Beverly Hill : Sage.

Bassey, M. (1999). *Case study research in educational settings*. Buckingham : Open University Press.

Cantrell, D.C. (1993). Alternative paradigms in environmental education research : The interpretive perspective. In R. Mrazek (Ed.), *Alternative paradigms in environmental education research* (pp. 81-104). Troy, Ohio : NAAEE.

Eckleben, H. (1997). *Problems experienced in English reading by multilingual, low socio-economic grade 4 Namibian learners, and the effect of a combined approach – single case studies.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Gall, M. D., Borg, W.R., & Gall, J.P. (1996). *Educational research : An introduction* (6th ed.). NY : Longman.

Munganda R. (2001). *Perceptions of African languages in education in Namibia : The case of Thimbukushu*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of the Western Cape, Bellville.

Robson, C. (1993). *Real world research* : *A resource for social scientist practitioner-researchers*. Oxford : Blackwell.

Rubin, H.J., & Rubin I.S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing : The art of hearing data.* London : Sage.

Stones, C. R. (1988). Research : Towards a phenomenological praxis. In D. Kruger (Ed.), *An introduction to phenomenological psychology* (pp141-155). Cape Town : Juta & Co. Ltd.

Swarts, P. (1996, July). *Language equality as a policy contradiction : The case of the Namibian language policy for schools*. International Seminar on Language Education in Africa, National Institute for Educational Development, Okahandja.

ACRONYMS USED

ALT	-	Additive Language Teaching
AT	-	Advisory Teacher
BES	-	Basic Education Support
BETD	-	Basic Education Teacher Diploma
BTL	-	Breakthrough to Literacy
DSE	-	German Foundation for International Development
EMIS	-	Education Management Information Systems
HOD	-	Head of Department
INSET	-	In-service training
JP	-	Junior Primary
LCE	-	Learner-Centred Education
LP	-	Lower Primary
LSMs	-	Learning Support Materials
MBESC	-	Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture
MOI	-	Medium of Instruction
MT	-	Mother Tongue
NAMPEP	-	Namibia Primary English Programme
NELLP	-	Namibia Early Literacy and Language Project
NIED	-	National Institute for Educational Development
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organisation
PRESET	-	Pre-service training
SIMs	-	Structured Instructional Materials
SLT	-	Subtractive Language Teaching
SP	-	Senior Primary
UP	-	Upper Primary
USAID	-	United States Agency for International Development

DEVELOPING LITERACY THROUGH THE MOTHER TONGUE: A CASE STUDY OF THREE SCHOOLS IN THE KAVANGO REGION

BY

PAULINUS HAINGURA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore whether in-service training courses have changed the classroom practice of serving teachers or made any difference at all in the way they teach. It also aims to explore whether the use of current learning support materials enable teachers to achieve their teaching objectives. The study used qualitative research methodology through a small sample of case studies involving three schools. Current reform theory suggests that teachers should know a variety of teaching techniques and approaches. Knowing different teaching techniques and approaches is believed to place teachers in a more favourable position to select approaches that best fit their situations. The core finding of this research is that Lower Primary teachers who undergo various in-service training courses become confused and are not able to select which approach to follow in the teaching-learning situation. Teachers, in these situations, usually resort to teaching in the "old" or traditional way. What also clearly emerges from this study is that the training offered in English is not well understood by many Lower Primary teachers. The study suggests that any training that is geared towards the improvement of these teachers' classroom practice should be provided in their mother tongues.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview and rationale

Before independence the design of in-service courses did not meet the training needs of Namibian teachers. Pomuti (2000:2) claims that prior to independence the in-service courses were designed without taking teachers' needs into consideration. According to her, initiatives were started before the country's independence to establish an alternative teacher training programme that took into account the needs of serving teachers. For Graham-Brown the training of many Namibian teachers has been in "the rigid and authoritarian methods of education … with no freedom or initiative allowed to the teacher. Retraining, would, therefore, need to include some rethinking of the teacher" (Graham-Brown, as cited in Brown 2000:14).

Since gaining independence substantial changes have taken place in the education sector in Namibia. The most important part of this reform has been the switch from Afrikaans to English as medium of instruction in schools. Alongside this teachers have been encouraged to use a more learner-centred approach through the introduction of a new teacher training course, the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) course (Brown 1990). The calibre of teachers needed for independent Namibia is clearly stated in the BETD Broad Curriculum.

> The future of Namibia is in the hands of the next generation, and the education and upbringing that they receive, are crucial to the well-being of each and every person and the future of the nation. The mission of teacher education in Namibia is to provide all children and young people with competent, fully qualified and committed teachers, who will provide them with an education that is equitable, relevant, meaningful, of high quality, and conducted in a stimulating and supportive atmosphere.
>
> (BETD INSET Programme Broad Curriculum 2003:1)

My interest in this field is partly as an Education Officer for the Rumanyo language subject developing curricula for Grades1-12. I am currently also involved (as one of the writers) in the writing of Lower Primary (LP) mother tongue (MT) literacy materials, sponsored by a German Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). After the production of these literacy materials I shall be involved in the training of teachers to enable them to use these materials. I am thus interested

in finding out to what extent the current learning support materials (LSMs) contribute to the teachers' success or otherwise in achieving their teaching objectives.

This study was also accentuated by the claim made by Swarts (1996:13) that "… many Namibian teachers are neither equipped to teach literacy in the mother tongue in Lower Primary nor to facilitate the switch to English in Grade 4".

Soon after independence the Ministry of Education put in-service teacher education at the top of its priority list because of the large proportion of unqualified and under-qualified teachers at the time. Although various in-service training (INSET) courses were introduced, no major studies were undertaken to look at their impact on the of teachers' classroom practice. Some project evaluations do take place but, as Damens puts it:

> Of prime concern … is whether we hear the voices of or opinions of the teachers regarding the quality of the language programmes. At the moment it seems that during the end-phase of a project evaluation the opinions of the bureaucrats and the experts or technical advisors are at the forefront, while the opinions of the teachers are relegated to feedback they have supplied during the short-term evaluation consultancy undertaken by the experts.
>
> (Damens 2001:7)

This study, therefore, is significant in the sense that it tries to bring the voices and opinions of the teachers. Furthermore it has a different focus from the other studies (Swarts 1998; Davids 2000; Pomuti 2000; Brown 2000 & Munganda 2001) in that none of those studies concentrated on the impact of short in-service courses on teachers' classroom practice. This study primarily aims to explore, through a small-scale study, involving three schools, whether undergoing the in-service courses changed the classroom practice of serving teachers or made any difference at all in the way they teach. Its secondary aim is to explore whether the use of LSMs, currently available in schools, enables teachers to achieve their teaching objectives. I used the term LSMs here, to refer both to resources that help the learners to learn and to the resources that help teachers to teach (teacher support materials).

The research was guided by the following key questions:

- To what extent do the INSET courses equip lower primary teachers with the know-how and skills to develop learners' literacy skills in the LP?
- To what extent are LP teachers able to apply the different literacy teaching methods which they have learnt in the various INSET courses?
- To what extent are LP teachers able to use the available LSMs in the MT to achieve the learning outcomes?

1.2 The structure of the study

Section 1 is a background section and includes an introductory orientation and a discussion of the reasons for selecting this particular problem as research area. It also provides the rationale for the study, a statement of the problem as well as the structure of the study.

Section 2 describes the research process in detail in terms of the research design and methodology followed in the study in order to investigate the problem formulated in Section 1. A paradigmatic perspective and conceptualisation are provided and the methods of data collection, data analysis and interpretation are outlined briefly.

Section 3 consists of the presentation and discussion of the data obtained and analysed in the study. Results are provided and presented in a graphic format (where applicable). This is followed by discussions on the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained.

In section 4 the results are viewed against an earlier literature study, with the aim of relating it to existing theoretical frameworks and models and reaching a conclusion regarding the research problem. Explanations, correlations, and discrepancies between the research findings and relevant literature findings are highlighted and interpreted.

Section 5 summarises the research findings and relates them to the research questions and objectives and in Section 6 the main conclusions of the study are presented and discussed.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design

How the research is designed and the types of methods used determine the quality of the research findings. This section, therefore, provides a framework of the whole process of research design and discusses the various methods of data collection.

This research was based on and guided by an interpretivist orientation. This research tradition affords a researcher the opportunity to understand the situation of the phenomenon by putting himself/herself in the shoes of his/her subjects, in their life world, thereby learning through the process of interaction the subjects' perceptions, interpretations and the meanings which they give to their actions (Adler and Adler 1987; Cantrell 1993).

While I used tables and ranked material, it was unlikely that I needed to use other statistical devices, thus my data was qualitative rather than quantitative, in line with Bassey's claim that:

> Sometimes interpretive data can be analysed numerically but more usually they are not open to the quantitative statistical analysis used by positivists. They are usually richer … than positivist data and, perhaps because of this quality, the methodology of the interpretive researchers is described as 'qualitative'.
>
> (Bassey 1999:43)

The nature of the study, usually, determines the researcher's decision to use either qualitative or quantitative methods. I selected the qualitative research methodology as the study aims to elicit views, opinions, beliefs and experiences of the participants in the process. I also aimed to observe dimensions of interactions, relationships, actions and events within the classroom situation. Fraenkel and Wallen note that "if (one) may want to obtain a more holistic picture of what goes on in a particular situation or setting or … classroom or school then qualitative research methods will serve the purpose" (Fraenkel and Wallen, as quoted in Munganda 2001:100).

