THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUOUS TEACHER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS USING ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE FOR LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a study conducted to determine the influence of a curriculum-based dynamic assessment (CDA) procedure on the performance and effect on additional language (AL) learners in mainstream education. Eight learners in Grade 8 selected from two schools in Lagos, Nigeria, participated in a process of debriefing and mediation during three continuous assessment cycles and the end-of-term examination in two subjects, Business Studies and Integrated Science. The study was an attempt to employ CDA as a means of reducing the inequity in the assessment of learners using a language in which they lack proficiency. Although the results suggest a generally positive influence of CDA to varying degrees, the participants' low level of AL acquisition was almost crippling to the entire study. Code switching had to be used extensively during mediation and debriefing, questioning the actual AL teaching and learning process. The severity of the barriers constituted a serious limitation to optimum learning. The results suggest that the AL teaching and learning process could be fundamentally flawed, as it appeared that some of the teachers, as models of language, were themselves failing the learners. The question of the adequacy of teacher training and continuous professional development for teachers was deemed a strong factor in both the participating schools. The results of this study indicate a profound need to expand teacher education and in-service training through distance education in order to increase the number of truly qualified teachers, particularly in rural areas.

Keywords: Additional language; code switching; assessment; dynamic assessment; teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

The study focused on the influence of curriculum-based dynamic assessment (CDA) as an alternative form of assessment for learners with an additional language (AL), in this case English, as the language of teaching, learning and assessment (LoLTA), but the close relationship to teacher education became evident during the data collection. The importance of initial teacher education and continuous professional development could also not be ignored, but was rather deemed as requiring further investigation. The resultant assumption was that distance education could be the key to successfully training and engaging with teachers, particularly in rural and remote areas.

This paper discusses the results of the study as they relate to language, and how language teaching methods and practices might have affected the learning and assessment of the participants. The paper begins with the background to the study, leading to a description of the study and the methods employed, followed by a discussion of the results and findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of the place and value of distance teacher education and continued professional development as probable avenues for improving learning outcomes on language acquisition and use.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The additional language factor in education is a global phenomenon. Immigration is on the increase and, with it, cultural and linguistic diversity (CLD) in classrooms. In addition, many learners in developing and postcolonial African countries have to use an AL as the language of learning, teaching and assessment (LoLTA) (Omidire, Bouwer & Jordan, 2011). This is due either to the multiplicity of the languages represented in such countries or their official languages being foreign ones. The situation creates a new generation of AL learners worldwide who are now said to outnumber L1 learners (Nieman, 2006). Teachers sometimes seem unaware of the complexities of AL acquisition and learning, and classroom practices often label AL learners as having learning disabilities, underachieving or being emotionally unstable, leading to classification into one or another form of special educational needs programme (Gonzalez, Brusca-Vega & Yawkey, 1997).

Other challenges associated with learning in an alternative language include static assessment in a language in which the learners lack proficiency on both

the receptive and expressive levels. Static assessment does not accommodate the language barriers that are often associated with alternative language acquisition and learning. How can assessment in the alternative language be equitable, valid or reliable when learners fail to comprehend or communicate due to alternative language barriers? The continued use of such static assessment practices can have lasting effects on the learners and their attitudes, especially when assessments are high-stakes assessments that are used for the classification of learners, selection and progression in schools.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Other forms of alternative assessment and accommodation in assessment have been investigated and found to not be fully able to cater for the challenges of alternative language learners (Omidire, 2009). The study therefore investigated the influence of dynamic assessment as an alternative method of assessment for learners whose home language is different from that of the LoLTA. The study built on CDA, which was developed by Lidz (2002:73) out of the need to "bridge assessment with intervention and for the results of the assessment to inform instruction". The purpose was to find out how alternative language learners respond to this method of assessment and determine the corresponding influence that the CDA procedure has on the learning, performance and affect of the alternative language learners.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative multiple-case study was conducted with eight alternative language participants, purposively selected from two Grade 8 classes in each of the two government schools, one from the lower-income bracket (LIB school) and the other from the middle-income bracket (MIB school). The study ran for the first school term through three continuous assessment (CA) cycles and the end-of-term examination. The participants were coded: AF, AM, BF and BM (LIB school) and CF, CM, DF and DM (MIB school).

