

DEBILITATING COLONIALISM THROUGH ETHNOGRAPHIC USER-ORIENTED EVALUATION OF A COLLABORATIVE SCIENCE ICL COURSE

L. J. Ngoepe

Department of Languages

University of Limpopo

Sovenga, South Africa

e-mail: lucia.ngoepe@ul.ac.za / <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6488-0850>

ABSTRACT

One of the most striking features of colonialism in the education system of South Africa (SA) is the sustained use of English as a language of teaching. If university tuition is offered to students in a non-native language such as English, these institutions inadvertently shoulder the responsibility of meeting the language needs of the students. As a response to the hegemony of English in Higher Education (HE), attempts made to meet the language needs of students in tertiary institutions are manifest in different approaches employed by universities, such as Integrating Content and Language (ICL) to support non-native speakers of English, in English media universities. It is thus vitally significant that courses offered in a number of countries be perennially evaluated to determine whether they are fit for purpose. The salience of evaluating input collected from a cohort of students who attend these courses cannot be overemphasised, hence a discussion of a student user-oriented evaluation of an integrated science content and language course taught collaboratively in one of the South African universities.

Keywords: colonialism, integrated, curriculum, ethnographic, students, evaluation, South African, decoloniality, collaborative, science, ICL, course

INTRODUCTION

Since language coloniality survives colonialism, the veracity of learning challenges experienced by non-native speakers of English led countries and universities to respond creatively to the linguistic plight of students at the threshold of tertiary education. As a consequence, they invested in a variety of contextual attempts to address and even redress the English language needs of students who have potential to succeed in Higher Education (HE). Following these challenges, approaches such as Integrating Content and Language (ICL) and Content and Language Integrated Teaching (CLIL) were developed. The aim of this article is to discuss interview responses emanating from student evaluations of one of the South African integrated science content and language courses taught collaboratively, with the objective of debilitating colonialism.

COLONIALITY

Coloniality survives classical colonialism; colonialism refers to a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people depends on the power of another nation, making the dominant nation an empire. Coloniality, however, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism and define culture, labour, inter-subjectivity relations as well as knowledge production way beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243; cf. Aim).

Ndlovu (2013, 1) argues that although the Third World suffers colonial domination in the political and economic spheres of life, it also experiences colonial domination in knowledge production. The question of knowledge production is quite crucial to the challenge of national identity and peaceful existence among the people of SA. Hence the significance of programmes such as the Bachelor of Science Extended Degree Programme (BSc EDP) one.

Colonial – and apartheid days were characterised by education which played a key role in promoting white supremacy and imposing Eurocentric worldviews. Historically Black Universities (HBUs) were established and maintained to train black people who served the colony and later the apartheid state. However, Historically White Universities (HWUs) either gave full support to the colonial and apartheid systems or enjoyed their liberal white privilege and benefits. As a result, government systems, academic agendas and curricula were imposed by the government and driven mainly by white academics (Delwyn 2016, 2).

Universities have arguably not done much since the demise of apartheid to open up to different bodies and traditions of knowledge as well as innovative and exploratory ways (Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions) (South Africa 2008). The institutional environment is not conducive to curriculum reform as it is inextricably intertwined with institutional culture which remains white and Eurocentric at Historically White Institutions (HWIs) (Delwyn 2016, 2). Years later, the curriculum remains disconnected from the lived experiences of most black people (Delwyn 2016, 3), prompting inception of programmes similar to the BSc EDP one.

The most striking and debilitating heritage of colonialism in African education is the sustained use of the colonial languages of instruction. This continues to be the case even in countries such as Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana (Prah 2018, 6; cf. Ngoepe 2007, 12).

DECOLONIZATION

Decolonization is about conforming to the Western knowledge systems and ensuring that they

become one way of knowing rather than the only way of knowing. A decolonised curriculum ought to place SA in the centre of teaching, learning and research as well as incorporate the epistemic perspectives, knowledge and thinking from the African continent and the Global South. These should place them on an equal footing with the currently hegemonic Eurocentric canon (Delwyn 2016, 4).

Decolonization should imply greater voice and means to autonomously produce as well as reproduce knowledge (Prah 2018, 76; see Evaluation). A decolonized education ought to reach into fundamental research (Prah 2018, 77; see Aim).

Through a decolonised curriculum, the past and structural domination, oppression in SA and the world over, must be addressed and future skills needed to overcome these in future must be developed; academics and administrators can help bring this to fruition. Thus, epistemological transformation and decolonisation would depend on significant transformation in academia (Delwyn 2016, 4). Which is why BSc EDP expatriate and local staff actualised interdisciplinary collaboration, collectively.

HE will, however, not be decolonised overnight, as students demand. SA needs academics and administrators with a decolonial stance who should decolonise their own curriculum and democratise the learning spaces in which they operate. Such a stance would lead to new possibilities for questioning what was once deemed unquestioned and unquestionable. However, progressive academics and lecturers are in the minority at universities (Delwyn 2016, 5; see Conclusion). Students who come from a unique past and have shown potential to study and succeed in the sciences are admitted into the BSc EDP, which is regarded as progressive.

CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATION

Pedagogic practices for English language teaching evolved in response to the growth of English as a world language. Thus, content and language integration is a practice that has emerged in response to such demographic changes. It also provides a means of teaching the English language through the study content. In a content and language integrated approach, language learners are not expected to be proficient in English before working with subject content. Language support is provided alongside instruction for content area specialisations (Christison and Murray 2014, 156). In the classroom, it is important to address how disciplinary discourses and their institutionally facilitated power or knowledge formations are linked to the world in order for this to make sense to the students, contextually (Chun 2015, 12; cf. Materials and Content).

