STRENGTHENING SUSTAINABLE ENGLISH TEACHING COMPETENCE BY ENGAGING RETIREES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Education is one of the fundamental goals of human existence. It is a basic human right. South Africa's education is for lifelong learning. Engagement of retirees from the community drives active participation and collaboration between Foundation Phase teachers and experienced retirees from the communities. This joint venture benefits both parties with skills, knowledge, values, and attitude transfer and a great opportunity for lifelong learning. It is said that "experience is the best teacher." A purposive sample of 5 retirees and 5 grade 3 teachers was used to represent the population of this article, comprised of all retirees and all grade 3 teachers in rural communities of Vhembe District. Data was collected through observation and interviews. Thematic analysis was used. Findings revealed that engagement of retirees benefits retirees with improved health and social and financial well-being; thus, retirees should be compensated for their work. Retirees could assist by training and coaching teachers. It is recommended that the Department of Basic Education start engaging retirees to help strengthen teachers' teaching competence in the English language.

Keywords: collaboration, English first Additional language, English Second Language, intergenerational knowledge, sustainable, teaching competence.

INTRODUCTION

The European Commission (2013, 9) posits that acquiring and developing teachers' competence needs to be viewed as a career-long endeavor. Agreeably, South Africa requires her teachers to be lifelong learners (DHET 2015, 58), meaning that the development of teachers' competence can never be a once-off transaction (Makhwathana 2020,44). To enhance the quality of English language teaching and ensure appropriate skills transfer and effective teaching, teachers must be competent and skillful users of English (Makhwathana 2020, iv). However, acquisition, integration, and application of different knowledge practices or learning are the foundations of competent teaching (DHET 2015,11).

According to UNESCO (2015), among the Sustainable Development Goals decided by the United Nations, the goal is centered around learners gaining the necessary knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development. As a cornerstone to strengthening teachers' sustainable English teaching competence, this study looked at the engagement of retirees who often possess a treasure of knowledge and experience to support the professional development of young and active teachers.

The rationale for engaging retirees in English teaching roles is to strengthen sustainable competence by tapping into their experience, passion, and commitment. It enriches educational environments, promotes mentorship to young and inexperienced teachers, and addresses practical needs within educational systems while fostering community and lifelong learning. Mokgolodi and Gaotlhobogwe (2020) state that retirees have "amassed so much knowledge during their working life that no book amount of documentary could exhaust."

Although various factors could affect the engagement of retirees to strengthen sustainable teachers' English teaching competence, for example, in Kasey and Krista (2013) on the relationship between attitudes towards and intentions to share knowledge, findings indicated that job satisfaction directly and positively predicted intentions to share tacit and explicit knowledge, and negatively predicted intentions to hoard knowledge. However, it is crucial to strengthen teachers' teaching competence due to their high contribution towards learners' achievement and success. Teachers' ability to use language effectively helps learners understand the subjects better and raises learners' interest and positive attitude towards the subject (Arshad, 2007, 23). Therefore, the involvement of retirees is beneficial for the co-development and co-generation of knowledge sharing and strengthening teachers' sustainable English teaching competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Retirees' world of knowledge and experience cannot be underestimated. This section outlines the engagement of retirees in some parts of the world and discusses how the engagement of retirees could strengthen teachers' English language teaching competence.

In Hong Kong, a group of elderly people offered to work with college students in activities to foster intergenerational relationships. The findings showed that "the older adult volunteers earned a valued teaching credential, improved their teaching abilities, gained confidence, and motivation for expanding their social linkages in the community" (Lai and Kaplan, 2016). Young teachers could benefit from the retirees' vast experience and expertise and become the best English language teachers for their learners. Reciprocally, retirees could also benefit from

young teachers' expertise in technology use in classes and life, noting that today's activities are technology-driven.

The engagement of Foundation Phase (FP) teachers primarily purposed to strengthen and expand their English Language teaching skills, which Lai and Kaplan (2016) posit creates an English language teaching competence-oriented intergenerational learning environment that stimulates young and active teachers' interest and practice to use the English language in classrooms. Engaging the retirees aims at skills transfer and rapport development for young teachers. With retirees in the same classrooms, it becomes easy for their wisdom and institutional knowledge to be transferred to young teachers. In this give-and-take situation, retirees continue to work beyond their retirement age since Mutafela et al (2021) alluded that teachers were still able and willing to continue working beyond the age of 55 while they were supposed to retire.