The instrumentation consisted of CA1 assessment tasks in Business Studies (BS) and Integrated Science (IS) as initially developed by the teachers, and mediational assessment tasks for the further rounds of assessment. Mediational assessment then entailed the linguistic adaptation of assessment questions set by the teachers to mediate cognitive-linguistic acts of response, and scaffolding in the form of a glossary was developed. The glossary contained subject-specific and functional

assessment terms from the questions, e.g. *agent, differentiate, describe*. The strategies aimed essentially at enabling the alternative language participants to self-direct their language-related acts to process the questions and construct their responses more effectively (Omidire, 2009).

Per CA cycle, the CDA procedure took the form of mediational assessment, linguistically focused debriefing and mediation regarding assessment questions. Debriefing involved discussing their observed behaviour and experience of the assessment with participants. The purpose of this was to identify the language-related challenges of the assessment tasks and engaging participants in a solution-finding exercise to address the perceived linguistic barriers (Omidire, 2009).

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Lagos State Ministry of Education and the participating schools. Informed consent was obtained from the participants and the teachers after a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study and processes involved.

DATA ANALYSIS

Each participant's continuous assessment scripts were examined individually in respect of receptive and expressive language skills. The participants' test scores were also analysed comparatively across the CA cycles and with some reference to the means of the scores of the relevant classes for signs of possible progress.

The transcripts of the debriefings and mediations in the original mix of English and Yoruba were analysed per participant, using an explanation-building technique, but with some member checking, with reference to the linguistic challenges experienced. Collective analysis of the debriefing and mediational data per CA cycle was used to arrive at emergent themes for the adaptation of the assessment items in the subsequent CA cycle or examination.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

(a) Use of dynamic assessment

The mediational process focused largely on the participants' access to the assessment questions by mediating more in terms of language than content (Losardo & Notari-Syverson, 2001). Particularly with the LIB school, mediation generally took the form of reading support. Decoding and comprehension of the assessment material

became the focus of most sessions, when, due to the extent of the alternative language barrier, graduated prompting (Campione & Brown, 1987) in respect of conceptual processing was rendered somewhat ineffective in some cases. The severity of the alternative language challenges (especially with participants AF, AM, BF, BM) often meant that processing the subject content itself was secondary to coping with basic communication in the LoLTA.

Three of the four participants in the MIB school were slightly different in that they could read and understand generally what the questions required of them. Therefore, support of metacognition to ensure focused comprehension of the questions and direction for the processing to arrive at appropriate responses became features of the dynamic assessment mediation. The findings from the debriefing and mediation shed valuable light on the nature of the challenges in assessment that each participant had individually.

Dynamic assessment appears overall to have had a positive influence on the assessment process for the participants: directly, by aiding the reading and comprehension of questions, and guiding appropriate oral responses; and indirectly, by mediating comprehension of the questions during actual assessment through presenting linguistically modified questions and providing the glossary and spelling list. The use of the glossary empowered the participants to exercise a degree of self-regulation in respect of comprehension of the assessment questions, suggesting that even indirect, non-individualised mediation in dynamic assessment could have a positive influence on the assessment of alternative language learners generally.

The study concluded that dynamic assessment appears to have had a positive influence on the participants' performance in assessment, although to varying degrees, and that contextual factors as well as individual learning potential played an important part in the variation. The results are an indication that latent learning potential possibly impacted on the participants' capacity to respond positively to the dynamic assessment used. Once the nature of the participants' alternative language challenges was identified and scaffolding was provided, individually appropriate dynamic assessment measures seemed to enable the participants' true ability to manifest itself to different degrees, and allowed them to perform closer to their full potential even in the face of the alternative language factor. However, they seemed to require mediation sustained over a longer period, which would hopefully have resulted in even better achievement.

