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Minority Languages' exclusion in the Lesotho School Curriculum: Perceptions of Teachers and Learners

ABSTRACT

The study sought to know why learners from linguistically disadvantaged backgrounds have low educational morale. A constructivist study was adopted through the use of focus group discussions with 246 learners and 142 teachers in 23 schools located in Botha Bothe, Mohale's Hoek, Qacha's Nek and Quthing districts in Lesotho. The findings revealed minimal if not absolute non-recognition of minority languages in the teaching and learning of learners from these linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, the study concludes that linguistically exclusive curriculum, and teaching

and learning practices can reasonably be associated with poor performance of learners. Based on these findings, the paper recommends that Lesotho's education system recognise the existence of national minority languages. In other words, the curriculum, its implementation and assessment of learners should not be divorced from the linguistic background of learners.

Keywords: Minority language, Language discrimination, Assessment, Lesotho languages, Language status

1. Introduction

Lesotho is a country of residence for a group known as Basotho. Gill (1993: xiii) defines Basotho as the “people united under Moshoeshe 1 during the first half of the 19th century.” In Gill’s view, the Basotho speak Sesotho (known as Southern Sotho) as their language but there are other languages such as siXhosa, Ndebele and siPhuthi spoken in the country. While Sesotho is the language of the majority population and the other three are spoken by the minority groups, the Lesotho Constitution declares Sesotho and English as official languages in the country and is silent about the existence of the other three (MoET, 2009). Even though the two are declared as official languages of the the country, their status is defined by the roles that they play. According to Ansell (2002) cited in Raselimo and Mahao (2015: 3), English was privileged over other languages even after the implementation of the Lesotho Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP). Illustratively, English is used as a language of business and administration. It is further used as a medium of instruction in schools from grade 4 to tertiary. Sesotho, on the other hand, is used as a medium of instruction from grade 1 to 3 because it is mistakenly regarded as the only mother tongue in Lesotho.

The CAP states that a child should be taught in their mother tongue in grades 1, 2 and 3 (MoET, 2009). However, this is not the case in Lesotho, given that only Sesotho is used as a medium of instruction from grade 1-3 while the other three languages spoken in Lesotho are marginalised. This means that learners who come from these minority linguistic backgrounds are also marginalised and their educational development compromised. This situation has denied the minority communities linguistic rights which include freedom of using one’s own language in education. This is the reason for their perceived poor performance and low educational morale at school over the years, as compared to their schoolmates who come from Sesotho-speaking backgrounds. This observation is supported by Christopher (2008: 203):

Poor linguistic development is bound to stunt an individual’s intellectual and/or expression of knowledge in other subject areas, since language is the medium for the reception and expression of knowledge. It is likely that some students’ achievement in other subjects/courses do not reflect the extent of their knowledge in the area due to their inability to express what they have in mind.

In the context of this study, the researchers also argue that if learners are not taught in their mother tongue, they fail to apply the knowledge of their language as an available mechanism to process and express their thoughts in the concepts that they may find difficult.

2. Literature Review

Language situation in Lesotho

In order to understand the motive behind undertaking a study such as this one, it is crucial at least, to outline the prevailing language situation in Lesotho. According to Kula (2004: 1-2), Sesotho is the major language spoken in Lesotho. Its speakers are estimated to be about 85% of the whole population. At independence in 1966, both Sesotho and English were made official languages by legislation. Today Sesotho, a language spoken by the majority, remains the national and first official language with English as the second. Despite being the second official language, English remains a prominent language at all strategic and planning levels in education, in particular (MoET, 2009). Sesotho is used as a medium of instruction for learners from all the different national language backgrounds from grade 1 to 3, after which it remains the only local language taught as a subject at secondary school level. Moreover, Sesotho is studied as a specialisation at institutions of higher learning such as the National University of Lesotho and the Lesotho College of Education. The practice prevails despite the CAP's clear stipulation that a child's mother tongue shall be the language of teaching and learning and presumably of assessment as well, during the first three foundational years (MoET, 2009: 8).

As it reads, the policy is unquestionably inclusive and responsive to the linguistic situation of Lesotho. It provides for children from minority language backgrounds to be taught in their mother tongue for the first three years of schooling. In this way, all children from minority languages and Sesotho backgrounds, will transit fairly from their different mother tongues into English as a medium of instruction. So, the policy was meant to "ensure access, quality, equity and relevance in the educational sector" (MoET, 2009: 1). A foundational level of schooling is, as spelt out in Raselimo and Mahao (2015), geared towards creating the basic foundation for secondary, technical, vocational education and lifelong learning (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 1982).

