Journal for Language Teaching 56 (1) 2022, 22 pages
https://doi.org/10.56285/jltVol56iss1a5414

Perceptions of lecturers on English as a primary medium of instruction at a selected university in South Africa

Juliet Munyaradzi
University of South Africa
E-mail: 55366864@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Tintswalo Vivian Manyike
University of South Africa
E-mail: Manyitv@unisa.ac.za

ABSTRACT

In the current era of globalization, English medium instruction (EMI) in higher education in non-English speaking countries has gained prominence worldwide. The reasons for this include to increase institutions' international visibility and competitiveness in the global market, to attract international students and to ensure graduates' chances of international employability. In addition, more academic conferences are conducted in English and more prominent authors and academic journals choose to publish in English. Thus, many higher education systems privilege English in academic discourse. In light of this, this study explored lecturers' perceptions of the recent implementation of English as a primary medium of instruction at a selected university in South Africa. Said's and Bhabha's postcolonial theories were used as theoretical lenses to inform the study and frame the data analysis. The sample chosen comprised three lecturers who are English Second Language (ESL) speakers. Data were gathered using classroom observations and individual semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that English as a primary medium of instruction diminished effective teaching and learning. The participants frequently code switched between African languages in the classroom. However, they acknowledged the role of English as a communication means in a multilingual context. It is recommended that students be adequately supported through the provision of adequately funded and quality English literacy programs and the implementation of African languages as media of instruction.

Keywords: perceptions, post-colonialism, English second language, medium of instruction, multilingualism, higher education

1. Introduction

In the current era of globalization, English medium instruction (EMI) has gained prominence in higher education worldwide, including in non-English speaking countries. Various reasons for this have been proffered, such as to increase institutions' international visibility and competitiveness in the global market, to attract international students and to ensure graduates' chances of international employability (Philipson, 2016). In addition, more academic conferences are conducted in English and prominent authors and academic journals choose to publish in English. Thus, many education systems privilege English in academic discourse (Makoe & McKinney, 2014). This has drawn attention to the hegemony of English and its impact on student achievement and access to quality education in higher education institutions where English is a second or foreign language (Makoe & McKinney, 2014; Ndimande-Hlongwa & Ndebele, 2017).

In Africa, as well as in many non-English speaking countries in Asia, such as Korea, India and Japan, many students in higher education are not proficient enough in English to use it effectively as their language of learning (Desai, 2016: 344; Hurst, 2016; Ndimande-Hlongwa & Mkhize, 2017). In such contexts, including South Africa, the language of instruction becomes a contested terrain. Although South Africa has over twenty-five spoken languages, the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996) only gives nine African languages equal status with English and Afrikaans: isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati, siPedi, Setswana, isiNdebele, Sesotho, Xitsonga and Tshivenda. Notwithstanding, the official status bestowed upon African indigenous languages, until recently South African universities used only English and/or Afrikaans as media of instruction. During a country-wide campus protest, the Hashtag Fees Must Fall Campaign of 2015–2016, students demanded English-only medium of instruction in all universities that had hitherto offered dual medium tuition in English and Afrikaans (Mutekwa, 2017; Mpofu, 2017). The students questioned both the lack of curriculum transformation and the inability of higher education institutions and the South African government to implement the language policy for higher education. According to Jansen (2017), the demands made by students during the protests especially at historically white universities (HWU) were a result of a combination of the institutions' failure to transform their culture, structural inequality and increasing higher education fees. He predicts that these factors left unchecked, could signal the doom of university education in the country as institutions become mere welfare institutions. Jansen (2017) argues that the students' call for the decolonization of university curriculum is misinformed as students are not expected to determine curriculum issues. He also criticises academics for their efforts to transform the curriculum to cater to students' demands.

Despite the popularity surrounding the implementation of EMI in higher education, it is riddled with challenges given most students' and academics' lack of academic English proficiency.

Various researchers confirm that EMI is a barrier to effective teaching and learning for most students in higher education in South Africa (Desai, 2016; Mutasa, 2015; Nyika, 2015; Ndebele & Zulu, 2018). Among the problems associated with EMI, English is a first language to only 9.6 % of the country's population Census South Africa (2011). Furthermore, most academics and students struggle to use EMI in academic discourse which results in poor learning and teaching and a lack of interactive learning. English second language (ESL) students have poor content knowledge. Further, lecturers who are not English proficient do not present content knowledge adequately. Consequently, EMI classes are perceived as boring and discourse is awkward. In multicultural and multilingual contexts lecturers are often underprepared to meet students' diverse needs in content area subjects. Furthermore, the curriculum used in most teacher training programmes to prepare student teachers to teach in an EMI context are not up to standard (Nyoni, Manyike & Lemmer, 2019). As a result, student teachers graduate without the theoretical grounding in second language acquisition required to teach in the EMI context (Nomlomo & Katiyo, 2018). Funding for the introduction of EMI classes together with sufficient student support is also inadequate.

Most ESL students who lack cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) Cummins (2010) underachieve Manyike (2017) or fail outright at South African universities (Council of Higher Education [CHE], 2016; Nkosi, 2014). The high dropout and failure rates in South African higher education can partly be explained by ESL students' lack of CALP (Desai, 2016; Mutasa, 2015; Nyika, 2015). These challenges are not restricted to the South African higher education system but are also observed in other non English-speaking higher education systems which are using EMI (Brenn-White & Faethe, 2013; Fenton Smith, Humphries & Walkinshaw, 2017; Wachter & Maiworn, 2014).