HE has witnessed many dramatic changes over the past quarter of a century or so (Wilkinson and Walsh 2015, 9). Woodlard (2005) identifies two ideologies that have relevance

for the study of English language policy in HE; “authenticity” and “anonymity”. Authenticity locates the value of language in how it relates with a particular community whereas anonymity is concerned with the way hegemonic languages in modern society tend to exercise their authority on a conception of anonymity. Thus, Jenkins (2013, 78) avers that despite their apparent opposite orientations, the two ideologies could have a negative effect on non-native English users, hence the significance of approaches such as English Medium Instruction (EMI), ICL and CLIL. For instance, the value of English in this context is located within an academic science community at the heart of knowledge construction (cf. Methodology – Ngoepe 2019, 234).

English is in practice the lingua franca of the world (Fulcher 2009, 126) and, as a result, there are a number of approaches to teaching in English, including English for Specific Purposes (ESP), EMI, ICL and CLIL. These approaches are supported by theories and methodologies behind teaching a course in English. For example, in a “deficit” approach, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students are seen as lacking academic skills and language. In contrast, though, it is possible to deem EAP students as resources (De Chazal 2014, 31). However, access to teacher training and support to apply the approaches cited is limited in some countries and institutions (Wilkinson and Walsh 2015, 11).

Separating content and language tends to deprive students of opportunities to deal with specific features of language when their motivation to learn is at its peak (Lightbown 2014, 30). As a consequence, there are now a number of perspectives on how best to integrate content and language (Lyster 2017, 9).

Integrated Content and Language in Higher Education (ICLHE) is a relatively new acronym based on the term CLIL as coined by David Marsh in 1994. CLIL refers to an approach where subjects and disciplinary content are taught in a Target Language (TL) which is usually not the first language of the students. Thus, students are allowed to focus on and to learn to use the TL as they learn subject content (Jacobs 2015, 25; cf. BSc EDP). Many writers on CLIL use a wide definition of the phenomenon; this includes a combination of academic content learning as well as learning heritage and community languages (Llinares, Morton and Whittaker 2012, 1). However, although CLIL is still relatively under researched, a number of authors acknowledge that there has been a long-standing research effort in immersion programmes (Llinares et al. 2012, 3).

Although the student participants abroad come from a variety of countries (Chun 2015, 21), in SA, the participants are more often than not, nationals. CLIL is a relatively new movement for the integration of language and content in Europe. In general, it involves learning curricular subjects such as Biology or Geography through the medium of English, which is a

non-native language (Christison and Murray 2014, 157). CLIL teachers are non-native speakers of the language used as a medium of instruction. The materials used may be adapted or written specifically for a CLIL programme (Llinares et al. 2012, 2).

Christison and Murray (2014, 157) argue that teachers working with CLIL in Europe are not only content specialists in their own disciplines, but also proficient speakers of the TL. Implementation varies widely as there is no established orthodoxy for CLIL. It should be noted that other countries outside of Europe such as Malaysia have tried to adopt the content and language integration model with different results from the CLIL in Europe.

In the United States (U.S.), content-based instruction (CBI) is most commonly used as a comprehensive term to refer to all types of programmes making dual commitment in content and language development (Christison and Murray 2014, 157).

Post 1994, several institutions of higher learning in SA strategically attempted to redress educational imbalances of the past. Possible solutions include teaching courses such as EAP and ESP to support underprepared cohorts of students that they admit (Ngoepe 2017(b), 186). These courses can serve as examples of English Language Support Courses (ELSCs) which can integrate content and language.

Furthermore, Jacobs (2015, 29) maintains that various contextual agendas drive ICLHE differently, in different places. The SA situation is such that ICL work is driven by an agenda which aims to widen access to HE that is directed towards particular HE programmes, and this is underpinned by issues of social justice. However, in Europe, ICLHE work seems to be driven by a foreign language learning agenda, premised on issues of internationalisation and multilingualism.

Research undertaken at an institution in Cape Town, SA, indicates that ICLHE work was framed by understandings that saw knowledge as something to be imparted; the curriculum as a body of content to be learned; language as a skill that could be taught separately in decontextualized ways; ICLHE teaching as something needed by English Second Language (L2) students who are not proficient in English which is the medium of instruction; and the framing of the students in a deficit mode (Jacobs 2015, 31).

If content and language lecturers have different perceptions of what it is to teach language, then interdisciplinary collaboration may not reach its full potential (Lyster 2017, 11). Lecturer collaboration is thus a promising avenue to explore in order to integrate content and language (Lyster 2017, 10). The process of shifting towards a more transformative ICLHE agenda would involve content and language practitioners collaboratively interrogating their ways of knowing as well as the modes and tools they draw on to create their ways of knowing (Jacobs 2015, 25) (see Figure 1).

NEEDS ANALYSIS

Needs Analysis (NA) refers to the techniques for collecting and assessing information that is relevant for designing a course (Hyland 2006, 73). Therefore, NA serves as a matrix for designing ELSCs. Needs, in turn, form the basis of a systematic plan of what students need to learn by selecting and sequencing the content and tasks which will lead to desired learning outcomes (Hyland 2006, 282). Thus, NA is a means of establishing how the course is structured and what it entails (Hyland 2006, 73; cf. Structure).

Curriculum design is on-going throughout instruction because NA can be conducted at different times and for different purposes (Christison and Murray 2014, 184). NA is rendered a continuous process because lecturers modify their teaching as they come to learn more about cohorts of students, thus shading into evaluation (Hyland 2006, 73).

“Needs” is a comprehensive term that embraces numerous aspects which would incorporate learners’ goals and backgrounds, their language proficiencies, reasons for taking the course, teaching and learning preferences as well as situations in which they will need to communicate (Hyland 2006, 73). It is, therefore, imperative that the language learners’ curriculum be socially relevant (Davidson 2014, 6).

Language learning objectives must be derived from content objectives. Experience in working with content specialists indicates that those who have experienced the most success in writing language objectives wrote them after content objectives had been established and appropriate texts had been chosen (Christison and Murray 2014, 161). For example, objectives of the BSc EDP in English and Study Skills (ESS) course determined by language and content lecturers include preparation for tertiary studies in science through the development of appropriate study skills, including student-centred learning, learning for transfer across the sciences, and so on (Cantrell 1993).