Should Lesotho continue to ignore the existence of minority languages as mother tongues to other Basotho, this means that learners from such linguistic backgrounds will continue to be mistakenly taught and assessed in a foreign language, hence their educational development is disadvantaged. This is echoed by Christopher's (2008) argument that the best first language education provides a rich foundation that a learner can use to acquire a second language or even perform well in other subjects. She further states that the literacy skills that are already developed in the first language would enhance easy transition to the second language medium education. The situation in Lesotho does not seem to acknowledge this claim since minority languages are excluded in the school curriculum.

Gacheche (2010: 3) shares the same sentiment with Christopher that education should be organized in such a way that it is delivered in the learner's mother tongue in the foundation grades for "People learn best when they are taught in a language they understand well." Christopher further mentions that

Efforts should be made to discountenance the growing perception that local languages are inadequate for education. If mother tongue education is given sufficient attention, the product of basic education could be empowered and sufficiently equipped in at least one language to participate in political, social and economic development in society (Christopher, 2008: 207).

The present study notes that none of the minority languages in Lesotho is used as a medium of instruction and assessment for learners. Matsoso (2001), Kometsi (2014) and MoET (2019) aver that Lesotho is not as monolingual and mono-cultural as it is often thought to be. These authors make reference to areas in Lesotho which are significantly populated by the Basotho who come from Nguni language-speaking backgrounds and have continued to live their ethnic language and culture since King Moshoeshe's creation of Basotho as a nation of diverse ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups. This observation is consistent with what is advanced by Rosenberg, Weisfelder and Frisbic-Fulton (2005), Legere, Karstern, Fitchat and Akindele (2002) and Webb (1995), all of whom acknowledge that these languages are predominant ethnic minority languages spoken in Lesotho.

Despite the existence of these other mother tongues, the Lesotho curriculum and assessment tools are developed with a blind eye to other mother tongue languages, hence examination question papers are all administered in Sesotho and in total non-recognition of learners from other language speaking backgrounds. This practice displays the marginalisation and exclusion that learners from such backgrounds suffer as their languages are not recognised in their educational development. Moreover, this impacts negatively on the minority communities' freedom to learn in their own language and to be assessed in the language that they understand well.

Assessment and minority languages

Cheng and Curtis (2004: 224) explain that assessment is a mechanism to correct or minimise bias in the allocation of opportunities. It is through assessment that one's suitability or qualification in the world market is determined. Therefore, if a tool that is used for assessment is uneven for all learners, then assessment should not be used as a sieve. Cheng and Curtis (2004) and Khalanyane and Hala-Hala (2014) summarise fundamental roles of assessment in educational development. They list them as tracking and selection, programme accountability, minimum competency testing, school and district accountability and standards-based accountability. This means that assessment is used to refer to all activities teachers use to assess learners' progress in learning, and measure their knowledge of the curriculum content.

Similarly, Ukwuije and Opara (2013) define assessment as an encompassing term covering various dimensions where academic achievements are measured. It incorporates the evaluation of the cognitive, psychomotor and affective skills of an individual learner. Lambert and Lines (2000) and Rust (2002) view it as an appraisal

of learners' learning outcome. According to these authors, assessment involves making judgment about learner's performance as well as identifying their strengths and weaknesses. In the context of the language situation in Lesotho, educational practice at curriculum content, teaching and learning as well as assessment levels glaringly marginalises and disadvantages all Basotho learners from the minority language backgrounds. These learners are subjected to the same scale of judgement yet the channel that is used to prepare them for assessment is foreign to them while native to their counterparts from the Sesotho-speaking background. Therefore, this paper affirms that the role of language in facilitating the assessment process and one's educational growth cannot be overemphasised. The effectiveness of any assessment and related performance at any educational level depends on, among others, how linguistically well-grounded learners are as highlighted in the above sections of this study. For instance, as research (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015; MoET, 2009) shows, learners at the foundation education levels are to be assessed through their mother tongue. It can reasonably be assumed that by virtue of having a strong grounding and communicative competence in such, they are more likely to perform better educationally than if their learning and knowledge were assessed through a foreign medium.

Assessment of learning can also be understood as a process of gathering information about learner progress towards learning outcomes (Linn & Miller, 2005). Huba and Freed (2000) add that assessment includes discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what learners know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of educational experiences. Furthermore, assessment includes learners, teachers and peers' real life situations that seek, reflect upon and respond to information from "dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance on-going learning" (Klenowski, 2009: 265). This declaration, therefore, makes language, particularly native language, a premium aspect in one's educational development.