I made use of the case study approach which allows for an in-depth search for, and an understanding of recurring patterns of events, regularities and the complexities of actions, and the collection of data in a context-specific situation (Adler and Adler 1987; Robson 1993). Case

study approach "… provides a unique example of real people and events in real situations, which might enable the readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories and principles" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, as cited in Ochurub 2001). For Gall, Borg & Gall (1996:28) "postpositivist researchers develop knowledge by collecting primarily verbal data through the intensive study of cases and then subjecting these data to analytic induction".

2.2 Methodology

The following paragraphs will briefly describe my research path. I conducted my research in the Kavango Region. Semi-structured interview schedules were developed to collect information from participants. For Cantrell (1993) and Stones (1988) interviews allow for the collection of data in the subjects' own words, thereby affording the researcher an opportunity to discover the subjects' perceptions, interpretations and the meanings that they give to their actions. Interviews are very effective data collection tools, according to Ochurub, "because the interviewer could clarify the questions, which were vague, or respondents could be asked to elaborate some issues" (Ochurub 2001:149). For Walker "interviews could be seen as the most rewarding and … the most informative way of carrying out a small-scale study to collect data" (Walker, as cited in Ochurub 2001:149). "… interviews also have some limitations. Interviews take much longer than questionnaires and the respondents were sometimes shy to say what they think" (*ibid*.).

I also conducted classroom observations with teachers from the sample schools. Mason describes observation as "a method of generating data, which involves the researcher immersing himself in a research setting, and systematically observing dimensions of that setting, interactions, relationships, actions and events within it" (Mason, as cited in Ochurub 2001:154).

For Gall, Borg & Gall (1996:344) "observation … allows researchers to formulate their own version of what is occurring, independent of the participants". The inclusion of "selected observations in a researcher's report, provides a more complete description of phenomena than would be possible by just referring to interview statements …" (*ibid*.). For Gall, Borg & Gall there is a difference between observation in qualitative research and observation in quantitative research. "… observers in qualitative research do not seek to remain neutral or 'objective' about

the phenomena being observed. They may include their own feelings and experiences in interpreting their observations" (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:343).

For Bassey (1999:43) interpretive researchers "recognize that by asking questions or by observing they may change the situation which they are studying. They recognize themselves as potential variables in the inquiry, and so in writing their reports, may use personal pronouns".

The participants of this study were three serving teachers who have gone through various INSET courses for literacy teaching in the Lower Primary. Gall, Borg & Gall (1996:217) justify the selection of small samples in qualitative research by stating that "the sample size in qualitative studies typically is small. In fact, the sample size might be a single case. The purpose in selecting the case, or cases, is to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied". In this case, the teachers were selected because they suit the purposes of the study. For this reason Michael Patton describes this type of sampling as "purposeful sampling" (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:218).

The schools were purposefully selected, the main criteria for selection being the setting of the school (rural/urban) as well as serving teachers who participated in various INSET programmes to teach literacy in the Lower Primary, despite the caution by Eckleben (1997:11) that it is not necessary in case studies to select participants according to certain variables. The schools studied as well as the areas in which they are situated are well known to me, therefore my relationship with the schools and teachers facilitated the study. This is in line with the observation made by Adler and Adler (1987) that an opportunistic membership role enhances the chances of collecting data because the researcher and the subjects share the same *weltanschaung* or world view.

I analysed the data using qualitative data analysis techniques by looking for naturally occurring units and reducing them to natural meaning units to check for regular patterns of events and themes (Stones 1988; Robson 1993; Cantrell 1993). Data analysis commenced while interviews were taking place. A more detailed analysis of the interviews, where themes and concepts were identified and explored, was carried out after I had completed the interviews. This was followed by a final analysis, which focused on a comparison of different categories of themes and

concepts, the identification of variations and connections between them and ultimately the integration of the various themes and concepts resulting in an interpretation of the research area (Rubin & Rubin 1995).

As the researcher was solely responsible for data collection, the researcher entered the research situation with his own personality and history, being a middle class, graduated Namibian male working at the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED). This implies the possibility of subjectivity and prejudices, which are often present in interpretivist studies. Cantrell (1993) emphasises this by stating that the interpretive researcher is part of the research process participating in a dialogic situation with the researched. It is recognised that the researcher has values, which are part of the process.

Due to the fact that meanings vary across different contexts of human interaction, I was not seeking generalisable findings. It is clear, according to Gall, Borg & Gall that "purposeful sampling is not designed to achieve population validity. The intent is to achieve an in-depth understanding of selected individuals, not to select a sample that will represent accurately a defined population" (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:218).

I respected the study participants throughout the process, as I regard this to be very important during any research study. I followed the necessary ethical guidelines to ensure that the study participants were not deceived, did not experience any form of distress, knew what was going on during the research process and knew that they were entitled to withdraw from the study at any time. In interacting with human subjects, I obtained consent before interviews were conducted and audio-taped. All participants were assured of the confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of any information shared with me.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 An analysis of selected in-service literacy courses for Lower Primary teachers

To review and analyse all the in-service literacy course programmes offered at the Lower Primary level, that have a national scope, is far too ambitious for a small-scale study of this nature. This analysis, therefore, only concentrated on those INSET courses that many teachers attended and are thus found in most schools in the Kavango Region.

The analysis of the following selected in-service courses focusing specifically on their aims and approaches was undertaken by a study of the courses from documents and records as well as interviews with key informants. The key informants, in this case, are the NIED officials, responsible for in-service training at the national level. For Wellington, "key informants are … individuals who possess special knowledge … or … skills and who are willing to share that knowledge with the researcher" (Wellington, as cited in Ochurub 2001).

3.1.1 The Molteno Project/Namibia Early Literacy and Language Project (NELLP)

With reference to the Molteno Project preamble, Hughes–d'Aeth and Rodseth note that the Molteno Project aims to:

- provide language education that will equip primary school pupils to learn through the medium of English at higher levels in schools;
- train teachers in the principles and practices of a learner-centred methodology;
- establish a localised, school-based training programme with strong continuing support for teachers;
- provide basic mother-tongue materials and tutor-training for adult education.

(Hughes–d'Aeth & Rodseth 1997:4)

In an interview with the researcher, the NELLP National Co-ordinator summarised NELLP's objectives as follows:

- *to ensure that learners become literate in the MT and then transfer the language skills that they acquire in the MT to a second language, in this case English;*
- *to equip teachers with the necessary skills and know-how to ensure that learners become literate by guiding them through the "Breakthrough to Literacy" course, which is a MT course, and subsequently through a second course, the "Bridge" course, which is an English course.*

A guide to Molteno Project courses (1994:5) outlines the characteristics of the Breakthrough to literacy course as follows:

- **It is child-centred**

  Children work in small groups – as well as on their own – at their own pace. It is highly suitable for use with large classes because of the emphasis on small-group work.

- **It is relevant to the children**

  Children create sentences about their own life experiences in a vocabulary that they themselves provide. The best of their writing becomes reading material for the class. This is called the Language Experience Approach.

- **The children compose sentences before they actually write them**

  This helps them to learn the written form of language easily.

- **It is an integrated approach**

  The children learn that spelling, writing, reading and oral are all aspects of language and are interdependent.

- **It develops independent and co-operative learning skills**

  Occupation Tasks, designed to develop thinking and learning skills, ensure that pupils learn to work independently and co-operatively in groups.

3.1.2 The Basic Education Support Project (BES) and the NIED/DSE programme

A

In order to assist the reform at lower primary level, USAID funded the Basic Education Support Project (BES), which developed materials consisting of teacher's guides, posters and readers for teaching Maths, Social Studies and Literacy in Grades One to Three. The Project was aimed at poorly qualified teachers in the four northern education regions of the country, and so instructional materials were developed according to systematic design principles which provided maximum support to the teachers. They were made available in five languages, Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama, Rukwangali, Rumanyo and Silozi, and have been distributed to approximately 500 schools in those regions. Teachers with very little training have found the materials and training provided with them very useful, while those with better training have found them restrictive. The evaluation of the project has shown that the teachers using the materials provided an improved learner-centred classroom and used methods designed to promote learning among their children.

(Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:18)

B

In 1998 another series of workshops (jointly organised and funded by NIED and DSE) on national (school) languages began. The general focus was on classroom interaction/learner centered approach in junior primary grades … These meetings were eye-opening and shocking for the meagre, unprofessional performance of the majority of participants ... Although it was expected to meet experts from this educational phase from all over the country one missed fundamental knowledge and expertise in how to teach in Lower Primary and literacy classes with particular emphasis on e. g. reading and writing skills. For observers it was very difficult to understand what these teachers teach their children … in preparing them e. g. for mastering skills which are substantial for educational advancement as well as equipping learners to the switch over to English as MOI in Grade 4. Nonetheless, the feedback from the participants at the end of the workshops as well as the material developed during the workshops and back home demonstrated how useful this form of in-service training was. A number of model lessons for all languages used in school or early literacy stages were developed. In 2000 the workshops focusing on creative writing came to an end. The results so far (various short stories and texts for each school language as well as model lessons for creative writing) are noteworthy and promising.

(Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:20-21)

I also made use of other sources for data collection to "illuminate" this study. Below is an extract taken from one of the NIED trainers' reports. I deemed it necessary to include this extract as evidence to highlight the objectives of the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport & Culture (MBESC) literacy course. In personal communications with the trainers they informed me that they did not use any particular training manual, guide or document from which I could obtain the objectives and other related information. Thus, the main reason for the inclusion of this extract is to shed light on some of the issues raised in their interviews.

Important issues /objectives

- Thematic and subject integration, the development of a year plan based on themes/topics;
- The application of LCE principles and managing group work;
- A language lesson plan developed over a period of a week (skills integration), quality of teaching reading;
- Phonics instead of alphabet names to be taught in the Lower Primary phase.

3.1.3 The interview results

The interview questions for the NELLP National Co-ordinator were as follows:

- What are the objectives of the Molteno Project/NELLP?
- Your training is conducted in English but the teachers are expected to teach in their mother tongues, how do you make sure that the teachers follow what you are teaching them in their classrooms?
- Do you think that your training equips teachers with the necessary skills to develop learners' literacy skills in their mother tongues?
- Do you usually observe the teachers? What do you think about them?
- Any further comments.

The interview questions for NIED Lower Primary training team were as follows:

- You are training teachers to teach literacy at the Lower Primary level. What approaches to literacy teaching do you promote and what are the research and pedagogical insights guiding your approaches?
- According to your experience, how do children learn to read and write?
- Your training is done in English but the teachers are expected to teach in their mother tongues, how do you make sure that the teachers follow what you are teaching them in their classrooms?
- Do you make use of the African language expertise available in your institute during your training sessions. If not, what are your future plans in this regard?
- Do you use any of the reading materials currently being used in schools?
- Does your training equip teachers with the necessary skills to teach literacy in their mother tongues?
- Any further comments.

I conducted interviews with three NIED officials using structured interview schedules. The interviews took about 40 minutes. For the sake of anonymity I shall call them Geraldine, Sarah and Dave (not their real names).

The NIED training team's approach to early learning is guided by the learner-centred approach using the whole language approach with structured phonics to support it. A lot of activities are used and learners are given opportunities to manipulate and ask questions and use the parts.

> *Lower Primary learners are eager to learn and they are at a stage where they have to start learning from scratch. Here, the whole language or integrated skills approach is found to be suitable. Learners are being taught in broad themes within their context and this lends itself to the learner-centred approach very much because learners share what they learn from home and their local environment and stories, rhymes and songs all come from their local environment.*
>
> *(Geraldine)*

"Learners are busy for the whole time building sentences, breaking them up into words. First they start with the sentences and they break them up into words or side words. From this [perspective] they are busy – they are actively busy" (Sarah).

In the School Readiness Programme learners do preparatory reading and writing activities and when the formal teaching programme begins in Grade One, then they start learning by doing. "We use the thematic approach and we try not only to integrate the language skills but all the subjects within that theme and that supports their reading and then writing" (Geraldine).

Young learners learn to read and write through learning phonics in a more structured way, which helps them in their reading whenever they come across words that are unfamiliar. When they come across words within their incidental reading vocabulary they will be able to read those as well.

> *During the School Readiness Programme learners do a lot of incidental reading. They come to the classroom with a background of incidental reading because of their surroundings and I think that during the School Readiness Programme they also have a lot of practice. They start with the patterns for their handwriting and when they start with their reading they also start copying the words – a simultaneous process focusing on reading but also bringing in the writing gradually.*
>
> *(Sarah)*

According to Dave, NELLP was started in 1992 and aimed at making learners become literate in their mother tongues, later on transferring the language skills acquired in their mother tongues to a second language, in this case, English.

> *It is a literacy programme … it is not a reading scheme. The emphasis is not to enable learners to read only, but to become completely literate by acquiring all the language skills i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing in the mother tongue and to transfer those skills to English.*
>
> *(Dave)*

NELLP also aims at equipping teachers to enable learners to become literate through a course, the 'Breakthrough to Literacy' (BTL), a mother tongue course. This leads them into a second

course, the 'Breach', an English course, which enables them to guide learners to transfer the skills acquired through BTL to another language and through that to become bilingual. The pedagogical context of NELLP is embedded in the philosophy of language teaching, which is called additive language teaching. Additive language teaching (ALT) means that a learner becomes literate through the mother tongue as opposed to subtractive language teaching (SLT) where a learner learns through a dominant language.

With regard to the question that their training sessions were conducted in English and thereafter teachers were expected to teach in their various mother tongues, the NIED trainers explained that in all their training sessions Advisory Teachers (ATs) from the various regions are usually brought in as they are the ones who would subsequently support the teachers on the ground, using their mother tongues.

> *Of course the ideal situation would be that Lower Primary teachers should be very competent in English as well because they are obliged to teach the children through the medium of English. Their second language must be of such a standard that their children will be able to transfer to English as medium of instruction in Grade Four. That is why the ideal situation would be, that the Grades One, Two and Three teachers must be very competent in English. That will also imply that they will be able to learn these skills in English and that they will be able to apply them in their mother tongues.*
>
> *(Geraldine)*

Sarah, however, felt the situation was not ideal in Namibia because some teachers really struggled. She felt that one could be taught an approach in any language to be able to apply it in any other language. "But this is just an approach – you can apply it in your own language. But it is very important that they understand it" (Sarah). That is why during the training sessions teachers usually work in groups to enable them to reflect and discuss and share ideas.

> *We try in our training sessions to model the learner-centred approach. That means that teachers are actively involved in their training and they share ideas. This is really appreciated in their feedback … the support they get from other teachers.*
>
> *(Geraldine)*

Both training team members were of the opinion that they had no means to conduct regular follow up training in schools.

> *We are not in a position that we can visit schools. That is why ATs are included in our training sessions. They are the ones who should do the follow up and report back at Curriculum Committee meetings on what they have done in their respective regions and how the teachers found it.*
>
> *(Geraldine)*

The NELLP National Co-ordinator confidently said:

> *Yes, this is also partly true in the sense that the initial training of trainers are conducted in English and all our manuals are written in English. However, when the training of teachers takes place at the regional level the ATs who are conducting the training are proficient in the mother tongue of the local community and they involve the teachers. Eventually the training actually takes place partly in English and partly in the MT …*
>
> *(Dave)*

Regarding the question of whether they made use of the African language expertise available at NIED the trainers explained that they usually invited the language experts at NIED to accompany them during their regional training. "There is an open invitation. What some of the 'Language Developers' usually do is to provide us with phonic lists, written in their respective languages, which we then share with the teachers during training" (Geraldine).

> *In the past our people were invited to our sessions but I think that they have a heavy workload. They, however, support us with the translations and they are involved in textbook development. I think we still have to involve them more in the future and we must see if they can fit in our programmes.*
>
> *(Sarah)*

As far as NELLP training courses were concerned Dave confirmed that Language Education Officers usually attended their training sessions. He also pointed out that the language experts were usually approached to help with the cross-checking of materials for language-related mistakes.

With regard to the question of whether they made use of the LSMs currently available in schools, they found this very difficult to answer because there were such a variety of LSMs being used in schools. Also the different languages needed to be taken into consideration.

> *What we usually do is to ask people to bring along what they have and to come share their ideas, but we do find that teachers are very confused because some of them have been trained to use Molteno and then the Publishers also do training in the regions on the textbook series that they have produced. Of course we must try and combine all those things because we expect them to teach in the thematic approach. And what we are trying to do is to train them how to use the available materials in their classrooms to teach the themes. What we also do is to teach them how to develop their own materials. And we hope that in future they will be confident enough to develop their own materials.*
>
> *(Geraldine)*

Sarah explained that they usually use familiar stories during their training and teachers are given materials that go with the stories. She stressed that teachers could use their textbooks the same way they used the other materials provided to them with the stories. She was of the opinion that any material, even Molteno material, could be used in the same way. "It is just an approach – a way of teaching. So you can use any material. The material is not important – the teaching approach is important for the teacher" (Sarah).

> *I know it is very confusing. Take, for instance, Molteno, teachers are trained in a specific manner. They are being trained for instance to divide the children in ability groups while learner-centred education says that children should be taught in mixed ability groups. So there are some differences, but we try to accommodate what they have in their classrooms and give them ideas on how to adapt their materials to fall within the learner-centred approach.*
>
> *(Geraldine)*

Concerning the question of whether they felt that their respective INSET courses equipped teachers to teach literacy in their mother tongues, they felt unsure about the issue. They felt that if they could visit the regions regularly and conduct follow up training "then the teachers could definitely gain from that. At the moment we go within a week and try to establish some approaches only to see them after some years again" (Geraldine). "ATs were able to do the follow up but they also have a terrible workload. There was no regular follow up after the reform.

ATs were so involved in the various NGO Projects. So, there is still a big gap and we still need to work on that gap" (Sarah).

