

**EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF THE BA IN CONTEMPORARY
ENGLISH AND MULTILINGUAL STUDIES STUDENTS: NEW BILINGUAL
PROGRAMME AT A HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTION.**

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the experiences and the challenges of the BA CEMS students, enrolled in the first bilingual degree that uses English and an African language as a medium of instruction. The aim of this paper is to investigate the challenges faced by the current students in the programme, in order to inform the current practices. The study employs a qualitative research method to better understand the challenges faced by students and how higher learning institutions can ensure the successful implementation of such programmes to foster the development and use of indigenous languages in higher education. Methodologically, group discussions were held with the third year and Honours students in the programme, to understand their experiences and challenges of being taught in an African language and the support they need for their throughput and also to prepare them for the workplace. The main findings indicate that there is lack of resources in African languages and students struggle when they do academic work in Sepedi. There is also a lack of institutional support and students are often discouraged from registering or completing their degree.

Introduction/background

In 2003, the then University of the North (now University of Limpopo) launched the first bilingual degree where an African language in this case Sesotho sa Leboa is used as a medium of instruction. The BA in Contemporary English and Multilingual Studies degree offers two major subjects, one taught and assessed in English and the other in Sesotho sa Leboa (or Sepedi), an indigenous African language. The content area of multilingualism is distributed across 12 modules, six each in English and Sesotho sa Leboa taught over three years. Each module is taught in six-month long semesters. All the Contemporary English (CELS) modules are taught and assessed in English and the Multilingual Studies (MUST) modules in Sesotho sa Leboa. The degree responds to the South African government's commitment to the

maintenance and promotion of African languages articulated in its Constitution (1996). The degree also seeks to implement a key recommendation of South Africa's National Language Policy for Higher Education, namely "the development in the medium- to long-term of South African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education alongside English and Afrikaans" (Ministry of Education, 2002:15). Another goal of the degree is the development of higher-order cognition, critical for higher education (Ramani & Joseph 2010).

Literature Review

The paper is underpinned theoretically by the BA CEMS degree additive multilingualism, defined as the maintenance and development of the home language simultaneously with the acquisition of a second language (Cummins

2000). To begin with, additive multilingualism has to do with the knowledge content of the curriculum of a programme as reflected in the BA CEM degree. This is a good reflection of the language policy, planning and implementation in its own right. This is meant to show that the world that we live in is multilingual in nature but individuals tend to represent monolingualism. In this sense, Cummins (1996). asserts that we need to re-discover “this multilingual world, and our own multilingual identity within it seen as a form of cultural empowerment.” This is the main objective for the bilingual degree under study.

Based on the above, every multilingual study is required to revolve around current South African language issues and at the same taking into consideration, language issues in Africa and the world at large. It is in this respect that the BA CEMS degree uses a dual medium of instruction of using both English and Sesotho sa Leboa. The BA CEMS programme in this light should be seen as a yardstick for additive bilingualism because of its attempt to develop both an indigenous language alongside English as media of instruction. Thus, the programme strive to improve student’s competence in both languages as tools for higher-order cognitive work. This way, the content of the curriculum is bilingual and so are the languages used for teaching and learning. This is an “alternative to accessing multilingual content through monolingual means, which in South Africa, is English” (Ramani & Joseph 2010).

Language Policy in Higher Education (LPHE)

Language Policy for Higher Education (2002) was produced by the Department of Higher Education in South Africa to

promote multilingualism in institutional policies and practice. Vila and Bretxa (2014:135) assert that the governance of higher education in South Africa is executed in terms of the Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997. Section 27(2) requires that subject to the policy determined by the minister, the council, with the concurrence of the senate, must determine the language policy of a public higher education institution, and must publish and make it available on request.

According to Madiba (2004), transformation in South African higher education is required in the sense that the legacy of apartheid reflected in the underdevelopment of African languages must be eliminated. The multilingual nature of South African campuses is acknowledged and validated by the Language Policy in Higher Education, which requires all higher education institutions to advance the use of African languages. Thus, Van Der Walt (2004) writes: “in line with the constitution founding provisions of non-racialism, non-sexism, human dignity and equity, constitution not only accords equal status to all our languages, but recognizes that given the marginalization of indigenous languages in the past, the state “must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages””. The LPHE seeks to redress the imbalance and injustice of the past whilst mapping the way forward for the promotion and development of indigenous languages. The promotion of multilingualism in higher education is also aimed at creating an environment in which all languages work together for the benefit of the student community. Makalela and McCabe (2013) are of the view that a multilingual university encompasses all situations where administration, teaching and/ (or)

research are, to some extent, conducted in more than one language at the institution.