Kapukaya (2013: 84) extends the definition of assessment to a "systematic collection, review, interpretation, and use of information about learners' achievements and educational programmes for the purpose of improving learners' learning and development." Generally speaking, assessment helps learners to realise their strengths and weaknesses in the teaching and learning process. In her investigation of the assessment practices by primary school mathematics teachers in Lesotho, Khechane (2016: 20) refers to assessment as all the actions and activities that the teacher uses during the teaching and learning process to measure learner's learning as defined by the learning outcome.

3. Theoretical Assumption

Social constructivism (SC) as one of the three main types of the constructivist theory, underpins the study from which this paper draws. The theory served as a framework with principles that imbed the researchers' conceptualisation and operationalisation of

the term minority language and its role in educational growth. As a research paradigm, SC focuses on how knowledge develops as a social construction (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). SC is, in principle, interpretivist and a framework for establishing and understanding how social groups interpret and attach meanings to experiences and practices making up their natural world (Eusafzai, 2014; Scotland, 2012). It is also about the need to appreciate, for research purposes, that perceptions and interpretations of behaviours of social groups chosen for investigation are best understood in their natural contexts. In the same way, this study examined the impact of minority home languages' exclusion on the educational growth of learners at their schools, which are taken to be their natural settings. According to Burrell and Morgan (2005: 28), the interpretive dimension of SC is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, and the central nature of the social world at the level of personal experience. As it is, this study focused on the perceptions of the learners and teachers who are directly involved in the teaching and learning of minority languages. This is because based on their natural world, they, as social groups, develop and attach their own meanings to particular cultural behaviours, languages, experiences and related practices, all of which, for purposes of research, should be accepted as the vital interests of the researched social group. SC, in this manner, is about, among others, the principle of the need for observance of social reality or construct in researching social groups (Creswell, 2013; Galbin, 2014). In this constructivist study, the status of the minority languages and educational practices in Lesotho are considered the natural educational context and social interest. Minority languages background learners (henceforth MLBLs) in Lesotho could therefore be assumed to have perceptions regarding the situation on how they are taught. Underpinning such an assumption is a social constructivist principle that perspectives of those groups most directly and negatively affected by the status quo are necessary in constructivist research aimed at influencing transformation (Higgins, Trehan & McGowan, 2015). MLBLs are in this case, the social groups assumed to be negated against by the status of their languages in Lesotho's education system (MoET, 2019).

Also, enshrined in social constructivist research is the value of the strategy of interaction amongst social groups who, in the case of this article, are learners and teachers assumed to be affected by the status quo. Interaction in this situation is a research strategy and vehicle for gathering and synthesising knowledge about the research phenomenon as constructed by the social group purposively selected for participation in the inquiry (Maree, 2007 cited by Matsoso, 2012). In line with the SC principle of social interaction, and as will become clearer later in this article, interactive focus group discussions generated data that thematised into knowledge in the form of perspectives held by the MLBLs about the effect of the status of their languages on their educational growth. As will again be clear later in this article, what these MLBLs collectively perceived to be their language-sensitive educational needs was deemed as socially constructed knowledge. In addition, examining their perceptions is of relevance in a study pursuing an understanding of the "we perspective" on the exclusion of minority languages from the school curriculum in Lesotho. In sum, the theoretical assumption underpinning the paper is that access to education and related processes of teaching and learning are

a reality that is socially constructed. They should, therefore, be ideally researched from the social constructivist perspective from time to time as required by circumstances of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) related issues such as the current lifelong inclusive quality education for all.

4. Methodology

In order to investigate how the exclusion of minority languages from school curriculum impacts on the educational morale of Basotho learners and teachers from minority language-speaking backgrounds in Lesotho, we adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative studies are understood to be naturalistic in that they allow the researcher an opportunity to study and understand the research phenomenon in the context of its natural setting (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster & Posezki, 2001). They gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour (Altheide, 1996; Stake, 1995; Meyer, 2001; Creswell, 2008). This study, in particular, seeks to determine the perceptions of teachers and learners from linguistically disadvantaged backgrounds regarding the exclusion of minority languages from the school curriculum in Lesotho. Moreover, qualitative studies characteristically call for the need to understand the research phenomenon in the voices of the people most directly affected by the status quo (Leedy & Ormrod, 2009). On the basis of this, the researchers believe that by virtue of being from Lesotho's ethnic minority language-speaking backgrounds, teachers and learners identified in this study as participants are most directly affected by the nature of the curriculum content, and therefore teaching and learning. Even if they may not necessarily be from the same language backgrounds as learners, the teachers of these learners were presumed to be similarly naturalistic in their interpretations of the education system in Lesotho. In addition, they take part in teaching the non-inclusive curriculum to linguistically marginalised learners, hence their participation in this inquiry.