Dave observed:

> *Yes, indeed I am hundred percent sure that our approach – the additive language teaching approach definitely equips teachers to ensure that learners become literate in the MT. Maybe I can just add a little bit more in that respect. We know that when a child enters school in Grade One, the child does not know how to spell a word, he doesn't know any handwriting, he does not have that skill at all, however, through the Molteno Project, a child can become literate within a period of 4-5 months. The child can read and write in his MT within 4 or 5 months – the frequently asked question is – how does this happen? It happens through the following method: when a child comes to the classroom the teacher uses a poster with pictures familiar to the child (home, environment, school environment, etc.). Those pictures have certain objects which the child is then led by the teacher to identify. The child identifies the pictures on the poster and the teacher guides him to say what it is and the child pronounces the words … By just simply looking at the picture and pronouncing the words the child brings the word in context with the picture. Furthermore the child is now led by the teacher by writing the word down on a card (text is brought in now). So the child sees now for the first time text in relation to the words that he has heard and the pictures that he has seen – for the first time the relationship between sound and word and picture is brought together.*
>
> *(Dave)*

He continued:

> *What the teacher then further does is to take a word on a card – the child identifies the word on the card and say it – the look-and say method – and the child after recognising the word and add meaning to the particular word he can in future identify the word and say it. But now the teacher takes the child a step further by breaking up the word into smaller units, the syllables and the child sounds the words in syllables as well, so here the child learns that there is a correlation between sounds and letters and that certain letters produce certain sounds. So literacy is then very well embedded at that point already – the child recognises certain sounds, certain syllables and then realises that syllables put together become words, words have meaning and then words put together become sentences. Sentences consist of words that have individual meaning. And then the child comes to the conclusion that all sentences have meaning – all these done in the MT and then once he can do that we lead him to actually copy those words. As he writes down the words he comes to the level of*

production in literacy where he produces words, but because he knows certain sounds he can also now produce other words – not only the words that he has been taught. Although we start of initially with just one hundred and nineteen words the child builds on the particular words that he has learnt that he has identified, that he has seen and recognised in the classroom, that we have shown him on the card. He builds on that and continues to expand his vocabulary. Once he has done that he has 'broken through' and can read any other text and not only Molteno text which further implies that he can transfer the same skills to English and can read English in the same way.

(Dave)

On further probing about whether handwriting was part of literacy learning both training team members felt that it was not. They felt that it was a formal subject that should be taught separately. "Handwriting is like phonics – it follows a certain procedure and you can't deviate from that procedure. So you can't teach that incidentally. It is a formal subject that should be taught as such" (Geraldine). On "any other comments" the team members explained what they meant by the integrated approach to literacy teaching skills integration and subject integration.

I think that in literacy teaching there is so much confusion amongst some of our teachers because they are getting this training of the different approaches from each and every side … What we should have wanted to see is that all teachers have more or less the same concept of what skills integration is how to make a year plan, how to plan a lesson, how to integrate all the skills into a lesson, how to use a story, rhyme or song within a theme as a basis for their teaching and learning …Unless we support the teachers, many of whom are unqualified or underqualified … (and I don't think that they get the necessary support to apply the approaches that we want them to apply) and unless the foundation at the LP is very secure the learners will always struggle with reading and writing.

(Geraldine)

If they don't know why they do these things … they don't understand the approach very good then they sometimes do the wrong things. And I think in some of these approaches from the projects I suspect they don't understand exactly why it is done. It is written down in books and they just follow like a pattern. If they understand and grasp totally they will give a solid foundation to the children. Because I think they must be very comfortable and they need to have confidence to do these things. I also want to add – although they have all these things if the teacher learner ratio is not in balance they won't be able to teach the children.

(Sarah)

The concepts skills integration and subject integration:

> *You always start with listening and speaking and I think as we do it in the training we sort of focus on listening in the beginning and bring the others in. And then we focus on reading and writing as we go along. We plan for a week or two weeks and not only for half an hour. We start with listening and from there go on to speaking and to reading and writing.*
>
> *(Sarah)*

> *If I can add if you take a story let's say our theme for the week is plants and we take 'Jack and the Beanstalk' as the basis for our literacy learning. The whole activity will start with listening to the story and listening to certain phrases that the teacher has planned beforehand and that she wants to emphasise during the week. Speaking will follow naturally from these as they will be required to dramatise, role play the story, answer some questions or re-tell the story within their groups … Reading will follow naturally from these … They will read sentence strips, flashcards, play games with words to one another so there will also be assessment with all these … peer assessment as well as teacher assessment. And of course then the writing activities also based on the story which will also integrate with environmental studies where we discuss plants and the whole issue of plants and seeds and all these will be integrated and will support one another in all these subjects in such a manner that the children get more and more opportunities to read and write.*
>
> *(Geraldine*)

At this point the NELLP National Co-ordinator took time to explain the language experience approach used in Molteno:

> *The emphasis falls on the child experience the language – which language? The MT and then the second language, in this case English. Here the emphasis of the language experience approach is to ensure that the child gets equipped with those skills, the reading and writing skills. The child looks at the word, identify the word after it was shown to him on a picture. NELLP also puts emphasis on phonics. Children are being shown how a word, which has meaning, can be broken down into syllables, and the syllables in turn can be broken down into individual letters. Children thus see the relationship between sound and letters. This is the language experience approach.*
>
> *(Dave)*

3.1.4 A summary of the course analyses and interviews

The in-service courses are all broadly based on the development of the following competencies and approaches to literacy, however the interviews revealed the following problems and doubts.

	Competencies and approaches		**Type of INSET courses**
1.	Learner-centred approach	-	All the literacy courses
2.	Language experience approach	-	Molteno Project/NELLP courses
3.	Additive language approach	-	Molteno Project/NELLP courses
4.	Classroom interaction	-	NIED/DSE Literacy Programme
5.	Whole language approach	-	MBESC literacy courses
6.	Phonics	-	Molteno Project/NELLP courses
		-	MBESC literacy courses
7.	Thematic approach	-	MBESC literacy courses
8.	Managing group work	-	All the literacy courses
9.	Independent and co-operative learning	-	All the literacy courses
10.	Skills/subject integration	-	Molteno Project/NELLP courses
		-	MBESC literacy courses

Problems and doubts

In the interview with the course presenters they expressed doubt about whether adequate support was available to LP teachers. They even had doubts about whether some teachers understood why they should do things in certain ways. They were of the opinion that there was no common understanding among teachers of the basic literacy concepts such as skills integration or subject integration. The teacher-learner ratio (overlarge classes) was also mentioned as a stumbling block for effective teaching and learning. This analysis formed a useful framework for the next phase of the research which was to visit schools, speak to teachers and observe some lessons.

3.2 The research site findings

3.2.1 The three subjects

Before I present and discuss the findings of this study I would first like to introduce the three teachers who were the subjects of this study. According to Gall, Borg & Gall, researchers use several strategies in helping readers of case study reports to determine whether the findings can be generalised to their particular situation or other situations. One way of doing this is by providing "a … description of the participants and contexts that comprise the case, so that readers who are interested in applying the findings can determine how similar they are to the situation of interest to them" (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:579). The most important part of this investigation was to find out whether the INSET courses had any affect on teacher's classroom practice. In order to do this I have chosen three teachers who have undergone these courses. For the sake of anonymity I shall call them Kadunga, Nangura and Mushova (not their real names).

Kadunga

Kadunga teaches Grade Two in a rural combined school. He has taught Lower Primary grades throughout his entire teaching career of 33 years. He has attended a number of INSET courses e.g. Molteno and Structured Instructional Materials (SIMs) as well as a number of Lower Primary reform workshops conducted by the MBESC training team based at NIED. His school is about two minutes drive from the Nyangana Mission station, a main health and religious centre in the Gciriku area. I shall call this school X Combined School (not its real name). The school has brick-built classrooms for all grades and has access to electricity.

Nangura

Nangura teaches Grade Two in a rural Senior Primary (SP) School a little further from the Nyangana Mission station than X Combined School and has taught lower primary grades for 16 years. I will call her school Y SP. She is a fourth year BETD INSET student. She enrolled in the BETD in order to further her qualifications and to acquire more teaching skills to help her in doing her job more professionally.

Mushova

Mushova teaches in a large urban Junior Primary School that has many learners. The school operates in old buildings that were used by Secondary School learners in the early sixties. As an urban school it has the privilege of electricity and modern toilets and an office for the principal. I will call her school Z JP. Mushova has taught Lower Primary grades for 13 years and she can also be regarded as a relatively experienced teacher in the Lower Primary.

3.2.2 The case study in three schools

The research at the three schools in the Kavango Region started with classroom observations and interviews that lasted for two weeks. I first wrote a letter to the Regional Director of the Kavango Region to obtain permission to go into the schools in the region and also wrote letters to individual principals via the circuit inspectors to get permission to interview teachers and do classroom observations in their schools. Once permission was received I travelled to the schools to proceed with the interviews and classroom observations.

Initially, I was confronted with the dilemma of whether I should interview the teachers or conduct classroom observations first. If I interviewed first, I could ask the teachers what they thought of the in-service courses and then follow up in the classrooms and observe if there were any differences in what they said and what they did. On the other hand, in order to see the effect of INSET courses on the subjects' classroom practice, I obviously had to see them in action. By observing the teachers in action first, and then finding out about the principles on which their actions were based, I would be able to find out what reasons (if any) they had for doing a particular classroom activity, for organising it in a particular way and why, in general, they had done what they had done in the way they had done it. Therefore, I decided to first conduct classroom observations and then do the interviews. However, subsequently I found myself using both ways.