Providing retirees with opportunities to meet and share their life experiences with young and active teachers thus helps them expand their interests and abilities to engage the young generation of teachers in community settings. Thus honouring their contribution. According to Lai and Kaplan (2016), recognising their contribution fosters intergenerational skills transfer and learning, where young and active teachers benefit and gain knowledge and experience from the retirees. Thus, collaboration and sharing of knowledge. Van Lier (2004) calls this collaboration the intergenerational approach to English teaching, a vehicle to transform older adults' life-long experiences into "meaningful potential" in the environment that can be concurrently knit into the teachers' English Second Language learning potential or "ability."

Ubangha and Akinyemi (2005) conducted a study on the relationship between attitudes toward retirement planning and retirement anxiety among teachers; findings indicated that 65 per cent of teachers would be willing to continue teaching after retirement if given the chance. Mapoma (2013) examined the sources of income for the elderly in Zambia and found that roadside selling, farming, and begging were the primary means of revenue for those over 60, including retirees. Re-calling retirees back to teaching and learning activities is tantamount to giving them a feeling of purpose, belonging, and value. As a result, retirees start to lead a life of fulfillment, satisfaction, stress-free, and connectedness, thus improving well-being (Makhwathana, Mudzielwana, and Mulovhedzi, 2017). Dziczkowski (2013) states that the reduction of stress is one of the benefits to retirees.

During collaboration with English teachers, retirees bring their skills and knowledge. They share their socio-historical knowledge, which grew from life-long experiences, while encouraging teachers to influence the course of these exchanges in ways that address real-life

issues (Lai and Kaplan, 2016). The collaboration professionally develops young and active teachers' teaching competence. Retirees become springs of valuable resources to improve young teachers' competence. In contrast, retirees are encouraged to continue learning and thus become lifelong learners (DBE, 2011).

The partnership between retirees and teachers enhances the professional growth of inexperienced and practicing teachers. In this partnership, retirees adopt various roles, such as coaches, supporters, counsellors, teachers, and sponsors. (Dziczkowski, 2013). Thus, teachers' sustainable English teaching competence could be strengthened by creating long-term mentoring and training programs with retirees.

Co-teaching refers to developing a relationship in which two instructors react and respond to each other and the class, in this article the retiree and the teacher co-teach the lesson (Lock, Clancy, Lisella, Rosenau, Ferreira, Rainsbury, 2016). Engaging retirees in co-teaching can strengthen teachers' sustainable English teaching competence. Co-teaching contributes to the richness of learners' learning experience (Lock et al 2016). Learners benefit from information and training and get role models and mentors. At the same time, the retirees' functional capacity is improved at all levels (Boulton, Horne, and Todd, 2019). However, successful co-teaching collaboration requires both parties to invest time and effort (Yanamandram and Noble, 2005).

Continuous professional teachers' development is crucial for teachers to work on their personal, academic, and professional growth in their learning areas. Thus, in Makhwathana (2020), teachers need professional development. Mokgolodi and Gaotlhobogwe (2020) noted that engaging retired professionals as knowledge and skills experts in career development could benefit them, teachers, and learners. Schools could engage retirees as presenters to support continuous professional teachers' development during their (schools') development workshops. The school management could decide on specific topics or focus areas that retirees could upraise teachers about. Retirees could bring valuable knowledge and experience that could improve active and young teachers' quality of English language teaching.