Moreover, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, 53) argue that if students, sponsors and lecturers know why students need English, that awareness would influence what could be acceptable as reasonable content for a language course together with the potential that can be exploited.

POTENTIAL OPTIONS FOR THE DELIVERY OF INSTRUCTION

There are three potential options available for the delivery of instruction. If the language lecturer and content area specialist can collaborate with each other, then there will be an advantage of shared expertise (Christison and Murray 2014, 158). ESS and content lecturers collaborate in sharing expertise as per the needs of students and the structure of a given course. They could follow the CBI, CLIL or ICL models.

The English language lecturer or specialist can deliver things that he or she has expertise in. The lecturer or specialist should remain sensitive to the language needs of students. However, the language lecturer may not have sufficient background of content area. Additionally, developing expertise at the level needed for secondary and content areas may not be a realistic expectation for English language unless the lecturer is also a content area specialist and experienced in the expected content area (Christison and Murray 2014, 159; cf. Collaboration).

One of the advantages of the content area specialist is that he or she may deliver instruction; this is the obvious advantage of the content area expert. The disadvantage is that the content area specialist may not have sufficient knowledge about language, and thus find it difficult to provide the necessary modifications in teaching content comprehensible to English students. CLIL lecturers are most often content teachers who are proficient native speakers of English. In the U.S., content lecturers are most often natives who may or may not have experience in learning another language. For these groups of content area specialists, lecturer language awareness is critical (Christison and Murray 2014, 159).

The third option for the delivery of instruction is a collaborative effort of the English language – and content area specialists. However, collaboration is initially not without tensions between academic researchers and instructors, for example (Chun 2015, 15; cf. Ngoepe 2007, 22). This type of collaboration should be both desirable and necessary. Despite the instructional desirable option, there are often reasons why it is not an option. For example, there is often lack of financial resources or flexibility in personnel to assign more instruction to cover a course (Christison and Murray 2014, 159).

In each area, whether it is in Physics or Chemistry, the lecturer must first be concerned about determining the content knowledge that students need to master. Planning for the content begins at the level of a unit or a course so that all content is connected. Some of the most important questions that lecturers and course designers can ask themselves are “What information should students know at the end of a course or unit?” and “What significant questions should they be able to answer?” (Christison and Murray 2014, 160).

APPROACHES TO INTEGRATING CONTENT AND LANGUAGE

Examples of approaches to ICL include the adjunct, sheltered and humanistic approaches.

The adjunct approach

In 1989, Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989) were the first to describe a framework for Content Based Instruction (CBI) in relation to the Adjunct Model. In line with this model, students are enrolled concurrently in two linked courses, that is, a language course and a content course.

This is based on the idea that the two courses share content base, and would be complementary regarding mutually coordinated assignments (Christison and Murray 2014, 162). ESS BSc EDP students are enrolled in English which share content base with Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics curricula. This includes preparation for tertiary studies in science through the development of appropriate attitudes and critical thinking, active learning, objectivity and inventiveness, and practical skills (Cantrell 1993).

Although there may be a variety of implementation options, adjunct programmes have a number of features in common. They have administrative resources to support such coordinates; a need for the language lecturers to have some mastery of the content area and a language component oriented around the discipline content including vocabulary, grammar, materials, often authentic discipline materials and assessment oriented around the discipline (Christison and Murray 2014, 162). For example, reading passages such as “Sick miners pay full price for gold” and “Contraception for elephants – A viable option” deal with national South African issues, while “The motor and pollution” (an American setting), “Energy and related problems in Malawi” and “The rise and rise of the Pakistan people”, which focus on international issues, are authentic discipline materials used in BSc EDP ESS (Ngoepe 2012, 66).

Adjunct approaches have been primarily used in HE, which is itself, diverse. For example, the two programmes described by Brinton et al. (2003) were for freshmen Francophone and Anglophone students at the University of Ottawa (Christison and Murray 2014, 163).

The sheltered approach

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) is an instructional model for CBI. It is a research-based and validated model of sheltered instruction which has been widely and successfully used across the U.S. for over 15 years. The SIOP Model is intended to support content area teachers who have both First Language (L1) and L2 learners in their classes. The approach can help teachers plan and deliver lessons that support English learners in acquiring academic knowledge while developing their English language proficiency. The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) participated in the development of this Model and continues to conduct relevant research (Christison and Murray 2014, 164).

CAL can collaborate with schools, states and districts in designing and conducting the SIOP Model’s professional development programmes. There are a number of different workshops, coaching, site visits and technical assistance offered. The team can work closely with professionals as they practise how to plan, implement and support instruction using the model. They also support the development of district and school level coaches who can assist teachers in implementation (Christison and Murray 2014, 165).

Lecturers can work independently with SIOP teachers as indicators can be clearly and succinctly described. Since schools and districts want to make a positive impact on student learning and go beyond what is possible with an individual teacher, they can try to implement a peer coaching model which supports a team of teachers in implementing the SIOP Model (Christison and Murray 2014, 165).

The humanistic approach

Through humanistic approaches, lecturers become facilitators in the learning process. This humanistic approach is more prevalent in the U.S, while the negotiated approaches have been predominant in the U.K. and Australia (Christison and Murray 2014, 192).

The lecturer's role in humanistic language teaching is to guide and assist students as they take on more responsibility for their learning. Envisioning the lecturer as the facilitator requires a change in standard teaching approaches. The purpose of facilitation is to move the responsibility for learning from the instructor to the students so that, ultimately, the latter take responsibility for their learning, with lecturers providing assistance, encouragement and monitoring in the learning process (Christison and Murray 2014, 197; see Evaluation).