(b) The additional language situation

The socio-economic and affective contexts in each of the schools were major factors that contributed to the findings, but none more so than the overall context of language. The findings from this study suggest that the challenges concerning the alternative language proficiency experienced by the participants formed the unique linguistic context within which each of these learners resided, both cognitively and affectively. The factors contributing to the linguistic context included the language of the community and immediate out-of-school environment, including the family or parental influence, the processes of teaching and learning, the participants' individual challenges in learning, and the influence of the school as context. All of these contributed strongly to the synthesis towards an understanding of the alternative language context of the study.

(i)   Language in the community

The participants' oral and written responses displayed a high level of interference with their L1 (Yoruba), at least in the linguistic, socio-linguistic, cognitive and affective dimensions. Their pronunciation was laced with the Yoruba accent and their spellings were faulty, often based on writing words as pronounced. Whole sentences were sometimes translated directly from Yoruba, thereby blurring the clarity of the meaning and making it especially challenging for someone who did not belong to the community. The interference of the L1 with pronunciation appeared to be a general phenomenon with all the participants. In Yoruba, words are written phonetically, i.e. according to the pronunciation of the component sounds on the alphabet table, which means there are no unpronounced letters or irregular spellings as there are in English. Therefore, some spelling errors of participants (AM, BM) are actually phonetic spellings as they perceive the sounds and thus become understandable, e.g. "loamy" as "lomin" and "heart" as "hart".

Grammatical "errors" made by learners in the alternative language sometimes carry psycho- and socio-linguistic overtones. For instance, in Yoruba, singular nouns and proper nouns (e.g. mom, dad, Mrs X) quite often take the plural form of the pronoun in spoken communication, depending on the relationship between the parties. Ordinarily in Yoruba, one cannot refer to someone older or in a position of authority using a singular pronoun, as in the English language, because the plural form signifies respect in Yoruba. An example would be a learner saying "They are calling you" instead of "He/she is calling you". Therefore, when referring to the

teacher as "they", CF in the example below was obeying the rules of Yoruba, which is incorrect in formal English:

Researcher: *Ma a worry, ko kin se pe nma so fun teacher yin. Mi o ni so.* (Don't worry, it's not as if I'm going to tell your teacher. I won't tell.)

CF: No, Ma. If <u>they</u> (teacher) catch you, <u>they</u> will beat you very well (Omidire, 2009).

The tenses also create confusion for those who are not proficient in both languages. In Yoruba, actions that occurred in the past are described using the present tense. There is no declension for verb-noun correspondence; it is denoted by adverbs of time and by the subject, and not by actually changing the verb form. Therefore a direct translation from Yoruba to English often results in grammatical errors. Below are examples in which CF was referring to incidents that occurred in the past, using utterances that were direct translations from Yoruba:

(a) CF: We <u>do</u> the correction in class. We <u>stand </u>up and <u>answer</u> the questions. (We did the correction in class. We stood up and answered the questions.)

(b) CF: I <u>check </u>for words on the paper. (I checked for the words on the paper.)

(c) CF: Yes, Ma. I <u>check</u> the words. It <u>make </u>it better. I <u>can answer</u>. (I checked the words. I made it better. I could answer.) (Omidire, 2009)

For the numerous differences between the two languages, ranging from phonology to syntax and orthography, learners require some measure of cognitive modifiability to accommodate the variations as they move from the L1 used in their community to the alternative language used in their lessons. The participants in this study appeared to have little exposure to reading in either language.