Against this background, the following research question was posed: How do lecturers at a selected university in South Africa perceive English as the primary medium of instruction? This study was underpinned by Said's (1979) orientalist theory and Bhaba's (1994) hybridity theory which are discussed in the section below.

2. Theoretical framework

Said's (1979) orientalist theory and Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity were used to inform this study. Said's (1979) theory is based on an analysis of the vast body of work written about the orient by Western scholars and demonstrates that descriptions of the orient enabled Western domination over the orient and its restructuring. The theory exposes the self-serving, distorted and biased knowledge and attitudes which distort Western knowledge about developing countries (Andreotti, 2011; Khan, 2003; Said, 1979). Western-based knowledge portrays the West as powerful and developing countries as desperately in need of domination (Said, 1979). This myth echoes Fanon's (2004) observation that when people are colonised and their identities suppressed, they develop an inferiority complex. As a result, they reject their culture

in an attempt to assimilate with the culture of the coloniser (Gilbert-Moore, 1997). When Western ideology robs the orient of its identities, the oriental people come to accept the status quo, because to rob a people of their culture is to rob them of their tools for self-definition in relation to other people (Wa Thiongo, 1994). In light of Said's (1979) theory, the use of EMI in the education system of formerly colonised nations like South Africa reflects how African people have succumbed to the perceived language of civilisation, which in South Africa's case is English.

Whereas Said's (1979) theory is centred around the misrepresentation of the colonised by the coloniser, Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity is centred on how the postcolonial individual has to live with opposing cultures or identities. Hybridity functions as a metaphor to understand the mixing of languages or language varieties in utterances. It derives from the horticultural term, which refers to the cross breeding of two species by grafting or cross pollination to form a third or hybrid species (Young, 2001). Hybridity in Bhabha's theory shows that frequent contact between different cultures results in the establishment of a new culture which has characteristics from all the original cultures. Bhabha (1994) understands hybridity as the third space which enables the displacement of the histories which constitute it and the setting up of new structures of authority (Huddart, 2006). Consequently, the third space disrupts the binary opposition between self and other (Andreotti, 2011). More specifically, the self who is a coloniser cannot escape the complex and paradoxical relationship with the self, who is colonised. Bhabha (1994) argues that, in the colonial encounter, it is not only the colonised who is subjected to Western ways. The coloniser is also transformed and from such a transformation emerges a mixed culture for both the coloniser and the colonised through their contact and interaction. Hybridisation can be employed to better understand the integration of knowledge and discourses across texts and relationships; hybridisation supports an understanding of the identity construction of the coloniser and the colonised Wolff (2017). All cultural statements and systems are constructs in a third space of enunciation (Bhabha, 2002). According to Bhabha (1994), cultural identity often emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space. Thus, ambivalence is closely related to hybridity in that both allow for an uneasy coming together of opposing identities. Bhabha (2002), defines identity as fluid, continual and changing in ways which individuals try to make sense of who they are.

While most postcolonial scholars try to separate the identities of the coloniser and the colonised into opposing binaries, Bhabha (1994) brings those two binaries closer together (Andreotti, 2011). The significance of Bhabha's theory lies in his suggestion that colonial authority is rendered hybrid and ambivalent in the postcolonial era (Andriotti, 2011). Here, Bhabha (2002) opens the spaces for the colonised to subvert the master discourse. The colonial subject is taken as the other, leading to the construction of a stereotype in post- colonial discourse work which brings those two binaries closer together (Gandhi, 1998). According to Bhabha (1994) hybridity involves the struggle of the dominant groups in their undertaking to define the identity of the other within a unitary, essentialising framework, in contexts where cultural and

linguistic practices, as well as histories and epistemologies clash. Hybridity, therefore, counteracts essentialism that defines culture and identity as fixed.

Said's (1979) and Bhabha's (1994) theories of orientalism and hybridity respectively are relevant in South Africa, where, although democracy was achieved in 1994, colonial legacies are still entrenched because underlying structures of oppression and injustices remain the same, including in higher education (Heleta, 2016:1). The South African higher education system remains a colonial outpost, reproducing hegemonic identities instead of eliminating them. This is particularly pertinent to the language policy in higher education (McKaiser, 2016), which is English dominated because of the county's colonial history, intensified by English hegemony in higher education worldwide (Hurst, 2016). English is a gatekeeper in South African higher education as it is an entry requirement for university enrolment. Several authors (e.g. Hurst, 2016; Fanon, 2004; Ngugi, 1994; Said, 1979) regard this type of linguistic imperialism as dehumanising, especially the use of the language of the coloniser as a medium of instruction in an African setting where indigenous African languages are marginalised.

3. Research design

This study used a case research design to provide an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of lecturers towards English as a primary medium of instruction at a selected university in South Africa, which had recently switched from dual medium to an EMI-only policy. A case study is closely aligned to interpretative phenomenological inquiry in that its aim is to develop insights from the perspectives of those who are involved in the experience. It is an approach which searches for meanings and experiences about a phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This design suited the topic of the study because it contributed to rich data and understanding of the perspectives of the participants in terms of their experiences.