A lecturer who regards his or her role as that of a facilitator of learning tends to be more supportive and more understanding. In order to be successful as a facilitator, the lecturer must also come across as genuine rather than as simply playing a role. A facilitator would foster an engaging environment for the students, and ask inquiry-based questions that promote meaningful learning, thereby promoting learner freedom that is essential in a humanistic approach to language teaching (Christison and Murray 2014, 197). For example, Zaaiman (1998, 74) argues that BSc EDP follows a learner-centred approach to teaching; lecturers act as facilitators while the development of problem-solving skills on the basis of insight into Mathematics and Science problems is emphasised.

In nearly all formal classroom settings, lecturers spend considerable time addressing cognitive aspects of learning. However, as reflected in the component of humanism, the affective aspects are vital and comprise an important part of humanistic language teaching. The Affective Domain (AD) deals with learners' emotions, values, motivations and attitudes which can affect learning. Which is why L2 researchers and lecturers acknowledge the importance of creating a low affective filter in the classroom. This is about creating a low-stress and low-anxiety environment (Krashen and Terrell 1983). The ability of lecturers to recognize that students have varied orientations to learning, some positive and others negative, as well as differing commitments to the process of learning, is important in creating a positive affect (Christison and Murray 2014, 197).

INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND SCIENCE CONTENT AT UL

ESS is a localised English language course anchored in a multidisciplinary approach in order to corroborate an act of decoloniality. The course is tailored for students who have shown potential to study and succeed in the sciences at UL. The course could be described in terms of course aim, structure, content, staff collaboration and assessment.

Aim

Research conducted on the home – and school backgrounds of the BSc EDP students revealed that home backgrounds of most students have not prepared them to succeed at university. Further, the schools they attended were situated in poverty-stricken townships or rural areas, resulting in students with a fairly low ability regarding academic literacy and language proficiency (cf. Ngoepe 2007; Zaaiman 1998).

The general outcome of ESS is that students' academic and general proficiency in English should improve, and that they should acquire language and study skills which will enhance their performance in Mathematics and the Sciences (cf. Ngoepe 2007; Fouche 2007).

Ngoepe (2012, 63) avers that in an attempt to address this inequality, the UL BSc EDP was introduced. Students who did not qualify to be admitted into the sciences but had shown potential to succeed in Mathematics and the Sciences, were given an opportunity to study.

Although BSc EDP aims to increase the number and quality of students from disadvantaged groupings entering science-based faculties at UL, the academic performance of students is inevitably influenced by their backgrounds and competence in the language of learning and teaching, which is English (cf. Ngoepe 2012, 63). Therefore, the need for an ELSC was glaring.

Structure

The former University of the North (UNIN) falls into the “Black/Homeland” category, and only became the UL in 2005 (Ngoepe 2007). UNIN was established in 1959 and was intended to cater for the Sotho-Venda-Tsonga (Sovenga) language groups at inception (cf. Kahn and Volmink 1994). UL is a large, rural HBU and not many high-quality students are available to register for mathematics and science-based study courses at the institution due to the educationally challenging situation in Limpopo Province (cf. Zaaiman 1998).

ESS is an intensive, one year BSc EDP ESP course, at UL. BSc EDP is also known as University of the North Foundation Year (UNIFY). ESS is taught in the BSc EDP curriculum together with Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics and Computer Literacy. Much of this

ESP work is based on the notion of a “common-core” of language and skills that belong to specific academic science disciplines (cf. Ngoepe 2007).

On average, BSc EDP admits 170 students, in 5 groups of about 30 students in each of the 5 core subjects. The classes are small but also labour-intensive because the lecturers in ESS would on average spent 5 contact sessions a week with each of the 5 groups (cf. Jansen, Ntshingila-Khosa and Cranfield 2005; Ngoepe 2007).

Materials and content

In keeping with the science context, ESS reading passages are mostly factual, descriptive and narrative pieces. These passages include topics such as The Motor Car and Pollution, Sick Miners Pay Full Price for Gold, Wake up Call for World’s Health, Pollution and Lung Cancer, Lead Blights the Future of Africa’s children, Greenhouse Gases and the Global Warming Trend (Ngoepe 2012, 67).

Themes that are contained in the ESS Grammar and Word Classes Module are Singular and Plural, The impersonal Scientific Style – The Passive, Modality, Word Classes – Nouns, Guidelines for the Use of Articles, Linking Devices, Using the Dictionary to Find Meanings, and General and Specific Statements. Writing Module 1 contains Cause and Effect, Quantity and Comparison, Relationships and Describing Structure, Function and Content, whereas Describing Graphs, Note-taking as well as Note-making form part of Writing Module 2. Most of these themes are linguistic or writing topics rather than themes as the term is generally understood (Ngoepe 2012, 67).

Listening exercises are also included in the ESS materials. Examples of exercises in the Listening Comprehension and Mini-Lectures Materials are “The Field Trip”, “Energy”, “the Noble Gases” and “The Preservation of Food”. All these passages are used as note-taking exercises (Ngoepe 2012, 68).

Some extracts used in the ESS Grammar Word Classes Module are from Physics, Chemistry and Biology textbooks. In the ESS Students’ Reading Comprehension Booklet, the passage “Lead Blights the Future of Africa’s Children” is an extract from the New Scientist magazine, while in Writing Module 1, Less Commonly Used Verbs which are used to describe structure in science are extracts from a prescribed Biology textbook (Ngoepe 2012, 68).

Collaboration

At inception, UNIFY staff was constituted by expatriates employed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VUA) and local staff employed by UNIN. The expatriates had experience in a bridging environment (Kahn and Volmink 1994, 17). However, during the UNIFY Project

Phase II extension period (1999–2000), the local staff was joined by expatriate Finnish Training Partners (FTP) (Ngoepe 2007, 22). Although Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics know no geographical borders as study areas and their analytical procedures are not country specific (Prah 2018, 76), africanisation, which is also known as localisation, is a must if South Africa is to move forward developmentally. Thus, the centering of African culture at the heart of the development endeavour is crucial (Prah 2018, 2; see Figure 1). Therefore, staff development was strategically factored in to empower local staff and develop their sense of ownership of the programme.