Many learners in the communities to which the participants belong have parents who are not competent users of English even at the level of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) (Cummins, 2000; Cummins & Swain, 1986). They get by using Yoruba and pidgin. Such learners (e.g. AF and AM) can be described as being linguistically hemmed in because they are surrounded by people who do not speak the language they need to acquire to make progress at school. Hence, their only exposure to English, the LoLTA, is during their lessons in school. From the findings, even peer interaction in the schools seemed to take place in Yoruba, while

conversational communication in Yoruba, which was mainly at the level of BICS, was different from their required academic communication in English at the level of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in respect of content, linguistic complexity and lexicon (Cummins, 2000; Cummins & Swain, 1986).

In discussing the language proficiency of the participants and the results of this study, the choice and use of language in the immediate environment cannot be ignored. In Nigeria, English may have been placed in a position of prominence because, as suggested by Opara (2004), it appears to be a unifying element in a highly complex multilingual society in which it is estimated that about four hundred indigenous languages are spoken (Bamgbose, 1995). Although English is the official language of the country and by implication of the communities within which the study took place, local variations of English containing alterations to the grammatical structure are also in use, and press against the boundaries of the proper use of English grammar as well as pronunciation. This tendency, coupled with the everyday use of pidgin, forms a formidable challenge for any individual, particularly alternative language learners who have to attain English proficiency at CALP level as well as assimilate complex subject terminology.

In Nigeria, there is now a very thin line between the correct use of English and the accepted use of English based on interference of the local languages. Knowing where one ends and the other commences could be challenging for alternative language learners. The link between some of the participants' errors in spelling and the local variation of the pronunciation of the words needs further investigation, as well as the use of pidgin in the community as a confounding factor in alternative language learning.

The findings revealed that the language situation in the communities of both schools possibly constituted a limitation for the participants. This substantiates Vygotsky's suggestion that the physical and social contexts within which learning takes place remain an integral part of what is learned (Haywood & Brown, 1990; Kozulin & Garb, 2002; Minick, 1987; Wood, 1998), and that the concept of human development places interaction between children and more mature members of their culture at the heart of psychological growth. Where cultural tools – such as language and speech – that facilitate social construction and intellectual development are not distinct or focused, the challenges become more complicated. Vygotsky's emphasis on the importance of the social environment and the social construction of the mind as a means of intellectual development (Deutsch & Reynolds, 2000; Minick,

1987) seem to be borne out by the influences that the contexts of the LIB and MIB schools had on the distinction between the results of their teaching and learning.

(ii)   Processes of teaching and learning

The impact of teaching and learning conditions on learners' progress cannot be under-estimated and, as noted during the course of this study, barriers may sometimes be almost overwhelming. As with the power of the language factor of the community, the severity of the barriers in the teaching and learning situation studied constituted a serious limitation to optimum learning and, in some cases, appeared to make other considerations even seem irrelevant. The challenges ranged from an outright non-conducive physical environment brought about by a serious breakdown of basic infrastructure, to inadequate teaching techniques and poor language models from which to learn. In the LIB school, the lack of basic amenities appeared to make both teaching and learning very challenging.

What the MIB school gained in terms of provision of basic infrastructure, it lost in hugely overcrowded classrooms averaging more than a hundred learners. The entire context seemed to be pitched against teaching and learning from the outset, a situation compounded by the alternative language factor and the learners having underdeveloped language proficiency in the LoLTA and often even in their L1. It is noteworthy that in the MIB school, even learners with above average performance (DF and DM) had failed to comfortably attain language proficiency in English at CALP level.

The LIB school participants required considerable code switching to be certain that they had a good understanding of what the project was about, and in particular for the debriefing and mediation procedures. This was despite the responses anticipated in the assessment tasks not requiring the formation of lengthy or complicated sentences or advanced grammar. In the MIB school, code switching was not necessary that often, but neither could it be ruled out (with CF).