3.1 Sampling and data collection

3.1.1 Sampling

The study was conducted at the Bloemfontein campus of a tri-campus South African university situated in the Free State province. In the Free State, the dominant first language for black inhabitants is Sotho; a small number speak Setswana and IsiZulu as first languages (Ntombela (2018). Most white and coloured people speak Afrikaans as first language and most black people speak Afrikaans as a second or third language. Prior to 2016, the university implemented a dual medium of instruction policy in which both Afrikaans and English were used as parallel languages of teaching and learning. We chose this university because it is a former Afrikaans-medium university which changed to dual medium of instruction after 1994, to open access to previously marginalised groups. After the 2015 student protests (Hashtag

Fees Must Fall Campaign), the university adopted a new language in education policy, which declared English as sole medium of instruction.

The sample consisted of three senior lecturers from diverse cultural backgrounds who were purposively selected on the basis that they all had experienced the former dual medium language policy at the university and the introduction of the new language policy in 2016. They teach courses offered to B.Ed. students, their highest qualification is a PhD and they had at least seven years' teaching experience. As such, they are part of the larger academic corps that are currently implementing the new language policy and we envisaged that they would produce rich data based on their experience. The lecturers are identified as Lecturer A, B and C. Lecturer A is a 45 year old female. She is a Zimbabwean national whose first language is Shona. She teaches English Academic Literacy. Lecturer B is a 56 year old male. He is a South African citizen whose first language is Sotho. He teaches Educational Psychology. Lecturer C is a 54 year old female. She is a South Africa citizen whose first language is Xhosa. She teaches Curriculum Studies.

3.1.2 Interviewing

We conducted individual semi-structured interviews with the participants. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study because they are flexible and versatile. Thus, they provided the researchers with the opportunity of asking follow-up questions based on the participants' responses. Semi-structured interviews have the advantages of providing space for research participants to express themselves verbally and offer a focused structure for discussion with some flexibility. However, they are time consuming, labour intensive and require interviewers to be knowledgeable about the relevant substantive issues. Although only the primary researcher conducted the interviews, both researchers discussed the collected data after the interviews and were both involved in data analysis. Individual interviews were recorded on a digital recorder in the participants' offices and each interview lasted 45 minutes. The participants responded to eight open-ended questions which constituted the interview guide. We also conducted a focus group interview with the same participants. The focus group interview which lasted 120 minutes followed up issues raised during individual interviews and were conducted virtually using Microsoft teams. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was granted by the College of Education Ethics Committee, University of South Africa and the Dean of Education at the selected university. Research participants gave written consent and were assured of anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw or to refuse to give any information without penalty.

3.2 Data analysis

We took the following steps to analyse the data. The first was data coding. Prior to this, we reviewed the data from the interviews to identify the frames of analysis, which are levels of specificity within which the examination of the data took place. These frames of analysis were used to demarcate segments within the data. Each segment received a label with a 'code' – a word or phrase suggesting how the segment informed the research question or research objective. The coding of the data resulted in the formation of categories. Through an interpretive process, patterns and trends emerged from the data, grouped into broad themes. At this stage the main researcher prepared the overall narrative through summarising the prevalence of the patterns, and trends, discussing similarities and differences between them and comparing the relationship between one and more of these. Although the initial research question and the theoretical framework suggested some of the expected categories, both researchers were open to categories and themes that emerged from the data.

3.3 Trustworthiness and limitations of the study

The four criteria used for ensuring trustworthiness in this study were credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Shenton, 2004). Trustworthiness was considered through the use of various strategies such as audit trail, study credibility, study dependability and study transferability. Creswell (2007: 230) suggests that such strategies lead to the effective validation of research findings.

We kept an audit trail for this study. This concept refers to a detailed chronology of research activities and processes, the influences on the data and data analysis. We kept this information in a research journal. Guided by advice from Lincoln and Guba (1985) in Anney (2014:278), we kept the raw data from interviews and focus groups for cross checking purposes. We established the rigour of the inquiry by immersing ourselves in the participants' world. This helped us to gain an insight into the context of the study.

Given the methodology, research design and the constructivist epistemology (where we admit that we had to construct an interpretation based on our understanding of what participants expressed), the credibility of the study was demonstrated by the use of many quotes from the individual interviews. We ensured evidence of the data by keeping audio data from interviews and written notes made during interviews. These helped us in our analysis of the data as we were able to discuss what seemed to have been important to the participants. The purpose of this study was to provide enough data and analysis to allow readers to gain a clear understanding of the perceptions of the lecturers in the South African context.

4. Results and discussion

In this section, the six themes which emerged from the investigation are discussed: challenges encountered during lesson delivery; inadequate expressive skills in students' assessment work; lack of language support; the hierarchy of languages and marginalisation of African languages; challenges faced in using African languages as media of instruction; and lack of support to develop indigenous languages.

4.1 Challenges encountered during content delivery

Responding to a question about their opinion of EMI in the context of content delivery at the university, the lecturer participants stated that English is a barrier to effective learning for many students who use it as their second or additional language as shown in the excerpts below.

Lecturer A said:

> *Most English additional language students struggle to understand concepts when I teach or when they read academic texts written in English. They also complain of complicated wording in assessment questions and examinations.*

Lecturer B added:

> *Sometimes I get frustrated because it would mean I have to repeat explanations provided which is time consuming. Anyway, I prepare handouts in simplified English for them. I also encourage them to take academic literacy modules seriously.*

The two comments above thus reveal that ESL students have difficulty understanding the content taught through EMI. Most ESL students appear to experience difficulties in understanding the content contained in their prescribed books. Their major struggle appears to be learning and understanding concepts. Conceptual knowledge forms the basis of understanding various subjects as each subject has subject specific vocabulary (Manyike and Lemmer 2014). Students' lack of conceptual knowledge is attributed to their lack of CALP needed to cope with academic tasks. Discipline specific lexicons make it difficult for most ESL students to understand what they are taught in various courses. The textbooks and curricula used in the South African education system and in higher education in particular are dominated by Western world views rather than by African world views (Heleta, 2016; Hurst, 2015). When textbooks are centred on foreign epistemological knowledge systems, that knowledge is not easily accessible to students and in turn they are unable to relate to these contexts (wa Thiongo, 1994).

