A Comparative Study of the Classroom Social Climate of the Siswati as a First Language Class and Siswati as a Second Language Class

Duduzile Mhlongo & O. I., Oloyede

Duduzile Mhlongo & Prof. O. I., Oloyede
Dept. of Curriculum & Teaching, University of Eswatini
Eswatini/ Swaziland

Abstract: The introduction of the new localized curriculum has resulted in siSwati becoming a core subject in Swaziland schools compelling students to offer siSwati either as a first or second language. This study sought to compare the classroom social climate of the siSwati as a first language class and second language class. The objectives of the study were to compare the classes in terms of physical environment; students’ participation, student-teacher interaction, as well as the methods teachers use to motivate students. A classroom observation schedule and a face to face interview guide were used to document the classroom social climate in 24 classes in four purposively selected schools. Equal numbers of first and second language classes were observed, data was analyzed using content analyses. Results indicated that although both classes had enough furniture but teaching material was lacking and there were differences in students’ participation and student-teacher interaction. The first language classes were congested, In both first and second language classes, learner motivation was verbal and student – teacher interaction was rarely appropriate and less often appropriate in second language classes. The study concluded that differences in these classes were influenced by the teacher, and the classes were distinguished in terms of students participation, student – teacher interaction but not in the physical environment. It was recommended that the government provides in-service training in classroom management skills for serving teachers; training institutions should also provide relevant training in the communicative approach in language teaching for second language teaching and that schools should provide learning materials.

Keywords: Classroom social climate, First and second language, Physical Environment, Students’ Participation, Student – Teacher Interaction.
1. Introduction

In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in Swaziland changed the secondary school curriculum from the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O-Level) to the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). The latter was later localised into the Swaziland General Certificate of Secondary Education (SGCSE), in 2009. Unlike the ‘O’ Level curriculum which allowed students in some schools to study French as an alternative to SiSwati their mother tongue, the new localised curriculum compels all learners to learn SiSwati (Government of Swaziland, 2008). The SGCSE curriculum divided SiSwati into two syllabi: SiSwati as First language and siSwati as a second language. Depending on their abilities in the language, learners had to decide whether they wanted to do siSwati as a first or second language (Government of Swaziland, 2008). Most learners of Swazi origin opted for siSwati as a first language while those of foreign origin opted for siSwati as a second language (Mkhabela, 2014).

However, since the introduction of the SGCSE curriculum in 2009 and the subsequent examinations in 2011 to 2015, credit grade level performance of the students (Grade C or higher) has been consistently better amongst the first language students than amongst students sitting for the second language examination. Amongst the latter, there has been a perceptible, steady decline over the years. Performance in any subject can be influenced by a number of factors. Battistich, Schaps and Wilson (2004) have reported on evidence showing that performance is greatly influenced by the classroom environment. These researchers concluded that classroom climate is a key influence on student motivation and, consequently, achievement. These findings have been echoed by other researchers who reported that classrooms with high teacher support and involvement tend to have students who enjoy learning and report a high desire for self-improvement and motivation for academic achievement (Goodenow, 1993; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Oloyede, 1998). In a study by Hootstein (1995), examining middle school students’ perceptions of their classroom social climate and motivation, classroom social structure was shown to influence student motivation (Stornes, Bru & Idsoe, 2008). Furthermore, teachers’ involvement and autonomy support were positively correlated with student task involvement, motivation and achievement. It appears then that teachers can create classroom climates, situations, and relationships that stimulate and boost student motivation and eventually achievement.

According to Ormrod (2003), teachers do not choose their classrooms. However, they do have control over the kind of classroom climate they construct with their students and the kinds of instructional practices they utilize. The classroom environment shapes teachers’ relationships with their students, and students’ relationships with each other and with classroom concepts. Laurel (2002) states that teachers often speak of a classroom’s atmosphere, tone, ethos or ambience and its importance for student learning typically, teachers concentrate almost exclusively on the assessment of academic achievement, and devote little attention to factors which might be related to their students’ patterns of adaptive learning and performance. Laurel (2002) further states that there is research evidence indicating that classroom climate has a significant influence on the types of goals students establish.

Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Lun, Hamre and Pianta (2013) examined the relationship between teacher-student interactions and achievement among secondary school students and results showed that positive classroom climates characterized by teacher sensitivity, regard for adolescents’ perspectives, order and organization and task-focus significantly predicted student achievement. These researchers concluded that secondary school class interactions are valuable for student learning and achievement. However, classroom climate in and of itself is not entirely sufficient to promote student achievement. Student engagement in classroom tasks and activities compliments classroom climate to yield positive outcomes.

It appears then that teachers can create classroom climates, situations, and relationships that encourage student motivation and eventually achievement. This shows that teachers play a vital role in the conceptualization of the classroom climate. They create both the social and physical environments for learning. One of the best ways teachers accomplish this goal is by having a good classroom management plan which includes ways to prevent problems from occurring, having clear rules and procedures, a well-organized physical environment, ways in which to communicate effectively with students, and how students can interact with each other. According to Doyle (2010), classrooms are
particular kinds of environments. They have distinctive features that influence their inhabitants no matter how the students or the desks are organized or what the teacher believes about education. Furthermore, classrooms are multidimensional, they are crowded with people, tasks, and time pressures, have people with differing goals, preferences and abilities, inhabitants must share resources, and actions can have multiple effects and influence student participation.

According to David, Roger and Edith (2007), a lot of research has been carried out to answer many questions of interest to educators: Does a classroom’s environment affect goal orientation? Can teachers conveniently assess the climates of their own classrooms? Questions such as these represent the thrust of the work on classroom environments over the past three decades. The very nature of classes, teaching, and students makes a positive classroom climate a critical ingredient of student success. Teachers who are successful in establishing effective classroom climates create more time for learning, involve more students, and help students to become self-managers. Therefore, a positive learning environment must be established and maintained throughout the year.

Research questions
The study sought to answer the following research questions:

a. What are the differences in the classroom participation of students in the siSwati as a first language class and the siSwati as a second language class?

b. How does the teacher interact with the learners in the siSwati as a first language class and the siSwati as a second language class?

c. What methods do teachers use to motivate students studying siSwati as a first language and those studying siSwati as a second language?

2. Methodology
This study adopted the qualitative research approach and the survey research design. The researcher used observations and interviews to gain insights about the classroom climate of the siSwati as a first language class and the siSwati as a second language class. The population included all the 11 schools in the Manzini region which offer siSwati as first and second language in the same school, and information on the schools offering siSwati as first and second language was obtained from the Examination Council of Swaziland.

The sample was 4 schools (36.4%) which were purposively selected out of the 11 schools offering siSwati as first and second language in the Manzini region. In the selected four schools, the students are taught in separate classes yet in the rest of the schools (7 in number), the students in these two streams (first and second language classes) are taught in the same class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Type</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A government mixed school, located in a semi-urban area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>It is a private school located in an urban area, it is a mixed school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>It is a mixed, urban school owned by the mission in partnership with government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>It a community mixed school, located in the rural area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, 24 lessons were observed, 6 lessons were observed in each school: 3 each in the first language classes and second language classes. All classes were taught by female teachers. The classes observed were forms 5 because that is where learners are separated into studying siSwati as a first and second language.

The classroom observation instrument used in the study has been adapted from Moos (1979) - the Classroom Environment Scale. After the observations, the teachers teaching the subject were interviewed using the interview guide prepared by the researchers. The researcher kept notes which were later analysed and summarized.
3. Results and Discussions
Research question 1: What are the differences in the participation of students in the siSwati as a first language class and the siSwati as a second language class?