This policy, however, comes with its own challenges. Kaschula (2013:4) argues that one of the main challenges in the development of African languages in higher education is at policy level. An excellent language policy which provides for the development of African languages and the promotion of multilingualism in the education sector exists. The policy, however, often lacks a plan of implementation as well as directives on who should lead or drive its implementation

The use of African languages in education.

Maseko (2009) holds the view that there are a number of advantages in using African languages as primary languages in tertiary education. During tertiary education, the young learners may strive to fit the new concepts within their conceptual and intellectual framework and experiences in order to comprehend and internalize information. Where a foreign language is used, the students may lack the supportive tool for proper comprehension, deepening their grasps of ideas and articulation of issues.

The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, isiSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. However, in practice, all languages are not accorded equal status LPHE (2002:2). Section 29 (2) stipulates that “Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in the public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and

implementation of this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account equity, practicability and the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices

The Intellectualisation of African languages.

Madiba and Finlayson (2002:40) assert that intellectualisation is a planned process of accelerating the growth and development of indigenous languages to enhance their effective interface with modern developments, theories and concepts. A language is said to be modernized and intellectualised if the particular language being developed is used in educational instructions in any discipline from kindergarten to tertiary level (Sin-wai, 2004:65). The intellectualisation of African languages may lead to the democratisation of access to scientific knowledge and technology to the benefit of the masses of the rural population who now wallow in ignorance, misery, disease and hunger because such life-saving knowledge and skills are confined to a foreign language accessible only to a privileged few (Mkandawire, 2005:173). Kaschula and Maseko (2014) add that African languages should be intellectualised in order to function in government administration, science, technology, medicine, engineering, and other spheres of life.

Bilingual Education

Bilingualism is practically present in every country in the world, in different classes of societies and in all age groups (Grosjean, 2010). Hoffmann (2014) defines bilingualism as the knowledge of an individual to speak and write in two languages. Herk (2012), Filipovic and Putz

(2014), Adika and Asante (2015) extend the term bilingualism as an individual with possession or competence of two languages, even though the degree of fluency in each language may differ as a result of individual language acquisition circumstances and frequency of use. Bloomfield (1935:56) defines bilingualism as “the native-like control of two languages”. Grosjean and Li (2012) extend the definition of bilingualism as the use of two languages or dialects in everyday life. The above definitions cover the use of two languages. However, other authors such as Herk (2012), Filipovic and Putz (2014), Adika and Asante (2015) include the degree of fluency and competence, while others simply believe that bilingualism is the use of only two languages despite the fact of competence.

According to Bellas (2014), one of the advantages of bilingualism is that bilingual programmes help students develop native language literacy first, which makes the transition to English smoother. Baker (2011) argues that bilingual education typically enables a student’s two languages to attain higher levels of competency. Tse (2001) states that strong forms of bilingual education frequently lead to illiteracy. Furthermore, he points out that accessing literacy in two languages adds more functions to a language, widening the choice of literature for enjoyment, giving more opportunities for understanding different perspectives and leading to a deeper understanding of history and heritage.

For example, a speaker can be fluent and competent in Sepedi and TshiVenda languages spoken in the northern part of South Africa, and not be competent in English. This speaker can still be referred to as a bilingual speaker. The students enrolled in the BA CEMS programme are

bilingual because they are fluent in Sepedi and English language.

The BA CEMS programme is bilingual in a sense that it uses both English and Sepedi as media of instruction. Both these languages are used to facilitate lessons and for assessment purposes. It is therefore important to highlight the objectives of bilingual programmes and what it aims to achieve. Experience from bilingual education programmes has proven in practice that acquiring strong skills in an African language and in the official language can be very beneficial, as in the case of Burkina Faso’s bilingual programme (Alidou *et al.*, 2008, Ilboudo, 2003). Its learners have developed strong multilingual competences for different kinds of set-ups. The programme deliberately supports the professional development of learners. It is responsive to socio-economic activities of the region, has built-in professional training and provides bridges to technical, vocational and higher education careers (Alidou *et al.*, 2008, Ilboudo, 2003). In this study the BA CEMS students have demonstrated that learning in the bilingual programme did not prepare them adequately to be able to support them to deal with diversity in the workplace. The students demonstrate strong transference skills between the two languages used in the programme. What they have learnt in one language can be able to be used in another language.