3.2.2.1 Classroom observations

The three teachers observed in this study were co-operative in this regard. I made it clear that I was not there to "assess" them in any way and that the results of the observations would be treated with the utmost confidentiality. My purpose was to discover whether the skills and knowledge gained by teachers through attending various INSET courses helped them to develop their learners' literacy skills in the LP. I was not necessarily looking for total transformation but for signs that they had understood and were potentially able to put into practice aspects of the *learner-centred approach.* I was thus looking at the ways in which the teachers had organised the work in the classrooms vis-à-vis interaction modes (whole class, pair work and group work). I did not use a particular observation system such as checklists or 'category systems' (Walker, as cited in Brown 2000:90) but rather opted for, what Walker describes as, 'natural' observation. My observation was thus open-ended in the sense that I did not have a set of pre-conceived categories of behaviour to look for. There is no doubt that my presence in the classrooms affected what went on to some extent.

3.2.2.2 Face-to-face interviews

"Typically … case studies involve fieldwork in which the researcher interacts with study participants in their own natural settings" (Kirk & Miller, as quoted in Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:547). I interviewed the teachers to gain opinions about whether the various INSET courses equipped them with the know-how and skills to develop literacy in the mother tongue. Walker, as quoted in Brown (2000:92) notes that "in essence … interview relies on the fact that people are able to offer accounts of their behaviour, practice and actions to those that ask them questions". All the face-to-face interviews were semi-structured and were the same for all teachers to produce what Wallace describes as "a professional conversation …" (Wallace, as quoted in Brown 2000:92).

Walker warns that one of the dangers of the interview is that it fails to offer a sense of closure to the areas of dialogue opened up. "As a result the interviewee typically emerges from the interview with a feeling of being left stranded. It is the researcher who goes away with the data to rework it in his or her own fashion, to gain satisfaction from it …" (Walker, as quoted in Brown 2000:92). As an attempt to avoid this, Walker claims that the interviewer should provide the

opportunity for reflection and processing within the interview itself. For my interviews this meant pausing at intervals to ask the interviewee to recapitulate and to summarise, or rephrase something if my understanding was uncertain, and sometimes to offer my own summary or rephrasing or to ask if I understood something correctly. The interviews were not more than 30 minutes long. To keep numbers to a manageable level I only selected three schools. Two of the subjects were interviewed after having observed each of their lessons and the third teacher was interviewed before being observed. This teacher was absent for several days due to ill health.

The interview questions to teachers were:

- How long have you been teaching?
- How long have you been teaching Rumanyo?
- Up to what grade, as a learner, did you study Rumanyo?
- Have you attended any in-service education course? Yes/No.
  If yes, mention the type(s) of course(s).
- Where you exposed to different literacy teaching approaches?
- Do you think the course(s) you attended provided you with the necessary skills and know-how to teach literacy in the LP?
- Which approaches work well in your situation?
- Do you have enough reading materials? If no, what do you do to improve your situation?
  If yes, do you think the materials are appropriate for teaching literacy at that level?
- Any further comments.

These interview schedules were translated into Rumanyo in line with Kirk and Miller's definition of qualitative research as "an approach to social science research that involves watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms" (Kirk & Miller, as quoted in Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:547).

For the sake of comparison, I also interviewed one Grade Two teacher who never attended any of the LP INSET courses under investigation. She taught English and Social Studies at Upper Primary grades for 21 years and had only started to teach Lower Primary grades in 2001. She had only attended the Namibia Primary English Project (NAMPEP) workshops. My intention was to see to what extent the skills she acquired through English workshops could be applied in teaching literacy in the Lower Primary grades in the MT. As Swain claims "skills learnt in one language could easily be transferred to another" (Swain, as cited in Eckleben 1997). For the sake of anonymity I shall call her Shitoka. She also teaches at X Combined School, described earlier. These two teachers (Kadunga joined by Shitoka) were interviewed together.

3.2.3 Interview results

Table A: Years of teaching (in general)

School	Teacher	Years of teaching
X	Kadunga	**33**
Y	Nangura	**13**
Z	Mushova	**16**

From Table A above it is clear that these teachers are all experienced teachers in the Lower Primary.

Table B: Years of teaching Rumanyo

School	Teacher	Years of teaching
X	Kadunga	**33 years**
Y	Nangura	**13years**
Z	Mushova	**14 years**

It is interesting to note that although Mushova has taught for 16 years she has taught Rumanyo only for 14 years. For the other two years she taught through the medium of Rukwangali (a local language in that area).

Table C: Level of training in Rumanyo

School	**Teacher**	*School level*
X	Kadunga	**Standard 2 (Grade 4)**
Y	Nangura	**Standard 8 (Grade 10)**
Z	Mushova	**Standard 5 (Grade 7)**

Table C clearly illustrates that none of the three Grade Two teachers studied Rumanyo beyond Standard 8 (Grade 10).

Table D: In-service upgrading workshops attended

School	**Teacher**	**English**	*Rumanyo*
X	Kadunga		**Environmental Education** **NELLP**
Y	Nangura	Unspecified	**SIMs**
Z	Mushova		**Attended but not specified**

Table D shows the in-service upgrading courses s attended by the sampled teachers.

Table E: Qualifications of teachers teaching Rumanyo

Level of teaching	**Total**	**Less than Grade 12**	**Grade 12**	**Grade 12 + 1 or 2 years**	**Grade 12 +3 years or more**
Primary	**57**	31	9	7	10
Primary and Secondary	**8**	7	-	-	1
Total	**65**	**38**	**9**	**7**	**11**

(Adapted from EMIS Education Statistics 2001:73)

Table E indicates the academic qualifications of teachers teaching Rumanyo (mother tongue) taken from the published Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) statistics (2001). According to these statistics there are 65 teachers who teach Rumanyo as a subject in Primary and Secondary schools. Fifty four (54) of these teachers are without formal training and only 11 teachers are regarded as qualified to teach the language at both Primary and Secondary levels.

Exposure to different literacy teaching approaches

All teachers were of the opinion that they were exposed to different literacy teaching approaches. For instance, Kadunga, said: "I was exposed to different literacy approaches but I must emphasise that different approaches bring confusion" (Kadunga). "I was taught different approaches on how to teach learners to read and write" (Mushova). "I was taught how to teach in a learner-centred way" (Shitoka). All teachers expressed the concern that the workshops provided by different stakeholders, such as NELLP's Breakthrough to Literacy, the BES Project with its SIMs, as well as the Lower Primary Reform workshops offered by NIED, were confusing to teachers, especially as they focused on different methods and approaches to teaching reading and writing.

Literacy skills development

All teachers answered in the affirmative that the literacy courses provided them with the necessary skills. "I can say yes, because I know the problems I used to experience when I started teaching 16 years ago and how I am teaching now, after going through the INSET course. There was, of course, a major improvement" (Mushova). I had difficulty believing their answers to this question, as I had not seen anyone of them using any of the methods advocated in any of the major literacy courses. Choral repetition was the main teaching method in all the classes observed.

Approaches that work well

The question was aimed at finding out which approaches work well for the teachers in the classroom situation. Do all the approaches learnt in the INSET courses work well or do teachers only apply the approaches that help them to achieve their teaching objectives? Participants did not know exactly how to answer this question. Some said none of the methods worked and some said there was a confusion. This question was answered without much reflection or consideration of what it wanted to find out. Kadunga was quite honest with his answer when he said: "In my own experience the old teaching methods succeeded in developing all learners' reading and writing skills. All that I can tell you is that all the courses I attended after independence use almost the same approaches. This is where the confusion comes in" (Kadunga). I observed him using this very same old or "traditional" method of teaching phonics. He taught punctuation to the Grade Twos in the way one would teach it to the Grade Tens. Learners failed to respond to his questions when he asked them whether one should put a colon, comma or fullstop at the end of a sentence. Shitoka also tried to justify why she was not using any prescribed literacy approaches. She commented that one was not allowed, for instance, to use the Molteno Project approaches if one had not attended any Molteno training.

Availability of LSMs

All teachers said that they did not have enough LSMs. On further probing about what they usually did if there were not enough LSMs, all answered that they improvised and many a times used the chalkboard. "But we usually hear rumours, when we go to workshops, that other schools have a lot of learning support materials. We are struggling (at our school) whilst our colleagues at other schools are getting everything" (Kadunga).

Appropriateness of LSMs

Two teachers felt that the available LSMs were not appropriate. One teacher however, felt that the available LSMs were appropriate. They said that there was a problem with the Rumanyo alphabet, which could only be sounded out, as there are no alphabet names in the language.

This, therefore, complicated matters, as teachers did not know whether or not learners should be taught using the English alphabet names.

Rumanyo workshops presented in English

This does not augur well for Rumanyo teachers. All the teachers felt that Rumanyo workshops should be presented in Rumanyo. This would enable teachers to explain difficult words and concepts, especially the ones created by syllabus developers, such as *manongontjo*, which means skills. Many teachers struggle to understand these new words and concepts. Teachers usually try to translate these concepts in their own way and not as they occur in syllabus documents which in turn results in confusion. “I received my training in Afrikaans and I have been teaching in my mother tongue since then. How can the Government expect me to understand training that is presented in English? (Kadunga).

Any other comments

All the teachers asked for more Rumanyo workshops. They felt that many workshops were being arranged for UP teachers but not for them. Maybe officials at the Regional Office thought that they (the teachers) knew their language and, therefore, there was no need to arrange workshops for them. “Is that maybe because there is no Advisory Teacher (AT) appointed for Rumanyo at LP level? If that is the case, one should be found soon” (Shitoka). “We want workshops from those who give workshops to other teachers. If they are not available at the Regional Office they should come even from NIED.” (Kadunga).