Code switching functions on two levels: the receptive and the expressive. At the receptive level, it aids comprehension and allows the teacher to act as mediator of understanding, while at the expressive level, it helps one to convey one's knowledge and understanding (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2004; Nieman, 2006). In the study, the implication of code switching, when practised by the Science teacher in the LIB school, was that the learners were able to achieve some measure of comprehension of the lesson content. Subsequently, preparing for an

assessment from English notes and textbooks and making sense of assessment questions in English independently without the help of code switching was a grim reminder that the challenges of an alternative language as the LoLTA certainly did not disappear. Moreover, achieving some understanding did not ensure any communicative competence at the expressive level. English was still the medium of expression of what had been learned. Code switching to convey understanding was not permitted, but rather learners were often stringently penalised for the smallest of errors.

Although the teachers' code switching seemed to aid learners' comprehension at the receptive level and the knowledge was then seemingly acquired, a major hurdle remained in preparing for assessments purely through the medium of the alternative language. Learners had to depend on either the recalling of information learned by rote, or the translation of all knowledge back to the alternative language when expressing themselves. Code switching certainly did not serve the needs of these alternative language learners at the expressive level. Unfortunately, the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) does not address the use of code switching in teaching and learning, so there seems to be no guidance on the subject.

The alternative language challenge is further compounded by the level of complexity and linguistic demand of some subjects over others. Integrated Science was deemed more difficult than Business Studies by most participants (AF, AM, BF, BM, DF and DM), apparently due to poor knowledge of subject terminology. The Integrated Science terminology was complex and finding Yoruba words for scientific concepts was daunting, so much so that AM and BM wished to drop the subject and speculated as to its pointlessness in their daily existence. Business Studies was obviously less complex for the majority of the participants and easier for the teachers to present.

The alternative language factor in teaching and learning made it essentially difficult to ascertain whether errors were due to a lack of subject knowledge, language deficiency or learning disability, or maybe a combination of all three. This substantiates the suggestion that teachers in multilingual and multicultural classrooms face the task of distinguishing between language-related achievement issues and other obstructive factors, such as genuine learning disabilities (Camilleri & Law, 2007; Frost, 2000; Lidz & Macrine, 2001; Pena, Iglesias & Lidz 2001).

The findings suggest that it is crucial to have resources to make this distinction. There appeared to be no special education consultants, coordinators or educational psychologists, which left a gap in the system.

(c) Participants' challenges in learning

The findings suggest particular areas in which the participants experienced the greatest difficulties. For instance, the learners in the LIB school seemed to have greater challenges with all aspects of reading than those in the MIB school, and this necessarily impacted on their learning overall. In a study carried out with Grade 8 learners in a township school in South Africa, Pretorius and Ribbens (2005) found that a lack of basic reading skills indeed had direct implications for the learners' academic performances. Some of the challenges the LIB participants faced included vocalising as well as following the words with their fingers when reading (AF and AM). This style of reading should long have been outgrown by learners in Basic 8, and could indicate an extreme degree of reading difficulty at the decoding level at this stage. It could also lead to a risk of losing track of the textual content due to overload of the short-term memory. AF and AM were the weakest readers among the participants. BF struggled with recognition of keywords, whilst BM's reading, though slightly more fluent than that of the others, still also required much practice.

The participants' reading comprehension was far from adequate, with questions having to be translated and terminology explained before they showed signs of understanding. However, in some instances (e.g. AF), even that was insufficient to ensure full comprehension. In contrast, the MIB school participants, except CF, were able to read relatively well. CF repeated words and phrases, which made the text sound somewhat confusing. CM, in his bid to rush through the reading, often tripped on words and then started again. DF and DM required minimal assistance with their reading, but more with pronunciation.

In all respects, comprehension was a considerable challenge for some of the learners, validating the findings of Barry (2002), who maintained that English L2 speakers did not have the level of proficiency required for comprehension to make inferences and critically evaluate texts used in the study, and had also found it difficult to complete sections in which they were required to write their own responses as a demonstration of comprehension. The learners in the LIB school

required extensive explanation (most often in Yoruba) to grasp the essence of the assessment questions. They demonstrated a lack of comprehension of the conceptual aims of questions.