Communication skills factored into the BA CEMS Degree

Workplaces require certain skills to employ graduates to different positions. The aim of the BA CEMS programme is to produce graduate who are efficient in both English and Sepedi. Writing, reading, research and communication skills are some of the skills expected by employers from these bilingual

graduates. Different authors such as Perera and Perera (2009), Adeyemo et al. (2010) have contributed towards various factors that influence employability of graduates such as work attitudes, computer skills, communication skills and work environment exposure.

In a study carried out by Dilrukshi et al. (2005) in Sri Lanka, it was found that inadequate communication skills that include written and oral communication is a major barrier in obtaining employment. The finding was also echoed by Perera and Perera (2009) who also carried a study in Sri Lanka that found inability to communicate to be a major problem in securing employment by graduate. Since these similar findings emanated from findings of studies that were carried out within the same country it became important to carry out this current study that is aimed at understanding the types communication that are factored into the programme and how these skills are necessary for the graduates to perform their duties in the workplaces. Effective oral communication skills, effective basic writing and reading skills, competence in English and Sepedi and development of good interpersonal communication skills.

Skills and abilities

Considering that the BA CEMS graduates are taught different skills in two languages namely English and Sepedi, the students are expected to be able to transfer these skills between these two languages. If translanguaging enables children to learn new concepts by using two or more languages, then it is likely that concepts learnt in one language can be processed and articulated into another language. This kind of movement between one language and another may be termed as language transfer. Lems, Miller and Soro (2010)

define language transfer as the action, conscious or unconscious, of applying features of a first language in the learning of a new language.

Language transfer could also occur when skills learnt in one language are transferred to another language. For example, when the students are taught on how to prepare an oral presentation, preparation of slides, logically planning the topic to be discussed and the actual delivering of the presentation in Sepedi, the students should be able to apply these skills into any other language that they may come across.

The concept of language transfer is central in this research since it highlights the value of using two (or more) languages in teaching and learning. The students in the BA CEMS Degree are taught skills in one language and they are expected to transfer the same skills into another language or languages that they may come in contact with at the work places. Modules such as MUST 302 introduces students to research, and these students learn how to do research using Sepedi. The students are then given a research project in the CELS 302 modules. The project is then written and conducted in English. The students are not taught the same skill again in English.

Cummins (2007) is one of the leading advocates of bilingual education and his argument is based on the concept of language transfer. He argues that language competence is a unified entity in which the different languages of a learner interact with each other to form what he calls a Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP). He does not believe that a child or adult's competence in each language is separate and independent forming a Separate Underlying Proficiency (SUP). This is one of the underlying theory for the framing of the BA CEMS degree. The BA CEMS programme offers students six modules in

Sepedi and another six modules in English. The content of the modules in Sepedi and English are different but linked to each other. For example, the students are taught how to do research in MUST 302 module which is offered in Sepedi, and later are given a project in CELS 302 module which is offered in English to do a mini research report. The students are expected to write a research report based on the research skills that they have learnt in Sepedi. It is expected that the students should be able to transfer the skill they have learnt in Sepedi into the English by successfully conducting a mini research project.

Future of African Languages

Madadzhe and Sepota (2006: 127) investigated the future of African languages as media of instruction in South African Higher education and came to the conclusion that African indigenous languages have been stagnated for the past decade. It is this stagnation they argue that is responsible for scaring students from taking indigenous languages as their fields of study. This is because of the “retrenchment, threats of more retrenchment, and enforced retirement of staff in African languages and lack of creation of new posts in this field at various universities” (Madadzhe and Sepota 2006: 127).

Several reasons account for a shift away from the study of African indigenous languages. The first is a negative attitude towards indigenous languages as mostly because these languages are being considered by many as primitive, inferior and backward. This is line with Foncha (2013) who argues that most parents send their children to English medium schools because the English language to them is seen as a language of power and Economic

upliftment. In light of this, Madadzhe and Sepota (2006: 132) assert that “

[N]egative attitude towards African languages is also attributable to the fact that Africans in the past (especially during colonialism and apartheid) were regarded as inferior beings not capable of logical thinking and learning sophisticated subjects such as Maths and Science. Some of the Africans do not want to be identified as Africans.

Based on the above quotation, English hegemony is very prominent given that it is a language of power and economic.