There is a link between the foreign epistemological knowledge which lecturers deliver to students and Said's theory of orientalism. According to Khan (2003) and Said (1978), Westerners or former colonisers created ontological and epistemological differences between

the orient and the occident. In the context of this study, the students whose first language is not English are the orients who are 'othered' since they are compelled to learn in a colonial language which, in South Africa, is English (Census South Africa, 2011). EMI represents the knowledge systems of the occident. Therefore, the content in textbooks is based on occidental or Eurocentric theories and examples (Heleta, 2016; Mudimbe, 2016). When ESL students read such texts, they struggle to understand the content or relate to it in a meaningful way because of the geographical and cultural distance between English and their environments. However, they are also aware of its advantages with regard to providing access to social mobility.

4.2 Inadequate expressive skills in students' assessment work

The participants also identified students' lack of vocabulary and expressive skills in their oral and written work. Comments below provide an indication of this challenge:

> *Over the years, I have noted with concern how most of the undergraduate students fail to express themselves when they converse in English and particularly in their written work. They lack the appropriate vocabulary and this leads to them failing examinations…students become helpless when they have limited vocabulary which impinge on their ability to understand and communicate both orally and in written form. (Lecturer B)*

> *Most of our students from disadvantaged backgrounds have poor expressive skills. Their grammar is usually incorrect. For instance, most of the students from poorly resourced high schools' written work is often marred by numerous spelling mistakes and incomplete sentences. Such students don't normally get good marks. They also don't understand the phrasing of questions in tasks and examinations. (Lecturer A)*

On the issue of students' language proficiency a participant commented:

> *Because certain students are not good in conversing in English, sometimes they have to stop and think before they say something while figuring out the correct words to use to express a point. (Lecturer C)*

The excerpts above indicate that students' lack of CALP disadvantages them when they answer questions during lectures and when writing assignments and examinations where most struggle to understand the questions. As a result, they give poor answers. The participants' views concur with Otaala and Platter (2013), who show that ESL students in Namibian universities are unable to focus in most lessons due to language related challenges. Thus, lack of academic literacy skills among most ESL students hampers effective teaching and learning in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

The use of English as primary medium of instruction in higher education institutions has adverse effects on the students' learning. It compromises the quality of teaching and learning

at university level as the majority of ESL students continue to struggle academically. According to Chilisa (2012), Heleta (2016) and Manyike (2017), lack of English language proficiency is related to high dropout rates, high failure rates and the inability of most students to complete their studies within the prescribed period. EMI in higher education strips most linguistically and culturally diverse students of their voices and render them powerless in their own education (Chilisa, 2012; Ndamba, Van Wyk & Sithole, 2017).

According to orientalism theory, in environments where a second language is used as a medium of instruction, the aim of education is perceived as providing assistance to the orient by civilising them through the use of the colonial masters' ethos and values (Said, 1979; Gilbert-Moore, 1997). In this study, participants revealed that ESL students, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds are viewed as both unable and unfit for the academic rigour of higher education institutions.

4.3 Lack of language support

Apart from the challenges faced in content delivery and assessment work, interviews results showed that ESL students at the university lack adequate English language support. The comments below from the three lecturer participants in this study support this finding.

> *As lecturers we expect students to write quality essays, but many of them don't have the skills. We unfortunately, turn a blind eye to the fact that some of our students are from poor and under-resourced schools. We expect English second or third language speakers of English to write proficiently in English. I mean, there is little support given to such students. (Lecturer A)*

> *Although the South African government provides funding to address language related problems, among other things, institutions sometimes find that the resources allocated are inadequate. Another challenge is that most language programs are not of good quality and as such these programmes are failing to teach academic language proficiency skills required to cope with academic demands. (Lecturer B)*

> *There is lack of support in the form of glossaries and terminologies in both English and other indigenous South African languages to assist ESL students who struggle with English, to assist them in their language development and increase their understanding of the content taught. Remember there are many students here with different linguistic backgrounds who need that kind of support. (Lecturer C)*

The results of the study thus revealed that lecturers in higher education institutions are not well equipped to assist students who struggle with language related challenges. The participants viewed their responsibilities as teaching content knowledge and not dealing with language related challenges. Lecturer A, for example, alluded to the fact that lecturers who teach different courses do not ensure that students have a conceptual understanding of their modules.

Thus, language related challenges are not addressed by content subject lecturers (Heleta, 2016; Lange, 2017; Mkhize; Balfour, 2017). We argue that it is not enough to expect language programmes to address all the language related challenges experienced by ESL students. For students to be assisted with language related challenges, all lecturers who use EMI should be willing to assist their students by identifying and addressing language problems which students might experience (Letsekha, 2016; Makalela, 2015; McKinney, 2017). We further argue that most lecturers are unaware of how they can assist their students with language related challenges. During face-to-face teaching, lecturers need to explain how different questions should be handled in order to support students' learning Manyike (2017).