From the above, it could be deduced that teaching in the BSc EDP programme was set to function and develop within some triangular collaborative ambit as illustrated in Figure 1.

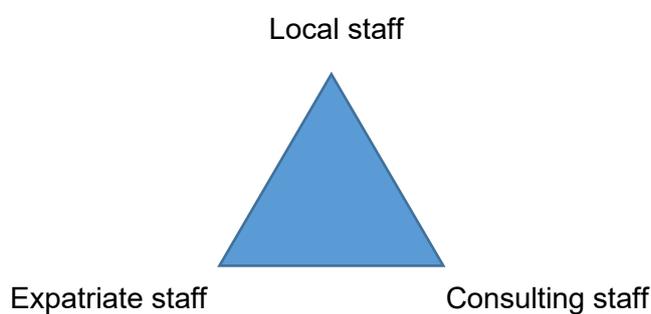


Figure 1: Triangular Teaching Collaboration

The researcher postulates “Triangular teaching collaboration” that is inherent to the BSc EDP programme in Figure 1. At an international level, local staff collaborated with VUA and FTP, while at a national level, they collaborated with both HBUs and HWUs in Gauteng as well as North West Provinces, SA. This laid some foundation for curriculum decoloniality as well as the institutionalisation of the programme (see Structure).

At a very basic level, ESS staff collaborated as a language teaching team in terms of teaching learning activities and the sharing of daily classroom experiences. To ensure that the student groups that the staff members were assigned to teach enjoyed equal attention and benefits, staff met formally once a week as well as informally anytime whenever the need arose.

Assessment

Students sit for at least four written tests per annum. Seventy five percent of the fourth test was, in due course, replaced by a group project module which, among other things, factored in concerted multidisciplinary assessment in ESS (Ngoepe 2017(a), 172). Officially, students start preparing for the project in the third term. The culmination thereof, which is in a form of group

presentations, is scheduled for the fourth term.

Evaluation was built into the UNIFY project from the outset to ensure that quality is attained and sustained; internal evaluation is done annually, whereas an external one is done whenever the situation warrants it. For example, an external evaluation report by the Commission of the European Communities (EU) in 1994 stated that UNIFY was doing valuable work in both institutional and national contexts (cf. Kahn and Volmink 1994; Cantrell 1995; Jansen et al. 2005) and this warranted continuation of the programme.

EVALUATION

Evaluation can be defined in different ways (De Chazal 2014, 136) and different things can be evaluated (De Chazal 2014, 137). For example, Arnold et al. (2010) maintain that evaluation can express a user-orientation; it would be the user who evaluates. Similarly, in this article, it was the enrolled BSc EDP students who evaluated the course.

Evaluation can either be described as formative or summative. The former is typically undertaken at intervals and can consist of “mini-evaluations” (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998, 128) such as the evaluation in this article, which is part of the comprehensive evaluation of the ESS course (cf. Ngoepe 2007). Evaluation approaches can be both qualitative and quantitative. However, if qualitative methods such as interviews are used, they normally cover a wider picture (see Appendix).

“Value” is at the heart of the word “evaluation”; to evaluate something is to make an assessment of its value. This value may relate to features such as its effectiveness, usefulness, reliability, generalizability, feasibility, significance, success, desirability, purpose or certainty (De Chazal 2014, 136). Analysis, synthesis and evaluation are of particular relevance to critical thinking (De Chazal 2014, 124). ESS students were thus afforded an opportunity to evaluate their course.

Stance is closely related to evaluation. However, it is associated more with broader and potentially more complex issues. A person’s stance tends to take some time to develop; this may be modified in the light of new developments. Both stance and evaluation are highly valued in academic contexts and are normally supported by evidence (De Chazal 2014, 137). Similarly, the ESS students are expected to take a stance regarding a course they attended.

Although “voice” is unique to a writer, evaluation and stance are major contributors to a writer’s voice. Voice is also related to language because a writer selects and uses certain language to express their meaning. As the academic level increases, students should be encouraged to develop their own voice. Thus, postgraduate students need to develop their voice more noticeably (De Chazal 2014, 137). Although the BSc EDP students are at the tertiary

threshold level, their “voice” should be heard given the veracity of the challenges emanating from being offered tuition in English, which is a non-native language to them.

Course evaluation can help assess whether or not course objectives are being met (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, 144), and in the process, evaluators get a voice and take a stance. The concepts of evaluation, stance and voice are in turn part of criticality, a term which can be used to cover critical thinking and critical evaluative responses (De Chazal 2014, 137). Critical thinking is a term used to refer to wide ranging thinking activities in university study. This is a vital and expected skill in academic contexts; university course descriptors frequently refer to it (Alexander, Argent and Spencer 2008, 251; De Chazal 2014, 137). Thus, ESS students are aptly phased into critical thinking at an academic threshold level.

There are good reasons for allowing students to take more control of classroom activities. Learner autonomy is developed, particularly at the level of managing learning. In terms of language development, the potential of CLIL lessons as a context for the development of a wider range of interpersonal language functions will only be realised if students have the opportunity to manage their own activities (Llinares et al. 2012, 33). BSc EDP students’ autonomy is seeded through this evaluation.

INTERVIEWS WITH ESS BSc EDP STUDENTS

The aim of this research was to afford students an opportunity to evaluate the ESS course with a view to determining whether it serves the purposes it was designed for.

The one hundred and eighty (180) BSc EDP students that were enrolled at the UL in SA were interviewed in groups of 30 for 30 minutes each, after being taught ESS. Interview questions mainly focused on course context and content, teaching learning materials, teaching time allotted as well as assessment. There was a total of 13 questions for each group.