According to Mokgolodi and Gaotlhobogwe (2020), it is crucial to re-think the cultural thoughts about retirees and to correctly reform societies' perceptions of the elderly and retirees as frail, confused, a burden, and unable to participate in the rapidly changing and technology-driven world.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the social learning theory advanced by Albert Bandura. This theory is increasingly alluded to as a central component of sustainable natural resource management

and promoting desirable behavioural change (Muro and Jeffrey 2008). Social Learning Theory postulates that people learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling. That is, people learn from their interactions with others in a social context. By observing the behaviors of others, people develop similar behaviors. After observing the behavior of others, people assimilate and imitate that behavior, especially if their observational experiences are positive or include rewards related to the observed behavior (Bandura, 1977 and 1986). This article adopted the social learning theory because of its emphasis on the importance of social interaction and observation of others in the teaching and learning process. Hence, the engagement of retirees for knowledge and skills transfers to active, young, and vibrant teachers. The researcher used this theory to assume that the engagement of retirees would highlight the

Competent teaching emphasises what is learned and how it is learned (DHET, 2015). Teachers should know English and be able to transfer it effectively to their learners. During an engagement with retirees, teachers could draw out knowledge and strategies from the retirees to strengthen their English teaching competence. Makhwathana (2020) observed that teachers needed to know and use strategies that work for their learners. Moreover, they transfer knowledge through effective teaching strategies suitable for their classroom contexts (Soepriyatna, 2012). Teachers' competence drives the quality and effectiveness of the teaching and learning process (Sudarsono, Yunitasari and Gunawan, 2017).

likelihood for retirees to serve as mentors and models for active young teachers in rural schools.

RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative approach with a descriptive research design was used. This approach was adopted to enable the adequate exploration of strengthening sustainable English teaching competence using structured interviews. The researcher was able to delve into various aspects that retirees could offer despite being on retirement because of age.

Only non-probability sampling methods were used to select the sample for this study. A purposive sample of 5 retirees and 5 grade 3 teachers was used to represent the population of this article, comprised of all retirees and all Foundation teachers in rural communities.

Interview guides were used to collect data from the five retirees and 5 grade 3 teachers. Interviews were used to solicit in-depth information from the participants. An observation schedule was also used to observe grade 3 teachers while teaching the English language.

Data was collected through interviews and observations. To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, the four constructs of credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability were considered.

Triangulation of data was used to enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings. Triangulation was done by using different data collection instruments, the interview schedule and the observation schedule, to compare and strengthen each other's weaknesses.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the participant's responses on the topic. The responses were sorted according to the opinions into specific response categories, and then common themes were grouped, followed by repeated words and phrases. Thereafter, all the common themes were identified and reported in a narrative form as findings of the study.

Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were considered. Their names were not recorded in this study and were not somehow disclosed. The researcher informed participants that their participation was voluntary. As a result, they could withdraw anytime should they feel the need to do so.

RESULTS

This study explored strategies to strengthen sustainable English teaching competence by engaging retirees. The responses have been marked differently for clarity; the retirees' responses have been marked R1-R5, whereas the teachers' responses have been marked T1-T5. The following are the findings of the study about the research questions. Responses were grouped according to themes.

Retirees should be engaged voluntarily.

All participants agreed that retirees could be engaged in strengthening sustainable teachers' English teaching competence. Other participants cited it to be 'a good idea'. However, other retirees needed to rest, others needed to help with reading, and others needed to do it for some payment. Here are some of the retirees' responses:

R1: "It is a good idea. Most of us need something to do, even if it is not full-time. I wish the department would also pay us something; I need extra cash to help us at home."

R2: "It is good that we will help at schools again, especially with reading. Learners cannot read."

R4:"Although I feel tired of working, I can sacrifice and help if the department needs me to help. I need to rest a little bit."

T1: "Yes, they can help us. Some retirees are still energetic. I like the idea."

Some responses indicated that retirees should be given options to choose to be engaged or not to be engaged, noting that they had reached retirement age.

T5:" Retired people should be allowed to choose whether they want to be engaged. Some are busy with grandchildren or other things; however, some need extra money, so they may opt to

come back and help. We will also learn from them".

Both teachers and retirees favoured engaging retirees to strengthen sustainable teachers' English teaching competence. The participants intended to share knowledge instead of hoarding knowledge (Kasey and Krista (2013). Some participants even went further to indicate that they needed to do something even if it was on a part-time basis: "Most of us need something to do even if it is not full time" According to Ubangha and Akinyemi (2005), this indicates a willingness to continue working even after retirement. However, a few participants indicated their need "to rest a little bit," which was overshadowed by their statement, "I can sacrifice and help if the department needs me to help". Other participants already knew the areas they could offer help at, for example, "It is good that we will help at schools again, especially with reading. Learners cannot read."