The second reason is the fact that very few schools and tertiary education use indigenous languages for teaching and learning. Even in the cases where they are used for teaching and learning, assessments are usually done in English. Based on this, it is needful to bring out the advantages of using African languages for teaching and learning. Hence, many parents and students are ignorant of these advantages and tend to undermine African languages.

Relevant content in African Languages

In the domain of content, only English is deemed useful as a medium of instruction. Predominantly in African languages, the main focus is grammar and literature with no idea of developing the literacy of these languages. This is in contrast with the departments of English language that focuses on the development of academic writing and reading and communication in almost all South African universities. In light of this, “English language within academia thrives as such initial offerings provide opportunities for first entry students to practice reading complex

written and visual texts, and to write in ways that are valued within academia. After all, English is the LoLT and English disciplinary concerns influence much of what goes on these courses” (Mabunda 2009). Ironically, almost all indigenous languages departments do not encourage the use of African languages in teaching and learning. As such, the African language departments “fail to draw students’ attention to the role of language in constructing and contesting different subject positions, identities, and knowledge” (Balfour 2000). Based on this, Mgqwashu (2007) argues that “the artificial separation of language studies, literature studies, and academic reading and writing in these languages usually results in pedagogic practices that leave students either understanding texts and able to discuss them orally, or with the ability to regurgitate what they have copied during lectures and can draw from memory. Under these circumstances the consequence is that students are left with an inability to construct complex and persuasive arguments in writing, and a failure to engage critically with detail in academic texts.”

Methodology

Research question

What are the experiences and challenges faced by BA CEMS students?

To understand the practices of the current students we held group discussions with Honours and third year students of the BA CEMS programme at the University of Limpopo. First of all, we set up appointments with the students currently on the programme to have focus group discussions as part of Tlowane’s PhD study. After obtaining written consent from all the participants in the Honours and third year classes, we made arrangements to

meet the groups for the actual discussions. The Honours students were nine in number and the third year students were eight. The focus group discussion took place in the classrooms at our appointed time. The discussion was conducted in English since all students are bilingual. English is the medium of instruction in the Contemporary English studies. The students however were given permission to use other languages such as Sepedi. The students could code switch into Sepedi as that is also the language of instruction in the Multilingual Studies class and the student’s home language. We designed a set of questions beforehand to act as a guide and for consistency in their responses. These responses were tape recorded and later transcribed to form the data for this study that we present and discuss below. We took on the role of observers and facilitators. We posed the questions and guided the discussion to ensure that the discussion focuses on the topic at hand. We also tracked that the questions we had were all answered and also asked follow up questions where necessary. Having set the ground rules at the beginning of the discussion, the participants still did not follow some of them. Like turn taking and giving other participants a chance to talk and finish.

Presentation and Discussion of Data

From the transcripts made from the focus group discussion with the Honours and third year students, we extracted some excerpts which I present as data in this section. We selected sections that were relevant to addressing the experiences and challenges faced by the current students in the programme.

Q1: What are your needs in this programme as a student?

Student 1: *I don't even know where to start. We need support cause its difficult when you are a student who is learning in an African language. We need access to books and resources especially in Sepedi. When we write assignments and we must research, we find materials in English and we must translate it as we cannot just copy and paste it because it is in English and we are writing a Sepedi assignment.*

Students 2: *Imagine when you have to cite, it becomes difficult. You are citing a text in English but you are writing a Sepedi module. Then you must paraphrase in your own words so you cannot just directly quote what that author is saying.*

Student 5: *Even the notes that we receive in class, I also feel that they are always less than the ones we receive in the CELS classes, the MUST notes are often less as the lecturers have to translate most of the text, but in the English class the lecturer can just print the article straight from the internet and then give it to us in class.*

From the responses above, lack of resources in Sepedi seems to be a challenge for the students. As Student 1 has stated, when they research or have to source information from the internet for their assignment, it is often a challenge to get access to materials in Sepedi. This requires them to translate some of the materials themselves for them to be able to use it in their assignments. The translation of these materials can result in loss of meaning and can be time consuming. In referencing it also becomes challenging to directly cite or quote the author as the information is often in English. Despite the programme being in existence for 17 years, students still quote lack of resources in an African language as a great challenge.

The next focuses on the challenges faced by the students enrolled for the BA CEMS programme.

Q4: Which challenges have you faced as a student in this course?