METHODOLOGY

The research design that was used in this article is ethnographic and embedded in nature while a qualitative approach was followed. Ethnography interprets and qualifies research that is premised on the study of behaviour in a naturally occurring setting. This perspective emphasises behaviour of groups as well as some interpretive and contextual methods which are respectful of participants’ views (Hyland 2006, 65). Ethnography can also give an account which is grounded in the data collected, thus developing this article’s conceptual explanatory framework (Hyland 2006, 66). This research was embedded in design (cf. Richards, Ross and Seedhouse 2012) as it was part of an evaluation of the ESS course as a whole (cf. Ngoepe 2007). ESS students were interviewed in groups, in class; this is akin to their BSc EDP classroom structural setting.

FINDINGS

The results of the interview sessions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Responses to Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 13

Question No./Statement	Response(s)
1. What is the significance of incorporating ESS in a science curriculum?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances knowledge of English language • Specific to a science context • Students perform better in science subjects • Essential for future scientists
2. How is ESS different from General English (GE)?	Students can now communicate in English in a science context
3. Course addressed language needs	All agreed
4. Any new language aspects introduced?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific style of writing (the passive) • Lab report writing • Describing graphs, etc.
5. Teaching learning materials to be excluded	None should be excluded
6. Were teaching learning materials easy or difficult?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority – challenging • The rest – easy
9. Students benefited from team teaching	All agreed
10. Good aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESS is different from GE • It is linked to science courses • Improved students' sentence construction • The common lecture exposed them to working in a bigger group • The course helps build confidence
13. Better equipped to study the Sciences	All agreed

Question numbers will be repeated for easy reference when presenting narrative responses in Table 1, as follows:

1. It is significant to incorporate ESS in a science curriculum because it enhances the English language knowledge, it is specific to a science context, students perform better in science subjects and it is essential for future scientists.
2. ESS is different from General English (GE) in that students can now communicate in English used in a science context.
3. Students were unanimous that the ESS course addressed their language needs.
4. New language aspects introduced were the scientific style of writing, which is also known as the passive, laboratory report writing, describing graphs, and so on.
5. None of the ESS teaching learning materials should be excluded.

6. Majority of the students found the materials challenging while the rest found them easy.
9. All the students benefitted from team teaching.
10. Good aspects of the course were that ESS is linked to the science courses in the BSc EDP curriculum and is different from GE; it improved the students' sentence construction; the common lecture exposed them to working in a bigger group; and the course helped build their confidence.
13. They all concurred that they were better equipped to study the Sciences.

Responses to questions 7, 8, 11 and 12 which are about assessment, adequacy of course time, frustrations and suggested improvement are presented in Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5.

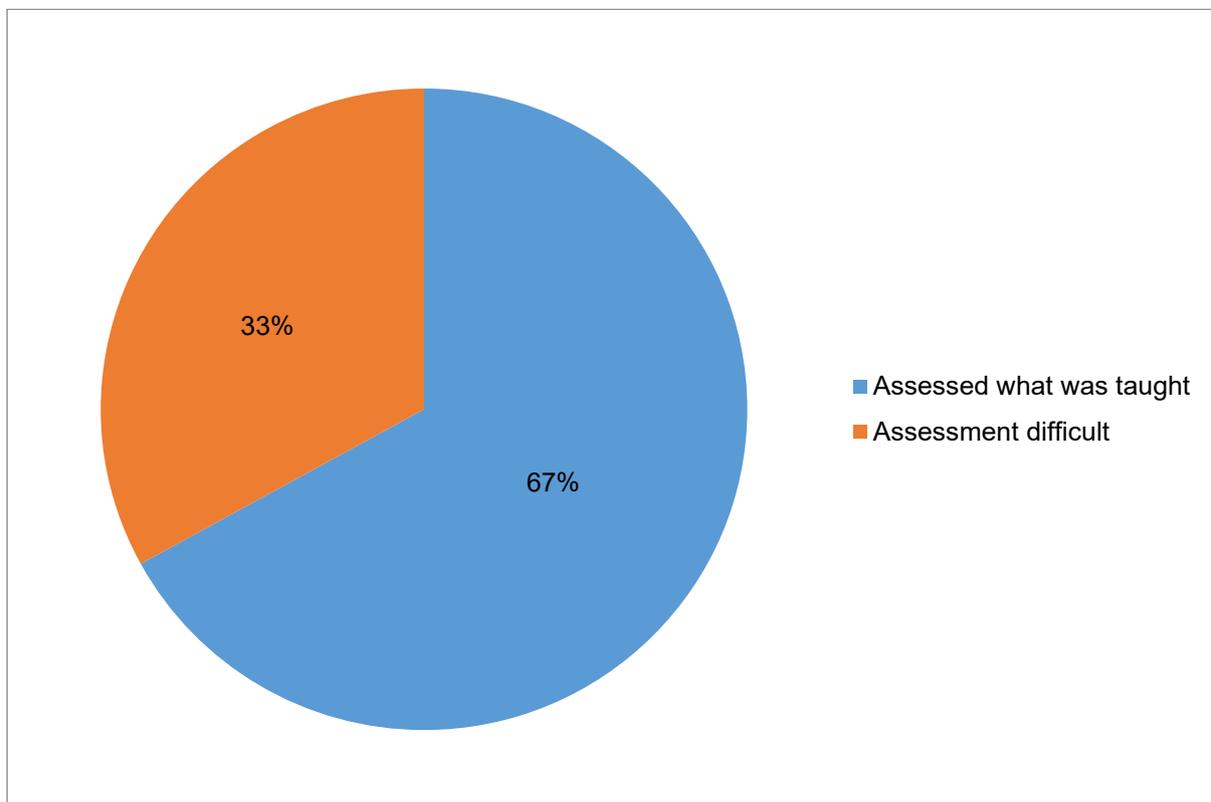


Figure 2: Course assessed what was taught

Only thirty three percent (33%) of the students indicated that the ESS course assessed what was taught. The rest, which is 67 per cent, found assessment rather difficult.