Students’ participation

Generally, observations showed that students demonstrated interest in learning siSwati as a first language as opposed to siSwati as a second language. The interest was also evident in that in the siSwati as a first language class, students tended to take the initiative whereas in the siSwati as a second language class there was a tendency amongst students to be frequently off task and not actively participating in class.

What was observed was that students studying siSwati as a first language actively participated in class discussions in contrast to students studying siSwati as a second language. When the teachers were interviewed, they pointed out that students studying siSwati as a first language participate in class because they are proficient in the language (siSwati) as it is their mother tongue. The teachers further argued that learners studying siSwati as a second language on the other hand did not participate as they are always afraid of making mistakes as they are not proficient in the language. The teachers were of the shared view that learners studying siSwati as a second language were in most cases observed to be uninterested in the classroom activities for the same reason, of non-proficiency in the siSwati language. One respondent teaching siSwati as a second language lamented saying:

“It is so difficult to teach the children studying siSwati as a second language because they don’t participate in class, at times when given work they just delay writing till the bell rings.”

Teachers teaching siSwati as a second language also raised the issue of attitude of the students. Teacher and student attitudes on teaching and learning siSwati as a second language are largely negative. The teachers’ views often echoed the sentiment that ‘abanganelani’ (the students just do not care). These negative attitudes may explain the negative environment in these classes. They may also account for the indiscipline and the lack of interest and apathy amongst students in second language classes.

Anderman and Kaplan (2008) stated that attitudes are a very important aspect in classroom performance. They further stated that performance of students in a language is greatly influenced by the students’ attitude towards the target language and culture. If the student has a negative attitude, then the student will put little effort to learn the target language and therefore be limited in the extent of his/her language acquisition. Similarly, if the student lacks self-confidence or has a negative attitude towards learning the target language, the student will lack motivation and be limited in the language acquisition process.

Research question 2: How does the teacher interact with the learners in the siSwati as a first language class and the siSwati as a second language class?

Instruction approach

Teacher centred teaching approaches were observed where the teachers spoke from the start to the end of a lesson. This instructional strategy, according to the teachers, was as a result of the large numbers of students congested into single rooms in the first language classes and in the second language classes by the learners ‘failure to participate’. Both siSwati as a first language classes and siSwati as a second language classes were dominated by teacher centred approaches and the students remained passive.

It was on rare cases where teachers employed learner centred approaches in the first language classes. This was observed when teaching literature “Lilungelo lakhe”, a drama book. Students were observed taking turns in the reading, and after reading each paragraph, the teacher would pose questions to the students. It was in this instance that the teacher was observed to be facilitating the discussion rather than dominating as was the norm. In most of the classroom observations, the teacher would come to class, explain particular concepts, and give examples. Once in a while, in both classes, the writing of notes would follow.

Literature shows that the teacher centred approach is a good approach to teaching when integrated with the child centred approach. Schuh (2004) stated that the teacher centred approach is advantageous in the sense that the classroom remains orderly. Students are quiet and the teacher retains
full control of the classroom and its activities. Likewise, teacher directs all classroom activities so they may not have to worry that students will miss important points.

Research carried out by several scholars including Schuh (2004), Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf, and Moni, (2006), and White (2007) stated that if the teacher centred approach is not integrated with the learner centred approach effective teaching and learning could be hindered as it doesn’t allow students to express themselves, ask questions and direct their own learning. It also makes students to work alone and in that way they don’t learn to collaborate with other students, and thus retard the development of communication skills (Schuh, 2004). On the other hand, in the student centred instruction, students and instructors share the focus. Instead of listening to the teacher exclusively, students and teachers interact equally. Group work is encouraged, and students learn to collaborate and communicate with one another. The advantage is that students learn important communicative and collaborative skills through group work (Nonkukhetkhong et.al 2006). This shows the importance of the learner centred approach as the students learn to direct their own learning, ask questions, and complete tasks independently. Students are more interested in learning activities when they can interact with one another and participate actively.

