

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY CHALLENGES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL
TEACHER TRAINEES AT JOSHUA MQABUKO NKOMO POLYTECHNIC IN
ZIMBABWE

A

Study conducted by

Trenance Khoza

(Student # 14007082)

In the

Department of English in the School of Human and Social Sciences
University of Venda

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Promoter: Dr. N.C.K. Neeta (UNIVEN)

Co-Promoter: Dr. L.M.P. Mulaudzi (UNIVEN)

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the nature of English language proficiency challenges experienced by trainee teachers at Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Polytechnic in Zimbabwe and to explore strategies to enhance their proficiency in the English language. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from English language lecturers, Communication Skills lecturers, lecturers teaching content disciplines, as well as trainee teachers through various data collection methods, namely questionnaires, interviews, observations, document analysis and a formative test. The use of a variety of data collection methods and sources enabled the researcher to triangulate data and corroborate findings. Qualitative data were analysed descriptively, while a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis software was applied to quantitative data.

The findings reveal that trainee teachers experience multifaceted English language proficiency challenges, in both Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and Cognitive or Academic Language Proficiency, thus hindering the successful mediation of academic content and resulting in underperformance all round. The assortment of English language errors revealed by this study include incorrect verb forms; duplicate subjects, incorrect tenses; subject-verb agreement; pronoun agreement; fragmented sentences; incorrect punctuation; incorrect spellings; and lack of cohesion and coherence. Causal factors of this poor performance included the learners' previous English language learning experiences at lower levels of education; the struggle for curriculum space between English and local languages; time constraints and high lecturer-student ratio; institutional language culture as well as lecturer competency.

Strategies for enhancing the English language proficiency of trainee teachers were suggested, namely use of a collaborative approach to language teaching; contextualised teaching/learning; the development of oral language skills; use of participatory methodologies; integration of Information and Communication Technologies into second language teaching/learning; and enriching the Communication Skills syllabus content.



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