Although participants responded positively towards the engagement of retirees, some added that retirees should be given options to choose to be engaged or not to be engaged: "The retired people should be given the option to choose if they want to be engaged or not." However, Mutafela et al (2021) posit that retirees who are still energetic and young should be given opportunities to serve the community. Participants further indicated that some retirees were busy caring for their grandchildren; thus, engaging them should be voluntary.

Some participants noted that some retirees retire while still energetic, able and willing to continue working beyond the age of 55 as affirmed by Mutafela et al (2021).

Retirees should be compensated for being engaged.

Some participants also indicated that retirees should be compensated for their engagement, "they must be paid for it. It will boost them financially", "I wish the department pays us something for that, I need extra cash to help us at home," and "However, some need extra money." Mapoma (2013) discovered that the primary sources of income for people above 60 years, including retirees, were begging, roadside selling, and farming. Thus, engaging retirees with compensation could assist those who are silently suffering. The following are the teachers' responses:

T4: "Yes, but they must be paid for it. It will boost them financially. They will teach us how they have been teaching. It will be fun learning old teaching styles" (she laughed).

R1: "I think it is a good idea. Most of us need something to do even if it is not full-time. I wish the department would pay us something for that; I need extra cash to help us at home".

T5: "The retired people should be allowed to choose whether to be engaged. Some are busy with grandchildren; however, some need extra money, so they may opt to help. We will also learn from them."

Engaging retirees could keep them busy and improve their health.

Some participants were enthusiastic about the engagement of retirees, citing that it would improve their health.

T2: "If retirees agree, I do not have problems. It will keep them busy."

T3:" It is suitable for their health. They will have something to keep their minds busy."

Participants' responses also revealed that engaging retirees would keep them busy, considering an idle mind is the devil's workshop. In contrast, a busy mind is healthy, and a healthy mind is good for the body. They further indicated that engaging retirees was good for their health. Literature confirms that mentors and mentees benefit extensively from increased self-esteem, awareness, insight, and professional skills. Moreover, reduce stress (Dziczkowski, 2013)

Participants' responses indicated that retirees could be engaged for hours to help with specific work, such as reading. The following were the responses: ... 'I think some of us may help these new teachers. However, for some hours, I do not want to go to school the whole day.' 'It is good that we will help at schools again, especially with reading. Learners cannot read, "We can help with some things, but not all." 'They do not have to come every day, not even the whole day."

Engage retirees only to help with some specific work

Participants' responses indicated that retirees could be engaged to help with specific work, such as reading. Some participants indicated they did not prefer being at school for the whole day: "... But for some hours, I do not want to go to school the whole day." The following are some of the responses:

R2:" It is good that we will help at schools again, especially with reading. Learners cannot read."R3:" I do not know, it is good, we do not have much to do here at home. So, some of us may help these new teachers. However, for some hours, I only want to go to school during the day."R5: "Yes, it is good, but things have changed. We can help with some things, but not all."T5: "retirees can train us on the strategies they used during their time and teach us where they can so that we learn. They do not have to come every day, not even the whole day."

Co-teaching

Participants' responses on how retirees could be engaged to help strengthen sustainable teachers' English language teaching competence were as follows: some participants suggested sitting down together and discussing their way forward, others suggested teaching together and helping each other, planning together, and demonstrating how teaching could be done. Here are some of the participants' responses:

R1: "Let us sit down and discuss how to teach whatever it is."

R3: "We can teach together with teachers to help each other. Alternatively, we can coach

teachers on how to do it. We can exchange some ideas."

R5:" I can help plan and show the teacher how to teach and then watch her do it".

T3:" They can prepare lesson plans with teachers and then teach learners when teachers like me watch to learn and copy how to do it."

Participants' responses also showed a willingness to work together as a team to help strengthen sustainable English language teaching. Teaching together emphasises the importance of social interaction and observation of each other in the teaching and learning environment, as alluded to in Bandura's (1977 and 1986). Here are some responses: "I think we can sit down and discuss how to go about teaching whatever it is," "We can teach together with teachers to help each other. Alternatively, we can coach teachers on how to do it. We can exchange ideas," "They can prepare lesson plans with teachers and then teach learners when teachers like me to watch to learn and copy how to do it." Working together could also help those teachers who lacked confidence during teaching and learning. They would eventually gain their confidence as they actively work together with retirees.