At the expressive language level, virtually all the learners appeared to have difficulty coping with terminology and subject-specific key concepts, and more so for Integrated Science than for Business Studies. This finding is not surprising, considering the extent of difficulty generally associated with Integrated Science, and suggests that lacking equivalent words for translation into Yoruba increased the level of complexity of the Integrated Science terminology from the point of view of the participants. CF and CM were the only two participants whose scores in Integrated Science were better than in Business Studies. These two participants (from the same class) appeared to have serious problems with the teaching methodology and attitude of the Business Studies teacher, resulting in a serious lack of interest in the subject and probably having a direct impact on their motivation and performance.

There was evidence of rote learning on the part of participants from both schools (AM, CF and CM). The findings seem to corroborate those of other studies (Banda, 2000; Barry, 2002; Howie, 2004; Howie & Hughes 1998; Prinsloo, 2005) suggesting that, due to the alternative language factor, the participants saw no other way to cope with the complex terminology than to memorise learning content even without real comprehension. As a result, they found it exceedingly difficult to formulate answers in their own words when questions required them to *explain, differentiate and describe.*

The tendency to learn by rote could be linked to the alternative language factor and is a critical setback for education in developing countries, since it could inhibit learners' ability to think independently and contribute to discussion and debate. Higher-order thinking, the application of knowledge, synthesis and evaluation become virtually impossible if basic comprehension has not been achieved. The ultimate product of rote learning, especially where alternative language is a factor, are learners who fail to develop to their full potential, who simply regurgitate what they have memorised and who are unable to contribute meaningfully to issues that affect them.

The findings further imply that, for the participants, processing their thoughts and ideas seemed challenging to varying degrees. DF and DM appeared able to process

their thoughts and ideas better than AM and BF, but for some, such as AF, it seemed virtually impossible. All the participants appeared to process their thoughts in Yoruba and then attempt to translate them to English. The following ensued, as they:

- read the questions in English;
- translated to Yoruba to attempt comprehension;
- processed and mentally formulated their answers in Yoruba; and
- translated their responses back to English.

This process of translation is very delicate, and could compound the problem when the learner's English lexicon is limited. From the findings, translating back and forth appeared directly related to the issue of vocabulary building and to participants' varying lack of adequate vocabulary, ranging from functional assessment terms at the receptive language level, to subject-specific terms, which made it impossible for most (AF, AM, BF, BM and CF) to express themselves clearly when speaking or to achieve clarity in their written work. The findings are supported by the report of Howie and Hughes (1998) on the performance of South African students in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 1995), which also identified these crucial language-in-assessment issues and concluded that they probably had a negative impact on achievement. Similarly, Aigbomian (in Ogunleye, 1999) found that learners in Nigeria did not have the required level of academic language to comprehend the physics concepts to the extent that they would meaningfully apply them. It is certainly not out of place to suggest that the above findings might be related to the methods and processes adopted for language teaching and learning.

THE PLACE OF TEACHER TRAINING AND ACCESS TO DISTANCE EDUCATION

The linguistic challenges encountered during the course of the study were almost overwhelming. One of the reasons the participants were chosen from Grade 8 was to ensure that, after seven years in full-time schooling and learning the alternative language, there would be some level of competence in the alternative language. The important questions then became: How was language taught in Grade 7 and during the primary school years? What was the quality of language teaching for these learners? How can teacher training be used to address the challenges in language teaching for better outcomes with a majority of alternative language

learners in a particular classroom? How can distance education be used to bridge the gaps in teacher education when one considers the remoteness of many of the schools in Lagos in terms of access to teacher training institutions?

The findings of this study suggest that the training of alternative language teachers might be more effective if elements of the training are directed at an awareness of the psycho- and socio-linguistic overtones that hinder language learning in the community in which the teacher will work. Training should also incorporate possible errors affecting grammar, spelling and pronunciation due to interference of the L1. The obvious challenge for those teachers who are already trained and in the system is that the logistics for retraining or acquiring new teaching skills are lacking and there are no obvious support systems in place. The idea of using distance education to create access to teaching innovations is therefore encouraging.