5. Population for the Study

The population for the study comprised teachers and learners from Nguni-languages speaking schools. The selected schools are located in four districts of Lesotho namely, Botha Bothe, Mohale's Hoek, Qacha's Nek, and Quthing. As illustrated by Matsoso (2001), isiXhosa and siPhuthi are spoken in the Mohale's Hoek, Quthing and Qacha's Nek districts of Lesotho, while Ndebele is spoken in the Botha-Bothe district.

6. Data Collection Methods and Procedure

Data for this study were collected by means of focus group discussions in those parts of Lesotho where Nguni languages are prevalent. From the National Curriculum Development Centre in Maseru, the researchers sought a list of primary schools in the districts of Botha Bothe, Mahale's-Hoek, Qacha's Nek and Quthing which are known of their populace of Nguni-speaking learners. They identified a total of 23 schools which have such learners. These schools constituted the population for this study. The researchers then visited the identified schools to collect the data.

On the arrival of the researchers at the identified schools, they introduced themselves to the principal and explained the purpose of their visit. They requested to collect information for the study from teachers who teach learners from Nguni-speaking backgrounds and the learners from these backgrounds. The researchers assured the principal that the information collected from the participants would be used for research purposes only and that it would be treated with confidentiality and anonymity. The number of participants identified by the school principals for the purpose of this research totalled 142 teachers and 246 learners.

The researchers were allocated a classroom to meet with the teachers and learners separately. The researchers introduced themselves to the participants, reiterated the purpose of their visit to the school and requested consent from the participants. They assured them that the information that they were going to provide would be treated in confidence and anonymity and that it would be used for research purposes only. They then engaged in structured focus group discussions. So as to ensure that they get data from the relevant people, firstly, the researchers asked teachers if they had learners from the minority languages backgrounds and the answer was positive. The learners were also asked to mention their home languages. After that, the researchers guided the discussions with prior structured questions in order to ensure the relevance of the data to the objectives and questions of the study.

On the one hand, from the teachers, the researchers sought to find out the impact of the language status of minority languages on the teaching and learning of learners from the Nguni-speaking backgrounds. For instance, they were asked questions such as "As teachers, what measures do you take to assist learners from non-Sesotho backgrounds? What challenges do you as teachers face teaching learners from non-Sesotho speaking backgrounds? How does the exclusion of some learners' home languages from the curriculum affect their right to education? What influence can the inclusion of learners' home languages in the curriculum have on the teaching and learning of other subjects? Between learners from Sesotho-speaking backgrounds and those from Nguni-speaking background, who often drop out of school prematurely and why?"

Similarly, from the learners, the researchers attempted to find out how they were affected by the exclusion of their mother tongue from their school curriculum and how that impacted on their educational development. To exemplify, the learners were

asked questions such as “Do you think the use of your home language for clarity would facilitate your understanding of school subjects? And why do you think so? How does the exclusion of your home languages from the curriculum affect your right to education? In comparison to those whose mother tongue is Sesotho, how would you rate your school performance? Between learners from Sesotho-speaking backgrounds and those from Nguni-speaking background, who often drop out of school prematurely and why?”

7. Discussion of the Results

The following sections discuss key findings of the perceptions from both the teachers and learners from the Nguni language-speaking backgrounds. The findings are presented according to themes that surfaced from the focus group discussions held at different schools. This approach aligns with Creswell’s (2008: 46) declaration that qualitative research requires the researcher to collect data largely comprising words or text from participants. These words are then described and analysed for themes. Generally, all participants for this study felt that the educational growth of learners from the minority languages backgrounds in Lesotho is negatively affected by the discriminatory and marginalised language practices.