One of the comments above reveals that there is inadequate funding for most language programmes in higher education. We therefore argue that opening access to higher education institutions to previously disadvantaged student groups without providing adequate student support to ensure their success results in symbolic violence (Letsekha, 2016; Makalela, 2015; McKinney, 2017). With reference to Said and Bhabha's theories, responsibility for students' academic success is attributed solely to students and not the institutions which admitted them. As indicated earlier, higher education institutions have failed to transform their cultures, hence they are not adequately prepared to ensure that previously disadvantaged students succeed academically (Heleta, 2016; Lange, 2017).

Nomlomo and Katiya (2018), confirm that the teaching and learning materials are still largely prepared for English monolingual students and that there is very little effort to ensure the provision for African languages. Lack of glossaries in African languages to scaffold learning results in underachievement among most ESL students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Most black ESL students who are taught in English struggle when they write academic texts and battle to understand academic concepts and terminology in their fields of study (Mkhize & Balfour, 2017; Nomlomo & Katiya, 2018). Students who are confronted with these linguistic and academic challenges face the risk of academic exclusion while others drop out of the system Manyike (2017). The role played by South African students in changing the language in education policy through the Hashtag Fees Must Fall Campaign indicates their awareness of the language challenge and the power of language in ensuring social and economic mobility. However, without adequate institutional support, ESL students may exit these institutions without the requisite skills to be economically competitive.

4.4 The hierarchy of languages and marginalisation of African languages

The participants indicated an awareness of the hierarchical placement of African languages in the academic, political and economic spheres in the country. They felt that South African indigenous languages are marginalised, particularly at institutions such as the University of the Free State where the primary medium of teaching and learning is English (Heleta, 2016;

Makalela, 2015). The lecturer participants claimed that the marginalisation of African language strengthens the English hegemony. Heleta (2016), Lange (2017) and Ntombela (2018) argue that the hegemony of English in the academic sphere is not only a South African phenomenon but an international trend in which more universities are opting for EMI to prepare their students for the international job market, to attract international students and to be economically competitive.

The lecturers commented as follows:

> *There is a growing tendency of using English as the language of teaching and learning. This happens all over the world even in contexts where the majority of the population speaks local languages, as is the case in South Africa. (Lecturer A)*
>
> *The importance of English is conspicuous in many domains of life, e.g., in business, education, jobs, etc. So for universities to produce graduates who are competent, they adopt English language policies at the expense of local languages. (Lecturer B)*
>
> *… Students want to be taught in their home languages, but look at the global imperatives for the need of English proficient graduates. (Lecturer C).*

The response by Lecturer C above implies that although it may be advantageous for students to be taught in their first languages, he adheres to English monolingual language policies as a global requirement. As such, he accepts the hegemony of English. Despite the South African Constitution placing the nine indigenous languages on a par with English, policy implementation in the schooling and the higher education system remains elusive (Heleta, 2016; Mudimbe, 2016; Nomlomo & Katiyo, 2018).The response further shows that the position of indigenous languages in higher education in South Africa is an issue which has not been resolved (Anita, 2015; Booysen, 2016; Hurst, 2015; Lange, 2017; Nyika, 2015).

All three lecturers were of the opinion that English as a primary medium of instruction was essential in ensuring that students are ready for the world of work. They regarded English language proficiency as a prerequisite for success in life and as such they saw no reason to change the language policy. These lecturers equated English language proficiency with being educated. Similarly, Anita (2015), Booysen (2016), and Mutasa (2015), found that lecturers opined that for their own children to be regarded as educated, they should have mastery of English.

With regard to the role of African languages in education, the study results revealed that African languages remain on the periphery in the South African educational sphere. The excerpt below provides proof of this assertion:

> *You can see the power of English language in many education systems in different countries. Textbooks are written in English, examination papers are in English and students must write examinations in English. (Lecturer A)*

In clarifying the position of indigenous languages in the hierarchy, Lecturer B reiterated that:

> *Zulu and Afrikaans have been recognised as subordinate media of instruction only to be used during tutorial sessions. However, I must honestly tell you that as lecturers, we sometimes find ourselves code switching in different indigenous languages during lessons to improve students' understanding, though the policy is against it.*

Lecturer C explained that apart from using English to teach, all formal gatherings at the institution are addressed in English:

> *"All formal meetings, that is, at departmental or faculty levels, are done in English".*

We therefore argue that these lecturers accepted the value of EMI without problematising it. The 2016 student protests mentioned earlier centred on the language question and specifically on the status African languages as media of instruction in higher education institutions (Badat, 2016; Mkhize & Balfour, 2017; Mbembe, 2016; Naicker, 2016). Hence, by adopting English as the language of teaching and learning, the education systems in postcolonial settings such as South Africa tend to be monopolised by Western thinking, which reflects hegemonic ideologies based on linguistic and cultural imperialism (Wolff, 2017; Heleta, 2016; wa Thiongo,1994).

Comments by Lecturers A and B above show that English is elevated in the higher education system. According to orientalist theory, the colonisers/former colonisers internalise their own superiority over the inferior by devaluing their culture, race or language (Said, 1979; Zohdi, 2017). The preference for EMI shows that the selected university accepts the hegemony of English without question. Ntombela (2018) argues that it is for this reason that most ESL students also glorify western cultures. However, the call for African epistemologies shows that these students are ready to embrace who they are and also acknowledge the different ways of knowing which deal with issues of identity and culture.