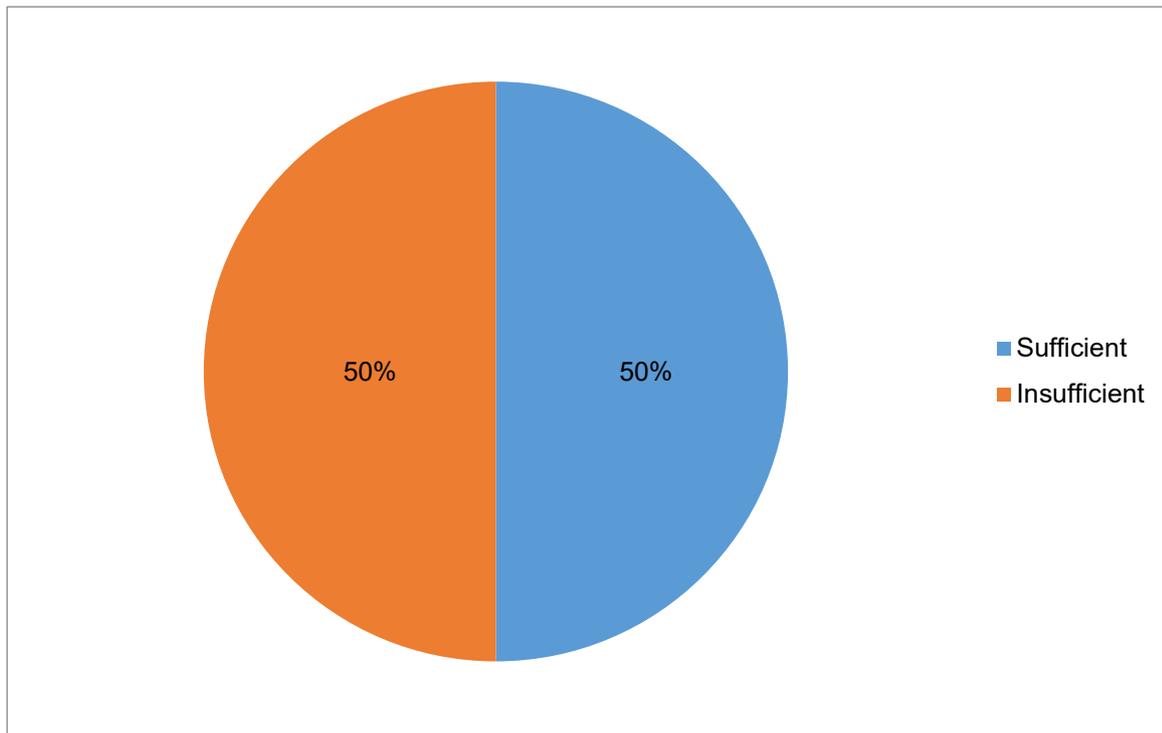


Figure 3: Adequacy of course time

The students were equally divided on the issue of adequacy of course time. Fifty percent (50%) of the students thought that there was sufficient time allotted for the course, while another 50 per cent indicated that the time was inadequate.

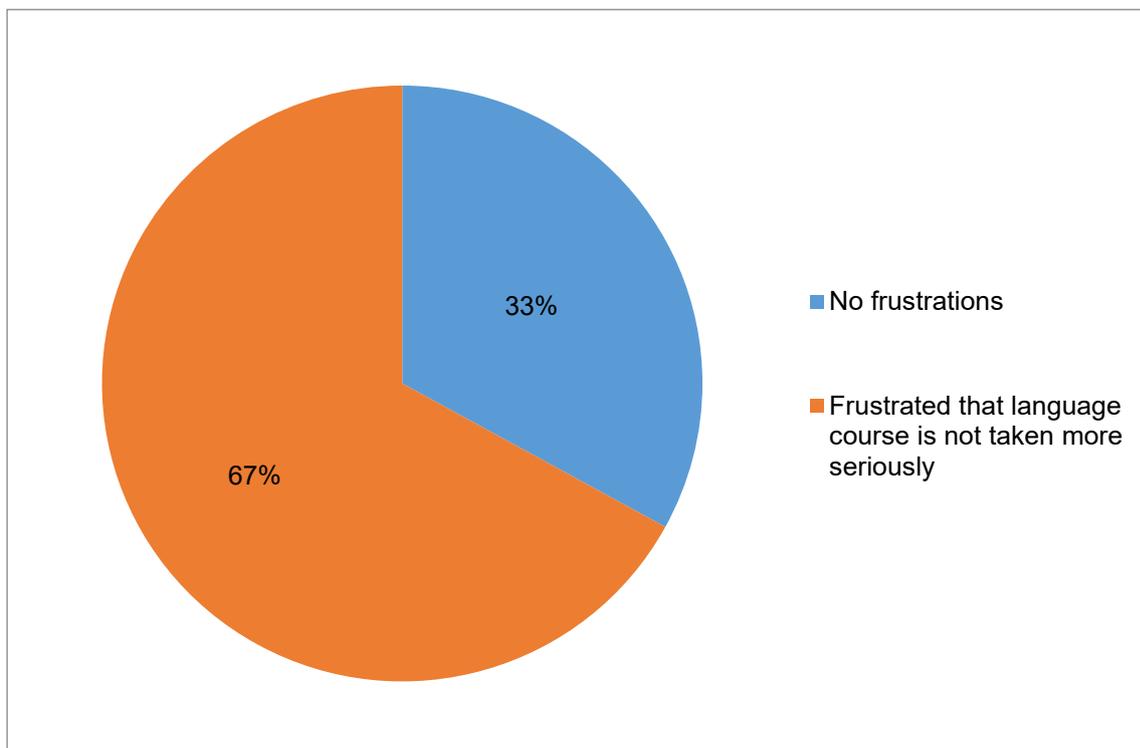


Figure 4: Frustrations about the course

Thirty three percent (33%) of the students did not experience any frustrations about the course, while 67 per cent of the students were frustrated by the fact that the course was not taken more seriously.