From the findings of the study, there appeared to be a somewhat desperate suggestion by the participants that English, (the alternative language) as a school subject, should be broken down into focused parts such as grammar, vocabulary, speech/phonetics, comprehension and spelling. The participants further believed that each component should be taught by different language teachers. This suggestion by the participants is an indication that the language teachers might not be doing enough to ensure that the learners reach the CALP level of language proficiency.

The participants all felt that a support system independent of the schools, such as private after-school tutoring or study support, was important for them to make progress. This further demonstrates the participants' lack of faith in the capability of the teachers to positively impact on their achievement. This appeared to be a call, albeit by a small group, for researchers to take a closer look at teaching practices and, consequently, the adequacy of teacher training methods to ensure that teachers are equipped with the right skills to handle the task of teaching alternative language learners.

There is a need for a specialised focus on teacher training for alternative language teachers. Literature has shown that achievement could be linked to proficiency in the LoLTA. The importance of a teacher training package that incorporates teaching strategies for trainee alternative language teachers cannot be understated. Once-off training should also be discouraged. New teaching techniques and innovations for language teaching and learning should be accessed through ongoing in-service training and professional development through distance education.

CONTINUOUS TEACHER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance teacher education appears to be a feasible tool for addressing the challenges of inadequate language teaching in schools. There are numerous advantages to using distance education for initial teacher training and continuous professional development for alternative language teachers. Among them is the convenience and flexibility with which learning can be achieved; study can be organised around work, social and family commitments. The training could also be directed at specific individualised needs for personal growth for teachers, and it could thus also be self-paced. The implication is that there should not be a gap in the methods adopted to facilitate additional language learning.

It is an avenue for the latest language-teaching and vocabulary-building strategies to be intermittently introduced to teachers for effective teaching and learning to take place. Distance teacher education could also hold promise, particularly for continuing professional development and in-service training. In-service training is an integral part of teacher development in the school system, ensuring that teachers keep abreast of the trends in education and encouraging consistent best practices and innovations in teaching. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) *Report on Teacher Education through Distance Learning* (2001) states that distance education is used to "raise the skills, deepen the understanding and extend the knowledge of teacher" and that the basic initial training for teachers is no longer adequate. The organisation believes that distance education can be a means of reorientation for teachers.

This study has been an eye-opener as to the extent of work still required to ensure that all teachers have basic training. Language pedagogy and actual classroom practices require further investigation. There is a need for teachers to be encouraged to seek assistance and/or support when their teaching methods do not yield the expected results. In the case of Nigeria, there is probably a need for urgent action to intensify efforts to make continuing professional development available and compulsory for teachers. It is essential to conduct research into practical ways of using distance teacher education and the latest teaching technology for professional development and in-service training in rural areas and places where the basic infrastructure is almost non-existent.

CONCLUSION

In the course of the study, several questions became apparent that require research. At the fundamental level of theory formation, the influence of the alternative language and the severity of the linguistic challenges encountered mean that exploring the background of the classroom teaching of the alternative language is of primary concern. At the level of application, research into alternative language education practices in the feeder primary schools as well as into the level of proficiency carried forward into the secondary school is proving to be essential.

The findings of the study suggest a need for further research into alternative language teaching and learning in primary schools as a method of exploring where the possible origins of the alternative language challenges for learners lie. In order to reduce the challenges faced by alternative language learners in mainstream classrooms, the alternative language teaching methods of Grade 8 teachers should be studied. It is evident that distance teacher education is the most feasible way to maximise the reach in terms of teacher training and development. Innovations are, however, still required to achieve success in rural areas. In Nigeria, there appears to be a need to raise the entry requirements for teacher training programmes in order to ensure that those admitted have the basic criteria. The possession of the required skills enables teachers to be effective trainees and forms a solid foundation on which to build the requisite knowledge and teaching skills.

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