Recognition and respect of human rights

The findings from both the teachers and learners revealed the need for the state’s governance structures to recognise and respect human rights at strategic planning and implementation levels. The participants for this study spelt out that it is one’s right to use one’s language and culture freely without feeling discriminated and labelled ‘a black sheep.’ For instance, one teacher explained that due to lack of recognition of minority languages, learners can sometimes be misjudged. She illustrated that, *“One may mistake them to be silly because of how they use Sesotho; they do not differentiate use of words. For example, if you call a Xhosa learner, on arrival, he will just say, ‘I am here, what do you want?’ This will sound impolite from the perspective of a Mosotho whereas that is how they use language in their culture.”* This is in line with Schiff-Myers, Djukic, McGovern-Lawler and Perez (1993) view/observation that if learners are not provided with an even transition from their mother tongue to a second language, that is likely to impact negatively on their learning of a second language, hence low educational morale and lack of differentiation between cultures. The participants further pointed out that to ensure inclusiveness as spelt out in the CAP (MoET, 2009) regardless of one’s language background, learners in particular should enjoy national resources equally without being judged according to one’s ethnicity, linguistic background or otherwise. For example, one learner argued that the exclusion of their home languages in the school curriculum affects their freedom of speech and expression because they cannot access information meant for the public like other learners who are from a Sesotho-speaking background. The learners disclosed that they also feel neglected in the country where they are born.

To illuminate the relevance of language competence in education, Badger and Wilkinson (1998) note that teachers should provide opportunities for learners to try out their literacy competence. The present study argues that this would not only demonstrate respect for human rights but that it would also show that language diversity is recognised. Learners in this study mentioned that as a result of non-recognition of their languages, they lose interest in schooling. Similarly, Christopher (2008) states that language proficiency is key to personal and national development. She emphasises government's need to enforce compulsory basic education and provide sufficient conditions for individuals to learn the language(s). That is, teaching, setting and writing of examinations should all be inclusive of all languages hence learners in this study indicated that, *"We would urge that minority languages be taught in the curriculum."* In this way, these languages would be recognised. This paper advances the argument that Sesotho speaks to only a part of the Basotho nation.

Freedom and flexibility to choose languages for educational development

The findings for this study revealed restrictions over language choice at schools. The participants demonstrated a need to include all languages spoken in Lesotho with no judgement as to how many speakers each language has as shown in their responses such as, *"We want to be taught in all languages. Teachers should be able to talk to us in siXhosa, siPhuthi."* They pointed out that learners need a platform that can allow them flexibility to choose which language(s) to study. This means that learners should be allowed to study Sesotho, siXhosa, Ndebele or siPhuthi since that freedom would enhance their love for education and the urge to perform well. For instance, the learners in this study disclosed that, *"We would understand if our home languages were used to clarify where and when we don't follow. This is often done through code-switching for those who speak Sesotho."* One learner, in particular, added that, *"We were raised in our home languages and one understands better if things are clarified in the language they grew up in."*

They further revealed that the present situation in Lesotho recognises only one mother tongue, which is Sesotho, probably because it is spoken by the majority of the Basotho population, not because it is the only mother tongue in the country. This was reflected by the participants' mention of other home languages spoken by learners in their schools. They listed siXhosa, siPhuthi and Ndebele as languages which exist in their areas. This revelation shows that the status of a language has an impact on how learners perceive education. The findings of this study revealed that learners who come from minority languages' backgrounds are deprived of learning their home languages; as a result, they neither pass nor enjoy schooling as much as others do. In their words, the learners in this study said, *"We lag behind in many respects and don't get admitted in well performing schools. We often decide to drop out of school mid-stream because we get discouraged by our poor performance."* The learners acknowledged that language is a significant determinant in one's educational development hence their declaration that they struggle with subject matter if they are not taught in their native languages.

Consultation

The findings featured consultation as another theme gathered from the participants. It was apparent from the participants' discussions that they preferred to be consulted on matters that concern their linguistic knowledge so that when school curriculum is developed, developers do so in cognizance of their existence as stakeholders (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). In that way, they would feel they are part and parcel of the education system and not as if they do not belong to this country, as it is the case now. Specifically, teachers indicated that their participation in school curriculum development would valuably inform their approach in teaching and assessing learners. This was deduced from their utterances such as *"We are not consulted when curriculum is developed."* This observation is supported by Christopher (2008: 1) who argues that it is about time that "examining bodies and curricula designers appraise their philosophies and practice with a view to aligning language teaching and assessment in national development goals and international best practice."

Roberts (2006: 6) adds that

... if learners are actively involved in decisions about how to learn, what to learn and why they are learning, and are also involved in decisions about criteria for assessment and the process of judging their own and others' work, then their relationship to their studies will be qualitatively different to those learners who are treated as recipients of teaching and who are the object of others' unilateral assessment.

