

TEACHING SETSWANA PROVERBS AT THE INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

The paper sought to investigate how first year University student's-teachers understand and instil appreciation of the beauty of Setswana language. Since the proverbs are carriers of cultural values, practices, rituals, and traditional poetry, they are rich in meaning, they can be used to teach moral values for the sake of teaching character building among the students and teaching Setswana at the same time. Proverbs contain values of wisdom, discipline, fairness, preparedness, destiny, happiness, and efforts. Proverbs are short sayings that contain some wisdom or observation about life and or role-play and to use a few of the proverbs to reinforce the meaning, using proverbs as a pedagogical strategy, the researcher has observed that student teachers find it difficult to learn and teach learners at school. Students-teacher's think and feel about how they conceptualize proverbs, how they define their knowledge and use of Setswana proverbs. The lecturer observed how the nature of proverbs are linked to the culture embedded in the language. In Setswana language there is a proverb that says, "Ngwana sejo o a tlhakanelwa" (A child is a food around which we all gather) which implies that the upbringing of a child is a communal responsibility and not an individual responsibility. Put in simple terms, a child is a child to all parents or adults, since a child's success is not a family's success but the success of the community. In doing so, the paper will explore on how student-teachers could make use of proverbs to keep the class interested in learning Setswana proverbs. As a means of gathering qualitative data, a questionnaire was designed and administered to student-teachers and semi-structured interviews were conducted with student teachers. The findings revealed that despite those students-teachers' positive attitudes towards proverb instruction, they did not view their knowledge of Setswana proverbs as well as the teaching of proverbs. The paper displays that proverbs constitute an important repository of valid materials that can provide student-teachers with new instructional ideas and strategies in teaching Setswana proverbs and to teach different content, which includes Ubuntu and vocabulary and good behaviour.

Proverbs must be taught and used by teachers and learners in their daily communication in class and outside the classroom in order to improve their language proficiency.

Keywords: *Setswana language, proverbs, student- teachers, teaching and learning, Ubuntu.*

1. Introduction

Setswana is an African language spoken in South Africa, Botswana, and parts of Namibia. It is the national language of Botswana, and one of the eleven official languages in South Africa. Proverbs constitute knowledge not only for African peoples but knowledge for the global public sphere (Dei, 2014: 50). Proverbs reflect human experience across cultures and languages, which contain folk wisdom tested throughout the time. In relation to language teaching, they can be used to teach, among others, speaking, writing, grammar, vocabulary, culture, and values. The use of proverbs can be carried out through Setswana culture and values. Teaching and learning Setswana becomes a vital effort as the Setswana student- teacher must exert his/her efforts to make his/her teaching interesting and his/her students have fun while they are studying, and to lead their students to a great success in learning the focus language. It is however important to note that, for student-teacher to apply strategies of teaching proverbs, he/she should bring in various techniques to his/her classroom to avoid monotony in class. To have a good start a student-teacher needs a strategy to teach proverbs in a very interesting approach that would have a feeling of pleasure during the learning process. Using Setswana proverbs could be an effective way to start a new lesson. When necessary, the student-teacher could compare two proverbs with a different context but serve the same meaning, for instance a Setswana proverb "Le aramele le sa go tlhabetse" (Make hay while the sun shines) and "Ngwana

wa dikgomo ithute molodi, o gopole motlhang malata a ile”. Son of a cattle-farmer do learn the (cattle-tending) whistling yourself, so that you can take over when your father's farm hands are gone.

Both meaning refers to the child to learn things while the parents are still alive. In this way proverbs are useful guideposts and could serve as interesting in the teaching and learning situation. The lessons learned from proverbs are diverse and of the greatest importance in the training of student-teachers. Evidently, proverbs have influence on teaching student-teacher how to part with knowledge when teaching learners at school. The need being the effectiveness of proverbs are that they are maxims, a wise saying based upon people's experience, and are reflection of the social values and sensibility of the people.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical importance of teaching - learning Setswana home language using proverbs is based on model theories that are founded on Education, schooling, cultural and instruction framework. Barlett Jere Whiting (2013), points out that a proverb is an expression which, owing its birth to the people, testifies its origin in form and phrase, expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth, that is a truism, in homely language. Furthermore, some proverbs have literal meaning as they are stated, other proverbs have figurative meaning which makes sense.

According to Calvins's Theory of Value, there is human value planted in learning and knowledge acquisition. The proverb if well taught by the student-teacher, with the right knowledge and skills should add moral and academic value in the learner and improve their performance not only in writing but also in life, in whichever context is presented, that is in and out of the class.

Proverbs are experiences, some of which have been learnt the hard way (Nyembezi, 1950). In a classroom situation they reveal what the learners and the student – teachers go through and their outlook to life. According to Ellis and Tomlinson (1980) and Mwanzi (1986) say that learner's accuracy in the use of Setswana depends on their ability to assimilate and use different integrated structures if well taught. Some proverbs have literal meaning as they are stated. Other proverbs have figurative meaning which makes sense.

Proverbs have been used as teaching tools for centuries to teach moral values and social skills. They may deal with mind, wisdom, experience, learning, and authority. They are indeed effective devices to communicate wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large (Mieder,2004:146). Proverbs contain a truth in few words that relate to everyday life having a universal value, and they can be remembered easily. Considering the good values of proverbs to teach Setswana as home language, it is a good way to consolidate the learning of vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns and moral values.