The learner centred instruction however also have disadvantages because when students are talking classrooms are often busy, and may become noisy and chaotic (White, 2007). So teachers must attempt to manage all students’ activities, which can be difficult when students are working on different stages of the same project. So this shows that the teacher should not rely on one method but use both as they work collaboratively to enhance the teaching and learning process.

Teacher moving around and guiding students

In some first language classes teachers were observed guiding students, whereas in the second language such student guidance was rare: the teacher would just come to class and lecture the students. In classes observed, the teacher was rarely observed seen moving around to monitor and guide the students in the teaching and learning process especially in the second language classes. In contrast with second language classes, students were encouraged to be creative in the first language classes, which in turn enhanced learning opportunities for the students. When one participant who taught first and second language classes was interviewed, she said:

“It is very easy for us to encourage creativity in students studying siSwati as a first language as a majority of students are proficient in the language so they are even able to play around with the language which makes the teaching process much easier.”

When one participant who also teach siSwati as a first and second language was asked about the interaction that they have with the students studying siSwati as a second language, the teacher stated that in the second language classes it is impossible for them to encourage creativity as much time is spent trying to help the students to master certain concepts.

Another respondent who teaches second language classes stated that it becomes difficult for them to teach students the second language siSwati because a majority of the student did not do siSwati from grade one to form three so they get to form four not knowing anything pertaining to the language:

“It is very difficult for us to teach these students because some of them have never had a single siSwati class from grade one to form three so for the sake of progress we just come to class deliver the content without asking any questions at times. This is because when we ask them questions they just display that they do not have any idea of what the teacher is talking about since they do not have a siSwati background.”

Language used when teaching

Teachers and students were consistently code switching- using English and siSwati words and expressions in both siSwati classes. This was more dominant in second language classes, where some teachers were observed teaching siSwati as a second language using English. One teacher came into class to teach about ‘Inkhulumo’ (Speech) in the first language class but once the English equivalent was introduced, she used it throughout the lesson.

Even when they were learning about parts of speech in the first language class, the teacher was observed using the term ‘adjective’ throughout the lesson, instead of the siSwati equivalent.
“siphawulo”. One teacher in a second language class was observed teaching composition writing using English language instead of saying “indzaba lecocako” the teacher simply switched to the ‘narrative composition’ and consistently used the English language throughout the lesson. The teacher was also observed code switching and using phrases like ‘niboba creative’ meaning ‘you must be creative’. The teachers were also observed using the words introduction, body, conclusion in composition writing instead of the siSwati equivalent words.

One participant who teaches siSwati as a second language when asked said:

“The fact is that a majority of the students studying siSwati as a second language are foreigners. Some just join us in Form 4, so we only have two years to teach them the second language. Hence, we also term it as a foreign language. We find ourselves-tempted to teach some concepts in English so that the students can understand what is being taught.”

In the siSwati as a second language classes this was dominant as English was used to explain concepts and to define words. Which means students will not be able to discuss what was taught in siSwati and when examinations come they will be drilled to reproduce certain statements without necessarily understanding the concepts.

Literature reviewed shows that code switching in the classroom has been discovered to have a number of disadvantages. The study conducted by Merritt, Clerghorn, Abagi & Bunyi (1992) revealed that there are inherent problems in code switching. The researchers noted that the tendency to code switch resulted in the restriction of the use of the targeted language in the classroom. Teachers would not elaborate on the subject matter or define words in the targeted language but would borrow from another language. And the result was ‘rote formulations geared to phrases from the teachers’ syllabus and what is expected in the (public) examinations.

What teachers did when students gave wrong responses or did not respond at all

Teachers were much less likely to encourage the learners to try again in second language class than in first language classes. In most instances in second language classes, teachers tended to ignore the students more when students did not respond to questions posed than teachers in first language classes. Hence, when the students in second language classes did not answer questions the teacher would simply ignore them and give the class the correct answer. This was observed when the teacher was teaching reading comprehension whereby students had to provide synonyms for certain words: ‘kuhacatela’, ‘kufukutsa.’ The students didn’t respond and the teacher did not encourage the student to try again. She just went straight and told them the answers.