From a postcolonial perspective, the hierarchies of languages as testified by the participants typify the colonial linguistic hierarchy (Pennycook, 1998:47). In other words, the place given to English and to the indigenous languages in South African higher education may, to a greater extent, serve to reflect what Said (1978) and Fanon (2004) call a Western view of the world in which indigenous languages must be understood as uncultured, lacking in power while languages of the colonisers such as English represent power, civilisation and culture. Therefore, the fact that English, the language of former colonisers, is adopted as a primary medium of instruction by higher education in South Africa in the era of democracy affirms that the responsible authorities still hold on to that myth that Western views of the world are the ultimate reality.

Research shows that in Africa, the language use pattern places ex-colonial languages at the top as most commonly used media of instruction and indigenous languages at the bottom. Ex-

colonial languages maintain their prestige as languages of higher education, science and technology and official government business (Gomba, 2017; Mkhize et al., 2017; Ndamba et al., 2017). The effect is the creation of linguistic hierarchies at an institution with English at the top and vernacular languages at the bottom (Prah, 2017).

4.5 Challenges faced in implementing indigenous languages as media of instruction

In explaining their opinion about multilingualism in higher education in relation to the EMI policy, the participants raised a number of challenges which higher education faces. The following statements clarify some of the challenges:

> *A serious challenge to consider is which language should be developed to the level of a medium of teaching and learning. Remember there are nine African official languages in South Africa. So which one must be used at which university and why? Mind you, each university in the country has a lot of students who come from different provinces. (Lecturer B)*
>
> *The LPHE and other policy frameworks advocate and encourage the use and development of local indigenous languages in higher education. However, this is difficult to implement because the students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. (Lecturer C)*
>
> *South Africa is a rainbow nation with people from diverse cultures and languages. It is thus tricky to choose a particular language as a medium of instruction. (Lecturer A)*

The statements by the lecturers reveal challenges with the implentation of a multilingual policy in the South African higher education sector and at the selected institution in particular. Their concerns concur with those expressed by Anita (2015), Booysen (2016), and Hurst (2015), who argue that it is difficult to choose a language for use as a medium of instruction because of the multilingual nature of South African higher education institutions. Despite the fact that the South African Constitution declares the nine indigenous languages as official, policy implementation at school and higher education institutions has failed as the result of the lack of clear implementation plans. The South African Constitution fails to provide guidance on how the language in education policy should be implemented and monitored (Hlongwa & Mkhize, 2014; Mutasa, 2015; Phaahla, 2015).

The failure by the South African government and the higher education institutions, or rather their unwillingness to enforce indigenous languages as media of instruction in the country's education system, can be explained from the orientalist theory point of view. According to Said (2003), "Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the orient." Chilisa (2012) argues that authority is a tightly organised language discourse in

which the former coloniser controls and manages the formerly colonised countries. Thus, policymakers, politicians and other stakeholders still pay homage to the former colonisers (Hurst, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; McKaiser, 2016). This explains the shift to EMI in most universities across the globe.

The lecturers indicated that in the face of all the challenges as discussed above, there are visible elements of resistance in higher education to the marginalisation of African languages. The following excerpts affirm this finding:

> *During 2015 and 2016 there was a lot of student activism as they protested against the marginalisation of indigenous languages by the South African higher education ... yeah. (Lecturer A)*

> *Resistance took place in form of protests against use of Afrikaans medium instruction, against university curricula which is largely Eurocentric. This came out as the #feesmustfall, #RhodesMustFall campaigns which spread throughout South African universities between 2015 and 2016. (Lecturer B)*

The #RhodesMustFall campaigns and other related student protests during 2015 and 2016 demonstrated strong feelings by the student body that the statue of Rhodes at a prestigious university in Africa symbolised approval of the ideals of the former colonial imperialists (Naicker, 2016). Such feelings ignited demands for the decolonisation of university curricula and overall institutional culture (Badat, 2016; Naicker, 2016).

The participants referred to resistance on their part, in classrooms during lessons where they codeswitch to students' vernacular languages when necessary. The following quotations illustrate this point.

> *Although the new policy clearly states English as the language of teaching and learning, as lecturers we sometimes use local languages once we realise that students are lost in class. (Lecturer C)*

> *It's a fact that those lecturers who can speak vernacular languages code switch to those languages from time to time to clarify or to emphasise the important aspects of the lessons. (Lecturer A)*

Ironically, although lecturers went to lengths to implement the new policy at the university, Lecturer C's and A's remarks above show that they often fail to adhere strictly to the policy requirements. Lecturers decided what in their view, was essential and what was non-essential for their students. Decisions taken are mainly pragmatically based on the situations which they encounter when teaching (Fanon, 2004; Chilisa, 2012; Ndamba et al., 2017; wa Thiongo 1994).

4.6 Lack of support to develop indigenous languages

The participants indicated that support to develop indigenous languages was necessary for both teaching staff and students. This included training lecturers in the use of African languages to facilitate the development of students' language proficiency in the various South African indigenous languages. The following statements confirm this finding:

> *I don't deny the effectiveness of using African languages as medium of instruction. The main challenge is that some lecturers need training on how to teach in those languages especially those who don't have adequate background and competence in such languages. Mind you it's not every lecturer working here who is South African. (Lecturer A)*

> *For the use of indigenous languages as medium of instruction to be taken seriously at this university and elsewhere in the country, then it should be made compulsory that some modules be taught in these languages for all the students as is the case for UKZN. (Lecturer B)*

Lecturer B's response above reveals that as long as monolingual language policies are in place, it will be difficult to use indigenous languages effectively as media of instruction. An acceptance of that status quo would mean accepting the pervasiveness of the colonial matrix of power (Hurst, 2016; Mayaba, Ralarala & Angu, 2018). Consequently, students will be under the misapprehension that no alternative ways of being and knowing exist in higher education.