Retirees could train and coach teachers.

When teachers responded on how retirees could be engaged to help strengthen sustainable English language teaching, they indicated that retirees could demonstrate effective teaching, train teachers, and observe as teachers teach for error identification. The following are the teachers' responses:

R4: "I can only train teachers how to teach something. I do not want to teach learners anymore.""

R2: "I can only go and help teach learners reading. I am good at it. If the teacher wants, I can train her how to teach reading."

T2: "Retirees can demonstrate to teachers how to teach effectively, and then we will learn and teach the same way."

T4: "The retirees will have to train teachers, go with them to class, and help teach. If they watch as we teach, they can see our mistakes and correct us."

T5:" Retirees can train us on the strategies they used during their time and teach us where they can so that we learn. They do not have to come every day, not even the whole day".

Participants also alluded to coaching. Both participants indicated their interest in coaching.

Hereunder are the responses:

R3: "We can teach together with teachers to help each other. Alternatively, we can coach teachers on how to do it. We can exchange some ideas."

T4: "The retirees will have to train teachers, go with them to class, and help teach. If they watch as we teach, they can see our mistakes and correct us."

When teachers responded on how retirees could be engaged to help strengthen sustainable

English language teaching, they indicated that retirees could demonstrate effective teaching: "Retirees can demonstrate to teachers how to teach effectively, and then we will learn and teach the same way." They further indicated that retirees could train teachers on effective strategies to use: "I think retirees can train us on the strategies they used during their times and teach with us where they can so that we learn" and observe as teachers teach to correct them:" The retirees will have to train teachers, go with them to class and help teach. If they watch as we teach, they may be able to see the mistakes and then correct us."

Participants also suggested that retirees could coach teachers: "We can teach together with teachers to help each other. Alternatively, we can coach teachers on how to do it. We can exchange some ideas."

The observation data revealed that most young teachers tried to use the English language for teaching. In contrast, some could not use English for the duration of the teaching and learning time. They engaged in code-switching to the home language. For example, ""let us write 'kha ri nwale'" and continue teaching without switching back to the English language. Teachers need support to help them learn how to use the English language for the duration of the teaching period. Social learning theory posits that individuals learn by observing others; in this study, retirees can serve as powerful role models for sustainable behaviors, influencing learners and young teachers through their actions. By engaging retirees as teachers and mentors in sustainable practices, younger generations can observe retirees' behaviors and learn through modeling.

It was also observed that some teachers needed to be confident in using the English language during teaching and learning. Due to a lack of confidence during teaching, teachers looked anxious and uncomfortable. Anxiety made teachers too tight and could not flow spontaneously during teaching. Thus, teachers need support from the retirees so that they can observe and learn strategies for teaching with confidence (Lai and Kaplan, 2016). To foster sustainable teaching, retirees can act as catalysts for communities of practice by sharing their expertise, engaging in discussions, and fostering a sense of shared learning and responsibility. Social learning theory emphasizes the importance of communities of practice, where individuals interact, share knowledge, and collaborate toward common goals.

Retirees can contribute to improving social learning theory by engaging in organised learning activities that promote discussion and critical thinking, implementing sustainable practices in practical settings, and considering the possibility of having more time for in-depth conversations and group learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

Most of the participants were enthusiastic about the engagement of retirees. However, they added that retirees should be compensated to motivate them to continue serving the communities. Engaging retirees in collaboration with teachers benefits both parties. Teachers benefit from knowledge, skills, and strategies, whereas retirees benefit from social, health, and financial well-being and technology skills. Integrating retirees into sustainable teaching enhances practical knowledge transfer. It enriches social learning theory by providing new insights into how learning occurs within communities, how behaviors are adopted and reinforced, and the role of diverse perspectives in shaping sustainable practices for future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that the Department of Basic Education initiate collaborations between retirees and teachers for skills and intergenerational knowledge transfer and to strengthen teachers' teaching competence.

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