3. Related literature review

There is a strong link between proverbs and pedagogy, for instance, student-teachers would teach learners at school the norms and values of society and instil in them the concept ubuntu (humanness) which they believed would make children grow up and be responsible citizens. Manda (2009) points out that ubuntu the understanding. *Ubuntu* is one of several African approaches to a comprehensive understanding of the process of cultivating cohesion and positive human interaction with one another and with creation in daily life. However, *ubuntu* picks out the idea that human beings are radically interdependent, and that this interdependence entails a morally normative pressure toward generosity, hospitality, friendliness, compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, consensus, and positive group-identification (van Niekerk 2013). Therefore, in teaching and learning, learners' exposure to certain proverbs can help in developing *ubuntu* in them. This can be seen through their behaviour, for example, respecting and treating one other with dignity and love. Onyebuchi Eze (2015) believes that the core of ubuntu can be summarised to mean that a person is a person through other persons “motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe” This means that humanity is not embedded in a person solely as an individual but that it is also bestowed from one person to the next. We need each other, we create each other and sustain one another as humanity is a quality, we owe to each other (Mangwegape 2019).

According to Mangwegape (2019), there is an expression that reflects this notion of social inclusion or social acceptance, namely, “Moeng goroga re je ka wena” (welcome dear guest, so that through you we may have plenty to eat - a rough translation). This expression reflects the African people's perspectives about visitors or guests, that a visitor or a guest is an important person who arrives into the space of a host; that they deserve more than the host or the host's family in terms of warmth, compassion, empathy, and care. Therefore, a visitor or a guest is viewed not as a client, a competitor, a challenger, or an intruder in one's space but as someone who adds value, plenty, comfort, humour, and honour; someone through whom there would be plenty to eat because even the meagre reserves that had been hidden for so long would be unearthed.

Some of these studies have employed questionnaires to uncover students' attitude to and/or experiences of the teaching and learning of proverbs. For instance, using a questionnaire, Hanz'en (2007) uncovered that teachers had a positive attitude towards using proverbs in Setswana language teaching.

4. Research methodology

The research design selected was qualitative approach which sought to establish the current knowledge and skills for the Setswana student-teacher in presenting lessons based on proverbs in Higher learning institutions. In this study, questionnaires and focus group interviews were developed by the research and used to collect data.

5. Aim of the study and research questions

The aim of the study is how student-teachers can make use of proverbs to keep learners interested in learning Setswana. Basically, proverbs reflect human experience across cultures and languages which contain folk wisdom tested throughout the time.

- What are the student-teachers' perception regarding the usage of ubuntu in proverbs?
- What are student-teachers' perceptions about the institution of higher learning Setswana teachers' practices in teaching proverbs in the lecture room?
- How do they think about their knowledge and use of Setswana proverbs?

6. Sample

The population of this study comprised 26 first year students, registered at the Higher learning institution of Central University of Technology in Setswana. The participants in this study were divided in groups for both first and second period of the study, and a questionnaire was developed for the Setswana student-teachers based on the objective of the study.

7. Procedure

The following steps were to improve the student-teachers teaching and learning:

Stage 1: Teaching proverbs

Student-teachers can be used to teach comparison between speaking, writing grammar, vocabulary, culture, and values.

Stage 2: Student-teachers can invite learners to make some comparison of proverbs that carry the same meaning.

Stage 3: Student-teachers should look for a strategy to teach proverbs in an interesting manner.

Stage 4: Culture and values can be carried out through the use of proverbs.

Stage 5: the philosophy of ubuntu can be used in the current issues of teaching character building,

Stage 6: Proverbs can be used in teaching character building as well.

8. Ethical considerations

The researchers observed ethical guidelines of seeking institutional permission, privacy, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of participant.

9. Data analysis

The researcher used qualitative method to analyse the data in this study. The questionnaire was designed to find answers to the research questions. For each proverb identified, detailed information about where language teaching, could be used to teach, among others, speaking, writing, grammar, vocabulary, culture, and values. Through the analysis the researcher identified the principle of ubuntu which they could be developed through their use. A focus-group interview took the form of a conversation with the intention that the researcher explores with the participants' views, ideas, beliefs, and attitude about teaching and learning of proverbs.

Student-teachers' perception regarding teaching and learning of proverbs in the classroom.

90% find it very interesting in the beginning of the lesson when the student-teacher makes the lesson interesting.

60% Learners are going to look for books that entails Setswana proverbs to learn more about them.
70% of the learners enjoyed the usage of ubuntu in proverbs.
The results show that learners enjoyed proverbs that deals with culture and values.

10. Results and discussion

The results show that by understanding the meaning of proverbs, learners could name and explain the proverbs, others could list the key words that they associated with proverbs. The meaning of proverbs could be of great help to the learners since teaching and learning took place, student-teachers started giving lessons on proverbs, they demonstrated qualities of ubuntu and their exposure to proverbs is of significant to the nature of proverbs that are linked to the culture embedded in the language. It can be noticed that the learner's meaning mostly included some of the cultural and formal aspects of proverbs. Owing to the variety in the forms of proverbs, there is not an exact and inclusive meaning that can enable one to identify them with any uncertainty. Some of the meanings of the Setswana proverbs are not quite true, for instance the proverb that says, 'ngwana yo o tlhogokgolo o sira rraagwe', (the big-headed child obstructs his father's view). Here the truth could be challenged and questioned. Considering these findings, the meaning of proverbs presented to the student-teachers in teaching and learning need to be renewed and updated to provide a more accurate picture of proverbs in modern times.

11. Conclusions

Proverbs can serve as interesting in teaching and learning situation because they are meaningful, and they contain some good values that can be practiced in daily life. In relation to character building, proverbs bear some educational values which can be used to build the student-teachers character. Setswana proverbs as the crystallisation of collective wisdom are the core of Setswana. Based on the features of Setswana proverbs, a student-teacher can make use of instilling the concept of ubuntu which they believed would make children grow up and be responsible citizens. The student-teacher can use proverbs in teaching Setswana skills, or the linguistic components of Setswana.

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