

## Comparative Education for Competitive Learners in Limpopo Province, South Africa

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### **Abstract:**

In South Africa e-education and multilingualism is a national development priority in a multilingual society. It is viewed as a national project geared towards attaining and sustaining qualitative education. The acquisition of literacy and multi-literacies is critical for participation in the global world. There is a need to develop cultural competency skills to enhance the ability to practice effective communication in intercultural situations. Collaborative use of digital technology and cultural competency are the best approach to enhance effective and appropriate interaction with people of other cultures. As a social transformation strategy, there is the intention to ensure that educational imbalances of the past are redressed and that equal educational opportunities are provided for all sections of our population. This paper explores the effect of the current education on learners. The study was qualitative in nature within the interpretivism paradigm. Research instruments, namely, interviews, classroom observation and document analysis were used to collect data. The study recommended that as the design and the scope of the e-education and multilingualism are multidimensional, they need to be clearly captured in language policies, clearly spelt in the curriculum and teaching modules and adequately financed for effective implementation for desired outcomes.

**Keywords:** cultural competency skills, digital technology, multilingualism, e- education and language policy

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### Introduction

The importance of education cannot be overemphasised while what education entails go beyond its meaning. Education is regarded as the key and the foundation of every living. Much effort is said to be placed on Foundation Education for the outcome to be responsible, relevant, confident and competitive youth who are ready to explore life in all its dimensions. (Fleming :2021) is expecting education to create important new fields of understanding and extend existing knowledge bases. In South Africa, after democracy, there was a strong and a desired shift from how things were done, especially in education sector. One of National Curriculum Statement principle under social transformation was to redress educational imbalances of the past and ensures that educational opportunities are provided for all sections of our population so that quality education can be for all (NCS- CAPS:2011:4). This is supported by

Gutierrez:2020 who argues that equality is one purpose of education in that it is key to personal development and the future societies, it unlocks opportunities and narrows inequalities. He continues to say that the world needs to create inclusive, resilient, quality education system fit for the future. As a way of striving to the intended quality education, e- education and multilingualism was introduced to attain and sustain the quality education. Acquisition of literacy and multi-literacies was encouraged so that participation in the global world becomes appropriate and possible. The development of cultural competency skills was encouraged for proper communication in intercultural situations. Digital technology was also flagged as a necessity for appropriate interaction with people of other culture. All these were necessitated by the notion of culture which is complex and multifaceted, emphasising that teachers need to understand the village culture and incorporate it in their classroom teaching strategies, content and use of language teaching with cultural intelligence and culturally responsive. This led to education being analysed in the context of social, political and economic to see how educational systems have been shaped by control of other powerful countries.

### Methodology

The study explored the effect of the current education on learners, to establish the appropriateness of its implementation and if it is yielding intended outcomes. The study was qualitative within interpretivism paradigm in which the meaning participants attached to their social world is well understood (Creswell: 2014) and data was collected through interviews, classroom observation and document analysis and analysed through thematic content analysis (Braun and Clarke: 2006) South Africa is a diverse country with public and private schools, some in rural and others in urban areas. Therefore, 10 schools, 5 public and 5 private schools were purposively sampled for this study based on the fact that public schools are under government control while private schools are independent. Principal per each school were interviewed regarding the current education in the country, classes were observed randomly to see how they are offered and the curriculum and the language policy were analysed to establish if they are implemented as approved. Theories of policy and practice (Zajda J & Rust v:2021) were the lenses through which this study was looked into. Jules T et al (2021) regard this theory as one of categories into which theories used in Comparative Education are broken into. This included Constructivism which examines factors that influence which idea gain traction, influence and then become practice in education. This brought into domination learner – centred approach which is a social constructivism approach that looks at the ways in which student learning is influenced by beliefs, learning strategies, learning styles and personal characteristics. Neo- liberalism which examines the privatization of education where corporations control education through private institutions also came into the picture.

### Presentation and analysis of data collected

#### From the interviews

Data collected highlighted vast differences between public and private schools in the country which brought to light that their education differs and clearly demonstrated that learners from private schools are likely to be more competitive while chances are slim regarding

competitiveness of learners from public schools. “We rely on donated books which are placed in our libraries, books are outdated but as long as learners can have books to read to improve their reading skills” Exclaimed one principal of a public school. She continues to say: “We also rely on donated computers which are very old and not effective, they are not assisting learners in any technological aspect, other than them just learning how to operate a computer. The school does not have data for learners (those who can) to navigate through them and most of the time they are off because of unreliable electricity in the area” This was echoed by another public school principal. On the contrary, one principal from a private school highlighted that the school has adequate and appropriate resources for all the learners. He continues to say:” All our learners has tablets in which all the material are uploaded and they can operate them effectively without assistance. They can seek information on the internet, they can work on the activities given to them and submit their responses electronically. It is easy to work with them as there is no class of more than 30 learners. “We employ teachers who are conversant with technology and the school continuously send them to workshop so that they are upskilled in terms of technology,” echoed one principal from a private school. One principal from a public school when asked regarding the training of teachers respond this way:” There are no workshops during working hours, they are scheduled in the afternoon and teachers’ attendance is poor. When questioning the poor attendance, it is evident that the workshops are arranged just for compliance because the curriculum implementers has nothing to workshop educators about. There are no equipment to equip educators to be 21<sup>st</sup> century educators. Their workshops are characterised going through the CAPS document with them, which they are used to.