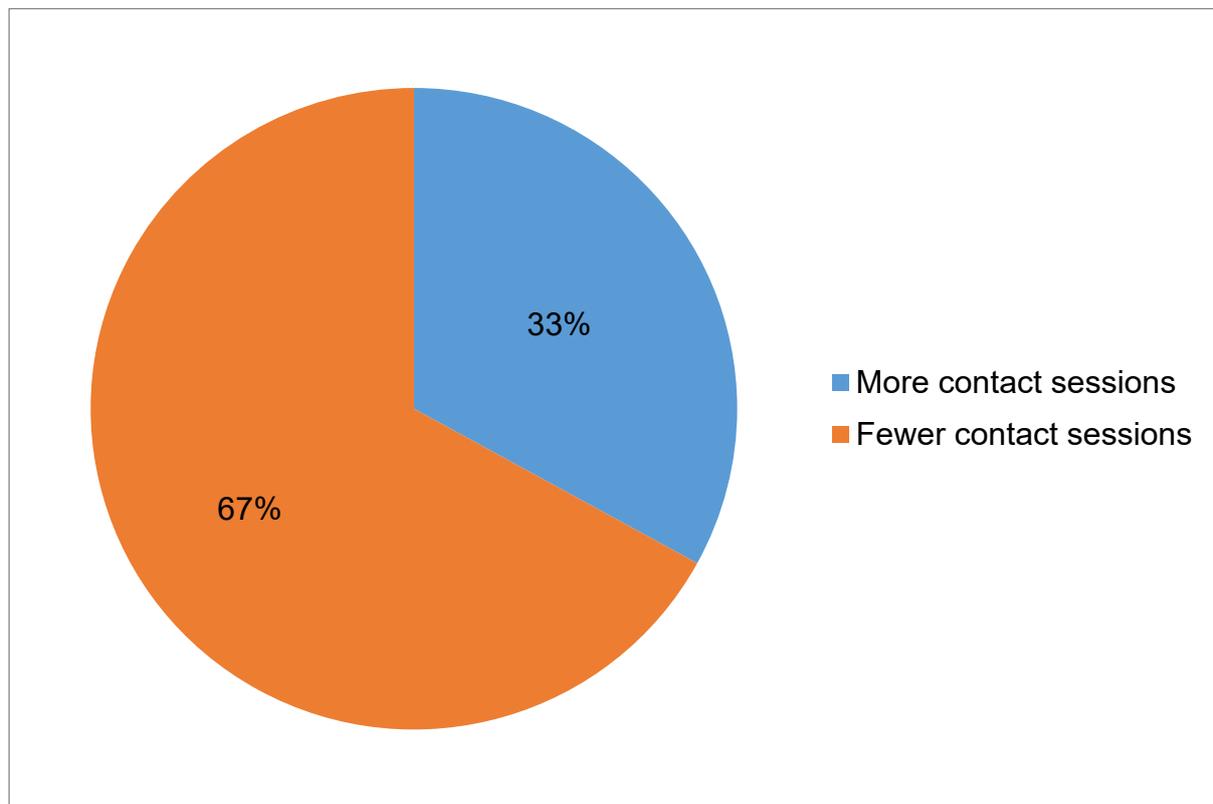


Figure 5: Suggested improvements

The majority of the students (67%) indicated that the number of contact sessions should be reduced, while the rest of the students (33%) indicated that they needed more contact sessions.

DISCUSSION

On the one hand, ESS students were unanimous that the course addressed their needs; that none of the course materials should be left out; that they benefitted from team teaching; and that they were better equipped to study the sciences.

On the other hand, most of the students (67%) stated that they found assessment in the ESS course difficult; that they were frustrated by the fact that the course was not taken more seriously; and that the number of contact sessions should be reduced. However, the students were equally divided, that is, 50 per cent and 50 per cent, on the issue of the time allotted for the course.

In a nutshell, areas which need attention are assessment, attitude towards the course since it has to be taken more seriously and that the ESS unit should review the number of contact session allotted to the course.

CONCLUSION

If universities could deploy staff qualified to identify and meet the language needs of students in a bid to tackle ELSCs contextual challenges, the attrition rate of students studying in non-native English language will be increased. In the long term, colonialism will be debilitated, economies of various responsive countries will be boosted as more and more students would complete their studies in the anticipated time.

Moreover, the staff would knowingly and in unison strive for localisation by meeting the set course – and by extension, programme objectives as evidenced in the collaboration that they can practise (see Figure 1). These international ventures could resultantly be rendered cost-effective.

Invaluable students' contribution to course development can naturally present itself in different forms. For example, ESS students got a voice and took an invaluable stance through this evaluation exercise and, as a result, they collectively got an opportunity to reflect on classroom activities in “a low affective filter environment”. This experience indirectly seeded learner autonomy among science students.

Although grappling with issues of redress tends to be capital intensive, countries and universities alike can take a stance for linguistic social justice by attempting to address and even redress this veracity of language teaching and learning challenges experienced by students who are not L1 speakers of English, studying in English media universities through approaches such as the EMI, ICL and CLIL.

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APPENDIX

Interviews with BSc EDP Students

1. Do you think it is important to incorporate English and Study Skills (ESS) in the UNIFY curriculum?
2. How different is ESS from the English you learnt at matric?
3. Does the ESS syllabus address all your language needs?
4. Is/Are there any “new” language aspects that you learnt from the course?
5. Is/Are there any teaching material(s) which you think should be excluded from the course and why?
6. Did you find ESS materials (study guides, etc.) easy or difficult? Why?
7. What do you think about the assessment practices in ESS?
8. Do you think that the time spent on the course was sufficient? Why?
9. Did you benefit from team teaching used in ESS? In what ways?
10. What would you regard as good aspects of the course?
11. What was the most frustrating aspect of the course?
12. If you were to improve the course how would you do it?
13. What convinces you that you are now better equipped to study the sciences with confidence?

Thank you for your contribution.