Student 6: *Well for me I think everyone thought that it is easy to write formal Sepedi language, and it is not. Just because I can speak Sepedi does not mean that I can write Sepedi, so it was difficult.*

Student 1: *I lack vocabulary in Sepedi especially when coming to assignments, I face challenges like grammar errors. Although I prefer to write in Sepedi, it is often difficult to write the formal Sepedi as compared to the one I use every day when talking. The two are not the same. And the worst part is I can't look for the terms on the computer or google like I would with English words.*

Student 3: *Presentation in English has always been my greatest challenge. I know how to speak English but it is not so easy when I have to use the formal English in front of lecturer and fellow students. I sometimes cram the information and I am always scared that I will forget what I needed to say. So I get nervous and I always get low marks in English compared to Sepedi class.*

From the responses above, language problems seem to be prominent from the student's point of view. The students seem to be having challenges in the use of formal and academic Sepedi. This highlights that students do not only struggle with English but the use of Sepedi as well. This means that students will require extensive support in both the languages.

In continuation, it is important to find ways in which the programme may be improved.

Q3: What in your opinion can be done to improve on the programme?

Student 8: *It is easier to do things in English than in Sepedi. English has resources and as well terminology. We are taught research in Sepedi and we are expected to then write it in English, and it is not easy to just switch like that. More support should be given; they should explain in detail how we must do it.*

Student 4: *Writing classes should be offered especially academic writing in Sepedi. I feel it is a space that is neglected and we are often expected to write academically just because we can speak the language fluently, and these two things are different. In writing you must link the ideas, use the correct words and also write in a way that the information flows well.*

Graduate 7: *One thing I am happy about is when we do presentation in the Multilingual studies class. It is much easier to do it and I am more confident than when I do that in the CELS class. That is great. I wish we could get more support when preparing for presentation in the CELS class.*

From the responses above, the programme should not only focus on supporting the students in improving English writing skills but both languages require the same effort. The students indicate that they are confident in conversing in Sepedi but require support to write academically in the language.

The issues raised by the students are suggestive of the needed changes to the

programme to ascertain the efficiency and efficacy of the BA CEMS programme.

Q5: What changes in your opinion could be brought into the programme?

Student 3: *There should be guidance on the modules to choose so that it can be easy to get jobs. Like if I wanted to be a radio presenter I should have taken Media and Communication studies as electives but I did not know.*

Student 2: *For me the content is relevant, it has taught me a lot about the language situation in South Africa and what needs to be done to promote these languages. But right now I have applied for PGCE and I am told that I do not have a teaching subject and then I was rejected. If I knew when I was registering in first year, I would have chosen those teaching subjects as my electives.*

Student 5: *They should channel what is being taught so that we can understand clearly what we can do when we complete our studies. For me I wanted to be a language researcher and I am not sure how I am going to do that.*

The responses by the students imply that they are not confident of the career opportunities available for BA CEMS graduates. They raise issues about the relevance of the programme in the workplace and the need for career guidance when the students select elective modules when they first enrol for the programme.

One of the main objectives of the programme is to produce bilingual experts who would be able to make a contribution in the multilingual and diverse workplace. It is then important to identify the

bi/multilingual skills that the programme teaches the students.

don't accepts students from these programme.

Q2: What bi/multilingual skills have you learnt from the programme this far?

Student 5: *I can speak English better than I did when I came to the University. I can also write Sepedi very well. I am very happy that my English has improved and I believe it will create more opportunities for me to succeed in the future.*

Student 2: *My writing has improved a lot. Our lecturer used to make us submit work in different draft and give us feedback and that use to help me improve on my writing. That's why I write better now I used to struggle to write especially in English.*

Student 6: *being able to present well in English. I never use to have confidence to present but now I can stand in front of people and do presentations well and also use a power point presentations.*

The responses above highlight on the fact that the students see it as important to learn English. Although the programme is developing both Sepedi and English, the students still see the importance of perfecting their English skills and are pleased that their English has improved since they have joined the programme.

The question that follows is based on their knowledge on how the programme prepares graduates for the work place.

Q6: Do you think this programme is in line with your career path?

Student 3: *I didn't want to become a teacher but I heard it's easier to do PGCE and then become a teacher after completing my studies. So I plan on applying at UNISA to do that. I heard that here on campus they*

Student 4: *I am doing translation studies so I want to go and work at court as an interpreter. I also hope that I will be allowed to do my masters in Translation and Linguistics so that if I don't get a job in government I can become a lecturer.*

Student 5: *I didn't qualify to do law as planned when I came to the university, but I would like to go work in parliament as a language researcher or maybe language practitioner. I am not sure of what the requirements are. But I plan to continue my studies until I finish my masters*

Responses to question 6 indicates that the students are not prepared for what comes after the completion of their degree. Lack of information when they registered the programme about career opportunities as well as exit points being blocked are some of the challenges they face.