#### Classroom Observation

Data collected through interviews was confirmed during classroom observation where, in public schools classrooms there were no equipment used other than the textbooks and the teacher-centred approach was employed due to overcrowded classrooms. This is contrary to private schools classes which were of manageable sizes and learners were actively involved in their activities and consult the teacher where they need help and the indication of those who need help were very few.

During classroom observation it was also clear that learners in the private schools are conversant with English, they do not struggle in understanding anything uttered by the teacher and their accent is impressive. In public school classroom observation displayed African Languages learners struggling with English as the language of learning and teaching which is evident even in some of their teachers. It was clear that the present knowledge society demands the use of different teaching and learning methods in achieving the educational potentials of learners. It also calls for Inclusive pedagogical practices- promotion of pedagogies that are effective in a multilingual and multicultural classrooms. This clearly showed that in private schools learners are accustomed to reading multimodal texts while in public schools reading and writing still tends to be mono-modal.

### Document Analysis

Evaluation of the curriculum and the language policy in public schools indicated that the curriculum and the language policy are accurately presented but there are deviations when it comes to implementation. The documents do not talk to the current issues in the country, the language policy is crafted such that it allows multilingualism which practically it is not viable, hence learners are not achieving how 21<sup>st</sup> century learners are expected to achieve. The reviews of the curriculum and the language policy are long overdue but the progress along that route is of the snail's pace. There is no hope of including current issues as the current curriculum and the language policies are such that they are repetition of the previous ones, making one to expect nothing new in the reviewed documents. It is unfortunate that schools are expected to implement the documents as they are and deviating from them is a serious offence. In private schools there is a correlation between what is in the documents and what is actually happening in the schools. They are even free to amend the curriculum to suit the current education system. There are no issues regarding the language policy, their policy states clearly that English is the language of teaching and learning. English is taught by English speaking teachers and almost all learners attended English medium institutions from crèche.

### Recommendations.

The analysis suggests several policy recommendations and practical steps that the government might consider to effectively ensure that what the curriculum entail is realistic and doable for South African learners to be competent as compared to learners from private schools and even be able to compete with learners from other countries, hence the following recommendations:

- Resource development – There is a need for relevant and appropriate resources, thus investing in the creation and distribution of culturally appropriate teaching materials. Little A (2000) emphasised this by indicating how context, content, comparison and contributors give birth to education which is applicable to all. The good curriculum document needs to be backed up by resources for its implementation to be effective. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that all learners, irrespective of the type of school they attend are supplied with the required resources for learning so that they can cope in this ever developing world.
- Educator Professional development- Pedagogical skills for multilingual classroom and educator reskilling and upskilling is necessary so that the outcome of our education system can be competent individuals. This can only be possible if responsible educators are ever skilled on what is pertinent in the education system as reflected in the curriculum. Establishing regular, comprehensive training programs focused on linguistic diversity, cultural competency and modern teaching methodology. Knowledgeable and well trained educators will produce knowledgeable and skilled products who will face the developing world with confidence.
- Policy adjustment –Policies need not be static but be regularly updated to incorporate current issues that will produce learners who will compete with students not only nationally but internationally. Pro-activity of the government is key here, ensuring that current matters are immediately included in the curriculum and approved, all the

requirement are available, including human resources for implementation so that there is nothing preventing the teaching of any current issue. Antoni V (2024) supported this by highlighting the importance of adopting global education policies for relevant and responsive education.

- Affordability – Education to be adequately funded. Public schools need to be well catered for by the government so that learners in those schools are not disadvantaged. Free education must not mean providing redundant education whereby innovation is slowed down in the name of no funding. In most public schools, prescribed books and set works are in use for a very long period without changing them to new ones. This negatively affect quality in assessment as assessing the same set works for a long time normally results in predictability of questions. Collaborative efforts between government and institutions of learning is key to ensure that quality in the education of learners is maintained. The importance funding to support and sustain the initiative to improve education cannot be overemphasised.

Conclusion: The multidimensional aspects of e-education and multilingualism need to be clearly captured in language policies, clearly spelt in the curriculum and teaching subjects. This calls for alignment of the subject contents and language policies with the curriculum. Hence Paulston R (2000) encourages comparative Education which is relevant for past, present and future recipients. Whenever there is a new development which needs to be factor in in Education, this must be inserted in the curriculum and approved for immediate implementation without delay. In this way all learners will be equally equipped for the 21<sup>st</sup> century education and thus compete with learners provincially, nationally and internationally.

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