Although there are lecturers who are not proficient in South African indigenous languages. the implementation of a multilingual language policy is mandatory according to the Language Policy for Higher Education (Council for Higher Education, 2016). Institutions are therefore obliged to implement the policy effectively. We argue that the wastage of finances due to high failure rates and dropout rates can no longer be justified given the knowledge of language-related challenges facing higher education institutions. According to Cummins (1978; 1984; 1988; 1996; 2010; 2014), academic language proficiency skills acquired in a person's home language transfer to a second language.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of lecturers towards English as a primary medium of instruction at a chosen university in South Africa. The findings confirmed that these lecturers experienced English as a barrier to effective teaching and learning in contexts where students are ESL speakers who lack CALP. However, the participating lecturers perceive English as a prestigious language which promotes prospective graduates' ability to be competitive in the global market.

We therefore recommend the use of African languages as additional media of instruction in South African higher education. There is also a need for effective training of lecturers to enable them to blend content teaching and support CALP in their lesson delivery. Government should support language programmes in higher education to improve access and throughput rates among ESL students from disadvantaged ethno-linguistic backgrounds.

This study represented the voices of only three senior lecturers at the chosen university in South Africa. Because of the small sample size and uniqueness of the university at which the study took place, the results may not be generalised to other lecturers in other South African universities. The study focused on the experiences of a few individuals to infer aspects of the phenomenon of English as the primary medium of instruction policy at the university. It is our contention that while it may be inappropriate to make broad generalisations, the reality of interest resides in the lecturer participants.

6. References

Anney, V. N. 2014. Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: looking at trustworthiness criteria. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 5(2): 272- 281.

Andreotti, V. 2011. *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Badat, S. 2016. *Deciphering the Meanings and Explaining the South African Higher Education Student Protests of 2015-2016*. Johannesburg: Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research.

Bhabha, H.K 1990.(ed.) *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.

Bhabha, H.K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bhabha, H.K. 2002. Afterword: a personal response. In Hutcheon, L & Valdés, M. (eds.) *Rethinking Literary History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Booysen, S. 2016. Two weeks in October: Changing governance in South Africa. In Booysen, S. (ed.) *Fees Must fall. Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 22- 52.

Brenn-White, M. & Faethe, E. 2013. *English-taught Master's Programs in Europe: A 2013 Update*. New York: Institute of International Education.

Census South Africa. 2011. *South African Population Census, Community Profiles*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Chilisa, B. 2012. *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Council on Higher Education. 2016. *South African Higher Education Reviewed. Two Decades of Democracy*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

Creswell, J.W. 2007. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Lincoln: SAGE Publishers.

Cummins, J. 1978. Metalinguistic development of children in bilingual education programs: data from Irish and Canadian Ukranian-English Programs. *Aspects of Bilingualism*, 34(8): 855-883.

Cummins, J. 1984. *Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters. 127-138.

Cummins, J. 1996. *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*. Ontario, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.

Cummins, J. 2010. Bilingual and immersion programs. In M. Lang & C. Doughty (eds.) *The Handbook of Language Teaching*. 161-181. Malden: Wiley Blackwell.

Cummins, J. 2014. Beyond language: academic communication and student success. *Linguistics and Education*, 26(2): 145-154. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2014.01.006

Department of Education. 2002. Language Policy for Higher Education https://www.dhet.gov.za/HED%20Policies/Language%20Policy%20for%20Higher%20Education.pdf [Accessed: 17 Sep. 2022]

Desai, Z. 2016. Learning through the medium of English in multilingual South Africa: enabling or disabling learners from low income contexts? *Comparative Education*, 52(3): 43-358.

Fanon, F. 2004. *Black skin, White Mask*. New York: Grove Press Inc.

Fenton- Smith, B., Humphreys, P. & Walkinshaw, I. (eds.) 2017. *English Medium Instruction in Higher Education in Asia- Pacific*. Cham: Springer.

Gandhi, L. 1998. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Gilbert- Moore, B.J. 1997. *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*. London: Verso Books.

Gomba, C. 2017. Post-colonial theory in Zimbabwe's education system: headmasters' views. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 7(1): 77- 88.

Heleta, S. 2016. Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantle epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa. *Transformation in Higher Education* 1(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/the.v1i1.9

Huddart, D. 2006. *Homi K. Bhabha*. London: Routledge.

Hurst, E. 2016. Navigating language: strategies, transitions, and the 'colonial wound' in South African education. *Language and Education,* 30(3): 219- 234.

Jansen, J. 2017. *As by Fire: The End of the South African University*. Pretoria, South Africa: Tafelberg.

Khan, S.A. 2003. *Race and Difference: Orientalism and Western Concepts*. New York: Nature Publishing Group.

Lange, L. 2017. 20 Years of higher education curriculum policy in South Africa. *Journal of Education*, 68: 31-57.

Makalela, L. 2015. Translanguaging as a vehicle for epistemic access: Cases for reading comprehension and multilingual interactions. *Per Linguam,* 31(1): 15–29.

Makoe, P. & McKinney, C. 2014. Linguistic ideologies in multilingual South African suburban schools. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development,* 35(7): 2014, 1-16.

Manyike, T.V. 2017. Postgraduate supervision at an open distance e-learning institution in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*. 37(2) 1- 11.