Community involvement

The findings also highlighted the need for engagement with expertise at the level of communities. The participants stated that governing bodies needed to appreciate community knowledge and call on members of communities from minority languages background to guide curriculum development and be consulted during cultural activities to guide teachers and learners. For example, one teacher revealed that *"If those languages are to be taught, we already have qualified people to help us from the community who are native speakers. We can direct you to them because we know them."* In essence, this is saying that the community represented by the teachers in this case feels that they are part of the school system and are ready to partake in its development if given a chance. In this case, the participants claimed that during the assessment process, for example, all parties involved, particularly teachers, would be able to build assessment instruments with confidence since they would have prepared learners relevantly as well. At the same time, the learners would engage with assessment activities with readiness since they would have practised in the languages they understand well and with people who also know their languages. In support of this observation, CAP prescribes that "school life should be integrated with community life and everyday experiences of the learner" (MoET, 2009: 15). Some teachers even added that it would be worthwhile to engage the community as the custodians of the culture to assist in the school activities

relating to cultural events such as cultural day celebrations where learners perform their cultural dances and activities. This means that learners would better their educational growth as they observe the interconnectivity between the curriculum and their everyday lives.

Staff availability and viability

Furthermore, the findings showed that even before all languages are included in the curriculum and assessment of learners, governing bodies should first ensure availability of qualified teaching personnel. One teacher shared that they are even willing to guide the government in recruiting qualified staff to teach the minority languages. He added that *“Teachers need to be trained, if one needs to go to Transkei to learn isiXhosa, let it be so.”* These teachers elaborated further to say that sometimes teachers themselves are challenged by a deficiency in a minority language which makes it impractical for them to teach learners in the languages that they understand wellnamely, isiXhosa, Ndebele and siPhuthi in the case of this study. They further stated that there should be guidelines in place to monitor teaching practices in designated schools as a way of ensuring the viability of inclusive education in Lesotho. In doing this, all learners would be assessed impartially by qualified stakeholders.

Quality and equity

The discussions on how the exclusion of some mother tongue languages spoken in Lesotho affect teachers and learners from such linguistic backgrounds demonstrated that the practice is contrary to Sustainable Development Goal 4 which talks to equity in education. Therefore, the participants urged that relevant bodies should reconsider and review school curricula at all levels to ascertain quality and equity in education. They explicitly stated that from the preparatory school level to institutions of higher learning, the existence of all languages spoken in Lesotho should be highly recognised so much so that they should even be included in the curriculum for teacher training at institutions of higher learning. To ensure quality education particularly for qualified personnel, one of them even suggested that, *“Government should shuffle teachers and place them according to their language expertise. That is, teachers from Nguni backgrounds origin should be placed at strategic areas.”* This is substantiated by Raselimo and Mahao (2015: 1) who argue that there have been concerns about how appropriate Lesotho curriculum is and how authentic assessment tools are given the language situation in Lesotho. These authors referred specifically to assessment tools that do not measure desirable competences and skills, hence irrelevant education. This means that it is crucial to reform curriculum and assessment at all levels in Lesotho in order to act on quality and relevance issues. To emphasise the link between the curriculum and the learner, Doll (2002) envisages that good curriculum emerges from interaction and principles such as freedom to choose what one wants to study.

Recommendations

In light of the above, the study recommends that credits in a local language should be made a requirement for admission to institutions of higher learning in order to uplift appreciation and status of local languages. Furthermore, it urges that, siXhosa, Ndebele and siPhuthi be taught at schools as part of the Lesotho curriculum. To ensure practicality of this inclusiveness, the study also suggests that institutions of higher learning train teachers in the minority languages so that there could be qualified personnel to teach these languages. Moreover, all teaching and learning material should be written in the different languages spoken in Lesotho, including minority languages so that learners in lower grades could be assessed in the language that they understand, their “mother tongue”, as it is the case with their Sesotho native speaker counterparts.

8. Conclusion

The study conclusively argued that there are learners from Nguni language-speaking backgrounds in Lesotho whose existence is not recognised during curriculum and assessment tools development. On the basis of the findings of the present study, it is concluded that these learners feel neglected by the Lesotho education system and that their rights to education and freedom of expression are violated. The findings also demonstrated that the participants believe that the marginalisation of home languages contributes to their low educational morale. The researchers therefore, bring forth a research-evidenced argument that such perceptions of learners from these backgrounds are indicative their marginalisation and discrimination due to their language backgrounds.

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