3.2.4 Findings from classroom observations

3.2.4.1 Overview

The following lesson observations briefly provide an explanatory account of teacher-learner interaction, the way teachers interpret and utilise the available materials as well as the manner in which they mediate educational policies through the syllabus. The real-life classroom has to be taken into account. It was problematic for the teachers observed to strike a balance between the traditional teacher-centred and open classroom models of learning. Teachers need to have a balance between forms of social interaction that are routinised, such as recitation and questions directed by teachers to individual learners, and interaction which is jointly managed.

I observed overall poor implementation of the available source materials because teachers observed held a predominantly banking, rote-transmissive concept of teaching. In such lessons a

'telling' pattern of teaching prevailed leading to ritualised drilling and cohort slot-filling rather than cognitively focused participation. The teacher-learner cycle frequently afforded little wait time for learner answers and questions were mostly of display kinds rather than referential. Control was usually through nomination. Repair was predominantly teacher-initiated, disjunctive and evaluative with focus on linguistic problems rather than on communicative, socio-cultural, discoursal or strategic competence.

3.2.4.2 Lesson observations indicate the following:

- Available resources in classrooms observed usually consisted of some SIMs posters (in two classes) and a chalkboard. I rarely observed other resources such as book boxes or wall charts. All the classrooms visited were overcrowded with too few desks, shared by learners in two classrooms, whilst in the other two classrooms learners sat on the floor. The classrooms did not have enough chairs for learners and some chairs and widows were broken. Teachers could not provide individual attention to learners and teaching time was limited. There were insufficient LSMs such as workbooks, textbooks, crayons and pencils and many learners had to wait for others to finish doing the exercises because they were sharing crayons and pencils. None of the schools visited had a library or book boxes. Most classrooms were thus physically inadequate.

- There was over-dependence on the "teacher-tell" and "listen and repeat" methods. Choral repetition was the main teaching method used in all classrooms observed. All the teachers observed never asked questions to find out if their learners knew anything already - they assumed they knew nothing and told them everything. This resulted in the teachers talking most of the time. The teachers thus dominated classroom talk at the expense of learner participation.

- All the teachers observed continued to rely on a "one right answer" perception of knowledge and they did not accord learners the right to provide equally valid, though different, answers.

- All the teachers observed continued to underestimate learner knowledge and experience.

- All teachers observed reverted to the behavioural teaching of isolated structures, and lessons were characterised by cohort-slotting, closed-questioning and narrow turn-nominations. There was little attempt to modify the lesson to refocus in terms of a learner-centred approach or types of activities.

- The reading observed in some of the classrooms in this study was mechanical verbalising of the words, without establishing understanding of the meaning or context. The two teachers (Shitoka and Mushova), however, tried to establish the meanings of certain words. *Mukeke ana rara* [the baby is sleeping] "What is the meaning of *mukeke* [baby]?" (Shitoka). *Nahepo kuna kulira ngudu* (Nahepo is crying loudly] "What is the meaning of *kulira* [cry]?" (Mushova).

4. LESSONS LEARNED AND RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

The opinions expressed by the Lower Primary trainers that handwriting is a 'formal subject and should be taught as a subject on its own' is not supported by current studies. Bloch claims that:

> Current research on children's writing development tells us that initially, concentrating on neat handwriting and correct letter formation and the development of fine motor control is complicated and balanced when children are encouraged to begin using writing purposefully to the best of their existing abilities (emergent writing) so that they forge ahead with communicating and expressing themselves (using 'invented' spellings) through written language.
>
> (Bloch 2002:12-13)

For Bloch (2002:12-13) "handwriting practice is thus integrated within the literacy programme, and practice generally becomes part of a writing task. This does not exclude additional handwriting activities". She further notes that writing is understood as functional and children are taught to draft and edit their work. Within this framework neat handwriting and correct letter formation become necessary at a certain point (such as a letter or the presentation of a final version of a piece of work).

The NIED training team's view of regarding Language Education Officers as mere translation tools is rather narrow, as these Officers' scope of operation is much wider. Education Officers, in my view, are supposed to be fully involved in all activities concerning their languages, including the Lower Primary phase. They have a wider knowledge of the lexicon of their languages and are better placed to assist with the training of teachers to teach through their mother tongues.

To expect inadequately trained Lower Primary teachers to be 'very competent in English' is tantamount to looking at an African situation through eurocentric lenses. The critical issue that should be taken into consideration is that most of these teachers were trained in Afrikaans and have low competence in English. It is thus impossible for one to expect them to understand the training conducted in English and adapt and apply these skills and knowledge in their mother tongues.

NELLP's ambitious claim that it enables learners to read and write within four to five months was not clearly evident in Grade Two. The effects of NELLP's success should thus have been discernible in Grade Two. Perhaps the opinion, expressed (during the interview) by one of the NIED officials, that teachers just followed the prescribed teaching approaches of some of the literacy courses like a recipe without necessarily understanding why they did things in certain ways, might be true.

It is clear from the EMIS statistics (in Table E) that Rumanyo teachers in general lack appropriate academic qualifications. This state of affairs could be ascribed to their inadequate training in the past.

> The generally inadequate level of teacher training in second-tier institutions was in particular insufficient for lower primary teachers where national languages were the medium of instruction. Many of these teachers were appointed after Standard 5 (Grade 7), went through some weeks of job orientation, which could not be called 'teacher training', and sent to schools. One misconception was also prevalent in those years before 1990 and unfortunately persists to date that speaking a language qualifies anybody with a minimum of training for teaching in lower primary grades.
>
> (Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:8)

The lack of appropriate academic qualifications undoubtedly has an impact on their level of support to young learners. It also has implications for their practical knowledge base in the teaching and learning of young learners. This is in line with the claim made by Swarts (1998:42) that "there is a connection between the level of formal education and professional training of teachers, and the quality of teaching …"

It is clear from the results that the sample of Rumanyo teachers in this study had an inadequate level of training in the language, even though LP teachers are expected to acquire a firm foundation in the language used as the medium of instruction in order for them to transfer these skills to the classes taught in English. Legère, Trewby & Van Graan suggest that the training of teachers for national languages has to include both educational and linguistic components. The latter are indispensable for empowering human resources by equipping them with comprehensive knowledge about all aspects of the language competence in as many skills as possible, "reading,

writing and communication, confidence in the subject matter and in the relevance of teaching a national language" (Legère, Trewby & Van Graan. 2000:31).

From the results of this study, none of the teachers in the sample demonstrated a link between understanding and skills at an adequate level of accomplishment. The study also reveals that teachers did not reach high levels of reflection. While the models assume that teachers will be able to teach in a leaner-centred way, the study indicates that teachers have difficulties in making a connection between theory and practice. It was found that teachers are not likely to relate theory to practice if there is no mediation and they have no analytical tools. Gultig points out that strong and directed mediation is important in facilitating the integration between theory and practice (Gultig, as cited in Pomuti 2000:91). Pomuti (2000) is of the opinion that engaging teachers in material that requires critical thinking is not likely to benefit teachers who have not been exposed to critical thinking in the past.

The tendency of relying on a 'one right answer' perception of knowledge is not in line with the modern-day perception of knowledge. Teachers should recognise that learners have a right to provide equally valid, though different, answers. An area of training emphasis should be on teachers' perceptions of knowledge and the need to inculcate the understanding that knowledge is not static, and should also include the development of problem-solving capacity.

The lack of learning support materials led to the classroom environment not being conducive to learning. According to Bloch (2002:11) the environment in which literacy learning takes place needs to be one where children see regular reading and writing happening and where they get the opportunities to behave like readers and writers. This means that there need to be sufficient appropriate material for reading and for writing. Komarek supports this view by emphasising that "… mother tongue education only makes sense, if learners are exposed to publications and material in national languages outside the classroom" (Komarek, as quoted in Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:43).

Current literature does not support the use of formal drill and choral repetition in modern literacy learning and teaching. Bruce is of the opinion that "people who work with young learners need to

remind themselves that we all hold ideas and beliefs about how young children learn. Assumptions we hold about children have a direct influence on our teaching practice" (Bruce 1987:3). Whole language theorists and researchers such as John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, James Moffet, James Britton, Michael Halliday, Margaret Donaldson, Shirley Brice Heath and others have shown that human competence in oral and written language grows as language is used for real purposes i.e., without formal drill, intensive corrective feedback or direct instruction. Children learn as they engage as active agents constructing their own coherent views of the world and of the language human beings use to interact with the world and with each other. The development of writing and reading is fostered by meaningful social interaction, usually entailing oral language (Wagner 1989:2). For Bloch (2002:11) "language learning happens best when it is communicative, participatory, and involves active learning".

Teachers' underestimation of learners' experience and prior knowledge in all the classes observed can be ascribed to the teachers' beliefs and assumptions about learning. They assumed learners knew nothing and told them everything.

> … the discourse around learning theories in Namibia seems to be dominated by constructivist viewpoints .. learning in the Namibian classroom … takes place in a specific cultural context and that learners' knowledge of reality is constructed through new experiences and interaction which are linked to learners' existing knowledge.
>
> (Legère, Trewby & Van Graan 2000:47-48)

For Bloch (2002:11) "effective education begins with what children know, and builds on that. Young children know how oral language works, and are competent language users". Teachers must, therefore, re-evaluate their perception of learners and recognise that learners' experiences are valid and they can make relevant contributions.