The past decade has witnessed stagnation in the development of African languages. In view of this, Madadzhe and Sepota (2006: 127) say "it is undeniable that African languages as a study field have been experiencing drought in the past ten years in South Africa." This is evident from the BA CEMS degree programme that has never reached the its target of 40 students. In addition, the throughput is also a serious problem.

The results above suggest that lack of resources in African languages is still a great challenge. Programmes such as BA CEMS still rely on materials mostly available in English and it is often a daunting task of the lecturers to translate the materials from English to Sepedi. The materials are often not relatable to the African context as they would have been if

they were originally formulated for African language purposes.

Lack of terminology in African languages, and the formal language is often that which the students cannot relate to. The students in the BA CEMS are Sepedi speaking, and have known the language throughout their existence, but they are indicating that the terminology that is used in the text is not easy to understand and it is not the everyday terms that they use to communicate. The biggest challenge is when one meets the difficult terms they at times not find that term in the bilingual dictionaries if they want to consult and get the meaning.

The students require support in writing skills for both English and Sepedi. Sepedi is often neglected as it is taken for granted that the students are competent in the language. Not bearing in mind that the formal writing skill is different from everyday conversational language in any language. There is still a need to transition the students from Sepedi basic communication skills to the Academic language required by higher learning institutions.

Maseko (2009) holds the view that there is a number of advantages in using African languages as primary languages in tertiary education. During tertiary education, the young learners may strive to fit the new concepts within their conceptual and intellectual framework and experiences in order to comprehend and internalize information. Where a foreign language is used, the students may lack the supportive tool for proper comprehension, deepening their grasps of ideas and articulation of issues. Maseko's views align with those of BA CEMS in that the use of Sepedi is in helping the students understand the concepts in all their learning areas. The students have highlighted that they can

express themselves better in Sepedi class, as they are more comfortable in using their mother tongue, in this case Sepedi as compared to English. The students indicated that they more confident conversing orally in the Must classes using Sepedi. It is also easier to do presentation in Sepedi than English. They do not need to cram and therefore are less nervous when they present.

There should be link between what is taught and the outside world. And the modules should also guide what the students can specialise in when they complete their studies. The students have also highlighted that when they enrol in the programme it is often not clear to them what career paths they can take when they complete their studies. They require guidance on the selection of elective modules in line with possible careers that they may take when they complete their studies.

The ability to use the English language efficiently seems to be an important factor to the students. They clearly highlight that since they have joined the programme one of the important acquired skill is the ability to present and write well in English. This shows that they view English as an important language and skill to acquire. Kaschula and Maseko (2014) add that African languages should be intellectualised in order to function in government administration, science, technology, medicine, engineering, and other spheres of life. The African languages however are not recognised or given the equal status to be used for such high order functions. It is worthy to note that parents and students have a negative attitude towards African languages

Because these indigenous languages are perceived as inferior, backward and primitive. In this regard, they prefer

competence in English which is seen as a language of popularity and prestige.

A language is said to be modernized and intellectualized if the particular language being developed is used in educational instructions in any discipline from kindergarten to tertiary level (Sin-wai, 2004:65). For African languages to be improved in any way, they first need to be acknowledged and used as media of instruction in education. So far their existence is only in the form of policy, or they are taught as subjects but not used as media of instruction.

Conclusion

It is not only the negative aspects that the students have experienced, factors such as better understanding and the ability to use the skills learnt in African languages were evident from their responses. "Community life in Africa takes place mainly in African languages; therefore, mother tongue-based education has an impact on the direct environment. Learners can immediately

use what they have learned. Evaluations of non-formal education programmes" (Fagerberg-Diallo 2006) show that learning to read and write in the language/s used at community level activates learners. As such, this study reveals that students using African languages as medium of instruction in higher education face challenges that can result to them dropping out or changing courses. These challenges range from lack of institutional support, unclear career paths after the completion of their studies and lack of resources in African languages. Based on the above, the BA CEMS programme needs to support and acknowledge that the students are doing a unique programme that is not like any other at the university. They require different type of support such as career guidance, sourcing of materials for students to efficiently do their academic work and linguistic support in both English and Sepedi for the students to transition to the academic standard required by higher learning institutions.

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