Mayaba, N.N, Ralarala, M. & Angu, P. 2010. Student voices: perspective on language and critical pedagogy in South African higher education. *Education Research for Social Change*, 7(1): 1-12.

Mbembe, A. 2016. Decolonising of the university: new directions. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(1): 29-45.

McKaiser, E. Epistemic injustices: 2016. The dark side of academic freedom,' *2016 DCS Oosthuizen Academic Freedom Memorial Lecture*, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 30 May. http://www.iol.co.za/news/epistemicinjustices- the dark- side- of –academic freedom-2029747 [Accessed: 17 June 2016.]

McKinney, C. 2017. *Language and Power in Post-Colonial Schooling: Ideologies in Practice*. New York: Routledge.

McMillan, J.H., & Schumacher, S. 2014. *Research in Education: Evidence-based Inquiry*. Harlow: Pearson.

Mkhize, D & Balfour, R. 2017. Language rights in education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 31(6): 133-150.

Mpofu, S. 2017. Disruption as a communication strategy: The case of #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall students' protests in South Africa. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 9(2): 351-373.

Mutasa, D.E. 2015. Language policy implementation in South African universities vis-a-vis the speakers of indigenous African languages' perception. *Per Linguam*, 31(1): 46-59. http://dx.doi.org/10.5785/31-1-631

Mutekwa, E 2017. Unmasking the ramification of the fees must fall conundrum in higher education in South Africa: a critical perspective. *Perspectives in Education*, 35(2): 142-154.

Musitha, M. E. &Tshibalo, L. 2016. The politics of language in South African institutions of higher learning. *European Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 4(6): 1-11.

Naicker, C. 2016. From Marikana to #feesmustfall: the praxis of popular protest in South Africa. *Urbanisation*, 1(1): 53– 61.

Ndamba, G.T., Van Wyk, M. & Sithole, J.C. 2017. Competing purposes: mother tongue education benefits versus economic interests in rural Zimbabwe. The *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 8(1): 1-24. https://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2017.8.1.1

Ndebele, H. & Zulu, N. S. 2018. The management of isiZulu as a language of teaching and learning at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's College of Humanities. *Language and Education*, 31(6): 509- 525.

Ndimande-Hlongwa, & Ndebele, H.2017. Defying ideological misconceptions through information and communication technology localisation in higher education. *South African Journal of African Languages*, 37(1): 1-9.

Nkosi, Z. P. 2014. Postgraduate students' experiences and attitudes towards isiZulu as a medium of instruction at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 15(3): 245– 264.

Nomlomo, V. & Katiya, M. 2018. Multilingualism and (bi)literacy development for epistemological access: exploring students experience in the use of multilingual glossaries at a South African University. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 7(1): 77-93.

Ntombela, B.X.S. 2018. Linguistic imperialism in English assessment: the case of an historically black university in South Africa. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 7(1): 61- 76.

Nyika, N. 2015. Mother tongue as medium of instruction at developing country universities in a global context. *South African Journal of Science*, 111(1): 1-5. https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2015/20140005

Nyoni, E. Manyike, T.V. & Lemmer, E.M. Difficulties in geography teaching and learning in the ESL classrooms in Zimbabwe. *Per Linguam*, 35(2): 74-87.

Otaala, L. A. & Platter, I. E. 2013. Implicit beliefs about English language competences in the contexts of teaching and learning in higher education: a comparison of university students and lecturers in Namibia. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 2(3): 123-131.

Phaahla, P. 2015. Indigenous African languages as agents of change in the transformation of higher education institutions in South Africa: UNISA. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 23(1): 31-56.

Philipson, R. 2016. Native speakers in linguistic imperialism. *Journal of Critical Education Studies*, 14(3): 1-15.

Prah, K. 2017. The intellectualisation of African languages for higher education. *Alternation*, 24: 215-225.

Republic of South Africa. 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Said, E.W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Said, E.W.1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.

Said, E.W. 1999. *Out of Place: A Memoir*. London: Granta Books.

Shenton, A. K. 2004. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22: 63-75.

Smith, J.M., Flower, P. & Larkin, M. 2009. *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Theory Method and Research*. London. Sage.

University of the Free State. 2016. University of the Free State Language Policy. https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/policy-institutional-documents/language-policy [Accessed: 9 Sep. 2016]

University of the Free State. 2018. University of the Free State at a glance. https://www.ufs.ac.za/about-the-ufs/ufs-in-focus/ufs-in-figures

Wachter, B. & Maiworn, F. (eds.). 2014. *English-Taught Programs in European Higher Education*. Bonn: Lemmens.

WaThiongo, N. 1994. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature.* Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.

Wolff, H.E. 2017. Language ideologies and the politics of language in postcolonial Africa. *SPIL Plus*, 51: 1-22. https://doi.org/10.5842/51-0-701

Young, R.J.C. 2001. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. London: Blackwell.

Zohdi, E. 2017. Lost Identity; A result of "hybridity" and 'ambivalence" in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(1): 146-151.

About the authors

Juliet Munyaradzi

Ms Munyaradzi is an experienced English high school teacher. She completed her PhD studies this year and awaits the conferment of the degree in Spring. Her areas of interest are in bilingual/multicultural education and language policy in education.

Tintswalo Vivian Manyike

Tintswalo Vivian Manyike is a Professor and Chair of Department of Language Education Arts and Culture at UNISA. She has published extensively and presented papers at both national and international conferences.