Reverting to the behavioural teaching of isolated structures, and lessons militates against the modern trend of teaching and learning. Modern teaching and learning are characterised by a movement away from the behaviouristic process-product view of learning towards a more constructivist cognitive perspective with the emphasis on teaching learners how to think (Woolfolk 1995:240).

5. REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH

Methodological drawbacks

For the purposes of this study I shall list the following common data collection errors that may have influenced the data collection process in this study:

- Interviewer bias, which could be related to the personal characteristics and history of the interviewer (researcher), such as affiliation, race and gender (Neumann 1997; Peil 1993). I kept in mind that I was conducting the study as a middle class, graduated Namibian male working at NIED and that I might have had certain biases.

- Research selectivity effect, by implication the bias of the observer or interviewer with reference to the inclusion or exclusion of certain methods, data and questions (Stern 1997).

- Social desirability effects, i.e., the possibility that participants may have said what they felt they "should" have said or what they felt would please the interviewer, rather than stating the real facts (Stern 1997).

- Demand characteristics, where the participants provide responses that they thought the researcher wanted to hear (Stern 1997).

- Representativeness check, the fact that the researcher was present on some occasions but not others, might have skewed the findings (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996).

Limitations regarding the use of interviews

Interviews, according to Gall, Borg & Gall, "… rely on self-report by research participants. Although self-reports usually are easy to obtain many individuals bias the information they offer about themselves, or they cannot recall accurately the events of interest to the researcher" (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:328).

Limitations with regard to the use of observation

For Gall, Borg & Gall "the biggest problem with observation is that the observer changes the situation being observed, albeit unintentionally" (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:329). Both the teacher and the learners are likely to change their normal behaviour patterns when an observer enters the classroom. This can be solved if the observer can visit the classroom several times before recording any observational data, so that the class will become accustomed to being observed and will behave normally when observational data are collected. The other problem with the observational method is that it is time-consuming in that individuals must be observed over a period of time to obtain reliable data. All these were not possible in this study due to time and financial constraints.

The timing of the field trip

Although I initially planned to observe Grade One classrooms and interview Grade One teachers because some of the course materials of INSET courses such as NELLP were only used in Grade One, it was impossible for me to do this as the 10-week School Readiness Programme had just ended and 'formal' teaching for the Grade Ones had not started yet.

Throughout the research process, the researcher continuously sought to avoid methodological pitfalls. I paid special attention to the interpretation of the raw data and the tendency to arrive at hasty or ready conclusions.

Other factors

The fact that the Kavango Region has the highest percentage of unqualified and underqualified Lower Primary teachers is regarded as a potential limitation for the data collection process. The stigma and sensitivities surrounding this phenomenon may have restricted participants to reveal

true information about themselves and their schools which they perceived may lead to their further marginalisation or further marginalisation of their region.

The final criteria when judging successful interaction must be according to how well a task has been accomplished. Testing the learners after the classroom observations would have provided a basic assessment of effectiveness of the in-service courses.

I also feel that supportive components of my research could not be carried out, namely, interviews with Advisory Teachers, who are the custodians of in-service training for teachers at the grassroots level, as well as interviews with the Heads of Department (HODs) and School Principals. These interviews would have enabled me to verify claims made by the NIED trainers of the lack of professional support from school management and peers. However, since there is no AT responsible for Rumanyo at the LP level this was not possible. Time and financial constraints prohibited me from interviewing school management.

I included direct quotes as much as possible, in this study, because the use of direct quotes of remarks made by the study participants is regarded as "particularly effective because they clarify the emic perspective, that is, the meaning of the phenomenon from the point of view of the participants" (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:582).

Completing this study has been very useful to me in the sense that it has raised awareness of the complex language issues we are grappling with as well as the problems and constraints encountered in teacher training and development programmes.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study emphasises the fact that, given their level of training in general, and the level of training in their mother tongues in particular, most Lower Primary teachers, especially, the ones in the rural areas, do not understand the training offered through the medium of English. This study, therefore, suggests that Lower Primary teachers' training should be provided in their mother tongues by officials who are proficient in the various African languages. The current MBESC trainers' lack of knowledge of all the African languages' lexicon is viewed as a serious handicap in the training of LP teachers.

This research provides further evidence that the assumptions embedded in the courses are not realistic, and are not realised by teachers with the result that the INSET courses have had a small impact on both teachers' understanding and classroom practice. The findings of this study emphasise that the in-service training courses based on these models may not be the most appropriate intervention for teacher training and development in Namibia.

Teaching conditions, teachers' previous experience of schooling and limited professional support seem to be some of the additional barriers for teachers' performance in terms of classroom practice, pedagogical understanding and critical reflection.

This research did not aim to test existing theories but to add more ideas for further research. The main purpose of this research study should be viewed as a positive step towards major research studies. It is thus the responsibility of the readers or users of this study to determine whether these findings are applicable in their own situations.

REFERENCES

Adler, P.A., & Adler, P. (1987). *Membership roles in field research.* Beverly Hill : Sage.

Bassey, M. (1999). *Case study research in educational settings*. Buckingham : Open University Press.

Bloch, C. (2002). *Material development : Literacy course book.* Workshop report, PRAESA, University of Cape Town.

Brown N. A. (2000). *Bridging the distance : An impact assessment of the English language teaching methodology component of the Namibian BETD INSET programme.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Exeter, Exeter.

Bruce, T. (1987). *Early childhood education.* London : Hodder and Stoughton.

Cantrell, D.C. (1993). Alternative paradigms in environmental education research : The interpretive perspective. In R. Mrazek (Ed.), *Alternative paradigms in environmental education research* (pp.81-104). Troy, Ohio : NAAEE.

Damens, P.K.J. (2001). *Second language evaluation in Namibia : Toward identifying criteria.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of the Western Cape, Bellville.

Davids, L.S. (2000). *The pedagogical advantages of mother tongue instruction in the formative years of schooling : The case of Khoekhoegowab.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Namibia, Windhoek.

Eckleben, H. (1997). *Problems experienced in English reading by multilingual, low socio-economic grade 4 Namibian learners, and the effect of a combined approach – single case studies.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Gall, M. D., Borg, W.R., & Gall, J.P. (1996). *Educational research : An introduction* (6th ed.). NY : Longman.

Hughes–d'Aeth, A., & Rodseth V. (1997). *Summative evaluation of the research & development unit (Molteno Project) and implementation of bridge plus three materials in schools.* Johannesburg, South Africa.

Legère K., Trewby, R., & Van Graan M. (2000). *The implementation of the language policy in Education : Lower primary grades and pre-service teacher education.* Research report, Namibia Educational Research Association.

Ministry of Basic Education, Sport & Culture, Namibia. (2003). *The in-service Basic Education Teacher Diploma Broad Curriculum*. Okahandja : NIED.

Ministry of Basic Education, Sport & Culture, Namibia. (2001). *EMIS Education Statistics.* Windhoek : MBESC.

Molteno Project. (1994). *A guide to Molteno Project courses.* Braamfontein : Molteno Project.

Munganda R. (2001). *Perceptions of African languages in education in Namibia : The case of Thimbukushu*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of the Western Cape, Bellville.

Neumann, W.L. (1997). *Social research methods : Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* Boston : Allyn & Bacon.

Ochurub, M. (2001). *Developing and implementing the senior secondary curriculum in Namibia post-independence*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.

Peil, M. (1993). Situational variables. In M. Bulmer & D.P. Warwick (Eds.), *Social research in developing countries : Surveys and censuses in the Third World* (pp.211-219). London : UCL.

Pomuti, N.H. (2000). *The impact of practice-based inquiry in-service teacher education model on teacher's understanding and classroom practice*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch.

Robson, C. (1993). *Real world research : A resource for social scientist practitioner-researchers.* Oxford : Blackwell.

Rubin, H.J., & Rubin I.S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing : The art of hearing data.* London : Sage.

Stern P.C. (1979). *Evaluating social science research.* New York : Oxford University Press.

Stones, C.R. (1988). Research : Towards a phenomenological praxis. In D. Kruger (Ed.), *An introduction to phenomenological psychology* (pp. 141-155). Cape Town : Juta & Co. Ltd.

Swarts, P. (1996, July). *Language equality as a policy contradiction : The case of the Namibian language policy for schools*. International Seminar on Language Education in Africa. National Institute for Educational Development, Okahandja.

Swarts, P. (1998). *The transformation of teacher education in Namibia : The development of reflexive practice*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.

Wagner, B.J. (1989). *Whole language : Integrating the language arts – and much more*. Eric Clearing house on reading and communication skills, Indiana University, Smith Research Center.

Woolfolk, A.E. (1995). *Educational Psychology.* Boston : Allyn & Bacon.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PORTFOLIO AS A COMPONENT OF COURSE WORK ASSESSMENT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE MASTER OF EDUCATION (GENERAL EDUCATION THEORY AND PRACTICE) – MED (GETP) COURSE

As part of course work assessment of the MEd (GETP) course, students are expected to keep portfolios of work done throughout the duration of the course. These portfolios are aimed at documenting students' learning, growth and development over a period of time, in this case, over a period of two years.