Teachers complained on the shortage of time for attending to individual learners responses. Participants mentioned that there is no progress in the second language classes because one needs plenty of time to explain concepts thoroughly because most of the learners in second language have serious language problems. One teacher when interviewed stated that:

“Time for teaching the second language is not enough. This makes it difficult for us to complete the syllabus. Due to time constrains we are not able to give extra activities or at times probe. Thus we always work under pressure. It would be better if the syllabus of the siSwati as a second language was developed in such a way that the difficulties they experience in learning a second language are taken to consideration: making provision for time to give individualised instruction and differentiated attention to learners with difficulties.”

Grouping arrangements

Teachers in both classes always taught the students as a whole group but when given tasks in both classes they were given as individuals working on the same task. There were activities which needed the teacher to group the learners in small groups but the teachers didn’t do that. They claimed that, when grouped, students tend to make a lot of noise due to the large number of learners in classes thus ending up not achieving the desired effect. A teacher who teaches siSwati as a first language when interviewed stated said:
"It is so strenuous to group the learners when they are learning siSwati as a first language. It’s difficult to control them due to the large numbers."

In second language classes, teachers were less often observed using connection to prior knowledge, even less likely to provide differentiated instruction or use collaborative grouping, while they never incorporated varied assessments. It was also observed that in second language classes, questions were almost always low-cognitive and stimulated narrow student responses and students rarely ask questions from each other and from the teacher.

Research question 3: What methods do teachers use to motivate students studying siSwati as a first language and those studying siSwati as a second language?

There were no differences between first and second language classes in terms of the ways teachers motivate the students

Praises observed

It was observed that in both language classes student motivation was largely verbal, and less often material or expressed by way of physical contact. Hence, praise and complements were common. Teachers were observed in both classes making comments like:

“That’s excellent, a good try, not exactly, but thanks for trying, that’s a brilliant response.”

According to Hawkins & Heflin (2011), praise is a powerful motivating tool because it allows the teacher to selectively encourage different aspects of student production and output. For example, a teacher may use praise to boost the students’ performance, praising effort, accuracy, or speed on an assignment. Or the teacher may, instead single out the students work product and use praise to underscore how closely the actual product matches an external standard or goal set by the student.

Creation of classroom traditions

In the first language classes, no teacher was observed conducting special traditions for their classroom whereas in the siSwati as a second language classes in three of the classrooms observed in School D, one teacher was observed reciting slogans at the beginning of every lesson as a way of motivating the students. The teacher was observed reciting slogans like:

“We will cooperate,
We will communicate,
We will concentrate, and.
We will have a good lesson.”

Literature shows that traditions can help create positive feelings and bond students to their class. The use of thought provoking and memorable quotes is another possible way to create a special tradition in class as it creates a warm and inclusive classroom environment (Lasater, Johnson, & Fitzgerald, 2002).

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study yielded the following conclusions:

a. Both siSwati as a first language class and siSwati as a second language class had enough furniture, but had shortage of teaching material. However only first language classes were congested.

b. Participation was high in first language classes as learners are proficient in the language but low in second language classes.

c. In both classes, instruction was teacher centered, teacher was traditional, and code switching was more intense in second language classes.

d. In both classes, teachers motivated learners verbally.

e. Generally the classroom climate was positive in first language classes as opposed to second language classes.

5. Recommendations for action

Based on the findings presented in the fourth chapter and conclusions reached informed by the findings, the following can be recommended:
a. Teachers should be enlightened regarding their role in creating a classroom environment critical to teaching and learning.
b. Teachers should be enlightened regarding teaching strategies that motivate student-learning and the proper implementation of these strategies in their classrooms.
c. Government through the Ministry of Education and Training should provide learning areas, textbooks and additional educational material.

6. References