In my reflection on the MEd (GETP) course portfolio, I will start by looking at the research work that I have done thus far. First and foremost I will look at the contextual analysis that was done to serve as baseline data for my research. I looked at the Curriculum Guide for Senior Secondary Education. As this was a first attempt to do research, I struggled to kick-off. After reading the necessary literature that could provide background to the study, I decided to start, even though the product of that first attempt left much to be desired. I received comprehensive feedback from my tutors. I re-read my assignment a number of times reflecting on my tutors' feedback. I recorded my reflections and decided to start reworking the assignment by revising, polishing and refining it in accordance with my tutors' comments and suggestions until I was really satisfied. It is interesting to note that through the whole process of writing and re-writing I was doing my own editing. I regard this as a strength on my part, if one considers the fact that English is probably my third or fourth language. Through this process I learned a lot, especially, how to select material relevant to a particular study or topic as well as how to present the material coherently following academic writing conventions. After closely looking at the Curriculum Guide for Senior Secondary Education, I detected a mismatch between theory and practice. The preamble and the first part of this document are written in the language of social constructivism, the epistemology guiding the reform process in Namibian education, but the content, especially the assessment part remains locked within behaviourism. Doing this curriculum audit was an eye-opener as I have become aware of the many inconsistencies that still prevail in our education system, all perpetuated on the pretext of maintaining "standards". Although the document

prescribes a lot of assessment practices, the once-off end-of-year examination still remains the predominant type of assessment at Grade12 level.

The second assignment, was a real struggle for me. In my view, this should have been our first assignment because we would have benefited from exposure to the two major epistemologies before embarking on the curriculum audit. This would have helped us to do more justice to the documents that we looked at. But I am aware of the fact that our supervisors had their rationale for why they gave us a research task as our first assignment. They may have wanted us to experience research firsthand without being grounded in the methodologies and approaches to see where we were in terms of doing research and after having established our strengths and limitations, to guide us through the process. This was clear from our supervisors' emphasis on the fact that "the best way to learn about research is to do it". The task for this assignment was to critically discuss the epistemological bases of behaviourism and constructivism, by looking at the various theories as well as their strengths and weaknesses. This assignment looked simple (short), at face value, but was probably the most demanding piece of work in the whole course. This assignment was a test of academic conventions and as such the first time that I was confronted with this level of 'academese'. Being a professional working at the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) for the past seven years, I used to hear these concepts in seminars and conferences presented by professors and renowned scholars. I always regarded them as 'ivory tower' stuff, not really essential or relevant to my work at the grassroots level. I grappled with these issues and reworked the assignment again and again until I was satisfied. I learned a lot through this assignment. Having the conceptual understanding of these theories, I am now able to look critically at the Namibian reform process. Equally, having come to grips with the epistemological underpinning of the educational reform process, I am now in a much more powerful position in my professional context. The lessons learned in this assignment were valuable for the next assignment.

The third assignment was a critical review of published material relevant to and informing the selected area of my research. With this one I did not encounter much of a problem because I am familiar with the literature in my field. I learned a lot from this exercise as well. I could see when analysing my research findings that the material from the literature review helped me a lot in

substantiating my claims made in the study and also to put my research into perspective. I discovered interesting information pertaining to my area of work that will help me in future research and writing.

As part requirements for the MEd (GETP) course, students are expected to attend a formal research methods course at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, which I attended in August 2002. This course introduced research methodologies relevant to the research work produced throughout the course. The introduction to the course was of particular importance to me. The course presenters briefly summed up the history of research and research paradigms in South Africa. During the 1970s and the 1980s research in South Africa, in their opinion, had been politicised. The supporters of the apartheid government tended to do quantitative research, which was considered to be 'objective' and value free research. Those in opposition to the apartheid government tended to do small-scale research with a radical agenda (e.g. action research). When research was evaluated for accreditation and publication in various journals only that of the supporters of the apartheid government was considered. It was thus not the quality of the research that was considered for publication. Instead, who did the research was the main criteria for 'evaluation'. As pre-independent Namibia was a replica of apartheid South Africa, I find this history to be relevant to our situation as well.

I also need to comment on my research proposal and the research process concerning my empirical study. The research proposal was not much of a problem, but the subsequent research was, indeed, a hassle. I struggled with the transcription of the data gathered through interviews, as well as the writing up. The biggest problem in the whole process was the data collection. I briefly comment on the common data collection errors which might have influenced the data collection process in this study. The fact that I was conducting the study as a middle class, graduated Namibian male working at NIED and that I might have had certain biases, due to these personal characteristics. There is also the possibility that participants, in this study, might have said what they felt they "should" have said or what they felt would please the interviewer, rather than stating the real facts. This might be possible that the study participants may have provided responses that they thought the researcher wanted to hear, considering the fact that the Kavango Region has the highest percentage of unqualified and underqualified teachers. The stigma and

sensitivities surrounding this phenomenon might have restricted participants to state the true facts about themselves and their schools which they perceived might lead to their further marginalisation or further marginalisation of their region.

The fact that the researcher was present for only short periods of observation, might have skewed the findings. This is regarded as one of the drawbacks in the use of the observational method. In order to obtain reliable data individuals must be observed over a period of time. The other problem with regard to the use of observation is that both the teachers and the learners might change their normal behaviour patterns immediately when a researcher steps into their classrooms. This could have been solved if the researcher has been able to visit their classrooms several times so that they would become accustomed to being observed. In that way they would behave normally when finally observed for the purposes of collecting data. All these were not possible, in this study, due to time and financial constraints.

However, throughout the research process, I continuously sought to avoid such methodological pitfalls. I paid special attention to the interpretation of the raw data and the tendency to arrive at hasty or ready conclusions.

I also feel that I left out major components of my research namely, the interviews with Advisory Teachers who are the custodians of in-service training for teachers at the grassroots level, as well as the Heads of Department and School Principals. These interviews would have helped the researcher to verify the NIED trainers' claims of lack of professional support for Lower Primary teachers. However, since there is no Advisory Teacher (AT) appointed to deal with Rumanyo at the LP level in the Kavango Region, the interview with the ATs would not have been possible.

On a positive note the researcher's use of direct quotes of remarks made by the case study participants is regarded as a real strength because the direct quotes of their remarks clarify the meaning of the research problem from their perspectives.

Despite some drawbacks and constraints I am confident that I have acquired many valuable skills, through the research process, that will help me in my work environment. The division where I

work is Curriculum Research and Development, sub-division African Languages. It is thus clear from the divisional title that most of the work being done in our subdivision should be backed up by research. Currently this is not done, in our division, despite having the necessary infrastructure and expertise from the Professional Development division at our disposal.

Currently language development is done in isolation. Personally, it is very important to have had this exposure to doing research through this course because I am now able to plough it back into my institution by doing research in my own subject area and by helping my colleagues who will be doing research. Completing this study has thus been very useful to me in the sense that it has raised awareness of the complex language issues we are grappling with as well as the problems and constraints encountered in teacher training and development programmes.

Apart from portfolios, students in the MEd (GETP) course are also expected to keep reflective journals that critically records their academic and professional development in the light of the course. Initially, I found it difficult to distinguish between the journal and portfolio, both being ongoing reflective tasks. I only found out later through experience and discussions with peers and tutors that they were different forms of writing. The portfolio is a more formal academic and professional task containing a variety of different pieces of work such as assignments, continuous reflections on the assignments as well as other materials included as evidence of my achieving the course aims. The journal, on the other hand, is a free, informally written ‘conversation’ about my personal journey through the course, recording the challenges, the high as well as low points. The journal contains personal accounts of observations, feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections and explanations. For the purposes of the MEd (GETP) course, the journal is regarded as a tool for self-evaluation and as a means to evaluate the course, as such it is a critical dialogue between course participant and tutors. Through keeping a journal, I was able to link all the different experiences, and in this way, I was able to keep track of the activities of the course as well as my own learning process. I found the journal to be a valuable medium in the process of my personal growth and development in the course.

The most important and interesting part of the MEd (GETP) course was the contact sessions. At contact sessions tutors were able to unpack course content through scaffolding. Many difficult

concepts, such as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, which is the distance between learners actual development and the level of potential development usually realised under adult guidance or collaboration with capable peers, were unpacked.

During these contact sessions we also had opportunities, as students, to do seminar presentations, thereby acquiring skills on how to structure presentations as well as playing the role of "critical friends" i.e., reviewing colleagues' presentations. In one of these sessions Mrs Di Wilmot presented a module on assessment theories and assessment practice along with co-operative learning. Once more, I could see a clear mismatch between theory and practice with regard to our assessment practices in Namibia. The contact sessions really helped me to complete this course. The "home session" was for critical engagement with the course readings as well as for doing assignments. Initially, it was very difficult, to get through the readings. It took time to get through them because of the difficult language used in academic literature.

Through this course, I have also learned that the changes that have taken place, thus far, in Namibian education are mainly policy-based. There are great disparities between what is being advocated by policy and what is happening on the ground. Thus far the change in Namibian education has not filtered down to where it matters most, the schools. Most practitioners in Namibia remain locked in the old system, and continue to rebel against change. On the other hand, I am also not completely pessimistic in saying that only bad things are happening in Namibian education. I acknowledge that change is, indeed, taking place here and there.

Last but not least I will always remember my supervisors on the MEd (GETP) course who gave themselves dedicatedly to their job over the last two years. Their encouragement, advice, guidance and sympathetic support enabled me to navigate through this course. Without them the journey through this course would have been like a journey on a ship without a captain.