

EXPLORATION OF PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE STUDENTS' TECHNOLOGICAL READINESS TO TEACH DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

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Abstract

The outbreak of pandemics, such as Covid 19 and the need to learn “21st century skills” has resulted in universities intensifying the adoption and use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the training of pre-service teachers. Each teaching subject that pre-service teachers specialise in requires ICT skills relevant to the content of that subject. This paper focuses on English First Additional Language (ENGFAL) pre-service teachers' readiness to teach using ICT. This group of students specialise in a Bachelor of Education Degree at Further Education and Training level. A qualitative approach was used to gather data from final year ENGFAL students who will be on teaching practice (TP) in the middle of the year. Two focus group interviews comprising of five students each, were used to collect data from the ENGFAL pre-service teachers at a developing university in South Africa. This study was informed by the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework (TPACK). Data were analysed using a thematic approach. Key themes that emanated from this study were that most students were confident that they could teach ENGFAL using the traditional methods of teaching. The students revealed that ENGFAL has many aspects derived from the Language and Literature components of the subject and that sometimes confused them. However, only a few were confident that they could select appropriate ICT with the most affordances to achieve lesson objectives. Therefore, the majority of the ENGFAL pre-service teachers had limited TPACK. Another important issue that also emanated from this study was that the participants felt that they would have learnt better on how to use ICT to teach if they had done that in a physical classroom. They did not get adequate time to practice teaching using ICT in the physical classroom due to the Covid19 lockdown. Researchers of this study concluded that more practice, teacher, and peer support is needed for pre-service teachers to master ICT use in teaching ENGFAL.

Keywords: *Information and communication technology, English First Additional Language, Pre-service teachers, Technological and Pedagogical Content Knowledge.*

1. Introduction

The use of ICT to teach English is not new. ICT such as tape recorder, radios and videos have been used to teach language for decades (Lai Wah & Hashim 2021). Advantages of using ICT when teaching English have been posited in literature. For instance, Yüksel & Kavano (2011) argued that adopting English language websites, presentation software, watching videos, electronic dictionaries, and computer-assisted language, among other things, improved English language proficiency. The internet enables learners to access a wide range of information, and that exposes students to a wide range of materials for interpretation of language and contexts (Sidupa, Luke & Kurniawan, 2018). Research conducted by Romaña (2015, p.146) at the language institute of Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Bogotá, Colombia, revealed that “the reading of their peers' writings helped to boost learners' mastery of vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structure”. Romaña further found out that the use of Skype conference call can enhance speaking skills.

English teachers are expected to have adequate digital skills, since they must incorporate ICT in their teaching, and prepare learners for the information society. ICT has potential for promoting language learning and has therefore become a major component of teacher education programmes in nations like China, Hong Kong, and the United States of America (Hsu, 2016). This study is therefore informed by TPACK framework by Mishra and Koehler (2006). TPACK is an interrelation of teacher content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technology knowledge, as well as the contextual factors (Harris

& Hofer 2011). TPACK clarifies “pre-service language intentional use of technology for educational purposes in their own teaching” (Liu, Lin & Zhang, 2017). Prior research revealed that pre-service teachers’ levels of TPACK determined the degree of ICT integration in future classrooms (Hsu & Lin 2020). Liu et al argued that language teachers confidently use ICT in general but are unconfident to design technology supported lesson plans. Therefore, language teacher training programmes should emphasise how ICT should be integrated with lesson objectives, content, methodology, learner activities and assessments. The practical use of ICT has been shown to assist pre-service teachers to become confident about designing lesson plans integrating technology (Tai, 2015).

However, some thinkers such as Abunowara (2016) postulate that the use of ICT is usually disregarded in teacher training programmes. This view is true in the researchers of this study’ context, where pre-service teachers were rarely taught how to use technology during micro-teaching before the 2020 lockdown. We rarely incorporated technology when training our students, even though some authors are of the view that chalk and board are insufficient to teach English effectively (Nomass, 2013). Our pre-service teachers were not exposed to various ICT that can be used to teach English. We only commenced training our pre-service teachers to incorporate technology in their lesson plans during the Covid 19 hard lockdown. It is against this backdrop that we decided to explore ENGFAL pre-service teachers’ readiness to teach using technology during teaching practice. We were keen to conduct this research to improve learning and teaching of pre-service teachers. We also wanted to find out the strategies that can be employed to address the student teachers’ concerns in ICT use for teaching ENGFAL.

2. Research methodology

We followed a qualitative design approach in this study. This approach allowed us, the researchers of this study, to build an understanding of the topic and unpack meanings that our students ascribe to the topic under study. The main objective of this study was to explore ENGFAL pre-service teachers’ readiness to teach using technology. We used open-ended focus group discussions to collect data from the participants. Burns (2010) states that focus group discussions allow ideas and thoughts to be triggered by each group member. One participant’s sharing in a group setting may prompt others to talk. An open-ended focus group allows participants to discuss issues in their own language, vividly describe their experiences in detail, bringing out important themes, with examples (Leavy, 2017).

2.1. Context and participants

The research took place at a developing university in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. South Africa is a multi-lingual nation. There are eleven official languages in South Africa and English is one of them (Republic of South Africa: Department of Arts and Culture, 2003). At our institution, we train ENGFAL teachers, who will teach learners whose mother-tongue is not English, but a first additional language. The researchers of this study both teach ENGFAL pre-service teachers and micro teaching is one of the major components of the programme. Micro-teaching prepares the student teachers for teaching practice, which is also known as school-based evaluation (SBE) in our context. The ten participants in the study were all final year ENGFAL pre-service teachers. We purposively selected five female and five male students. Each group comprised of five students of a mixed gender. The participants have similar dimensions of differences. Most of them were from the same speech community, IsiXhosa, except two who spoke IsiZulu.

3. Findings

Focus Group A Participant A said that:

I can type my lesson plans and use PowerPoint presentation to display my notes. PowerPoint is easy because we use that for presentations in class. We use an overhead projector to display our presentations, so I can do the same when teaching at school. My worry is that, if I am going to teach at a school with interactive whiteboards, then I won’t know what to do. I have never practised using the whiteboard. Our classrooms do not even have the interactive whiteboard. I think that I can try my best to include technology in my teaching, but I still need support in terms of choosing the technology and how to use it.

In an opposing view, Focus Group B Participant E had this to say:

I think that when I go for SBE, I will be able to teach using ICT. I remember that I should choose technology that has many advantages and can help me achieve my lesson objectives. It requires a lot of time to prepare for the lesson and I hope that I will not be allocated many classes to teach.

Closely related to Focus Group B Participant E’s views, was Participant C from Focus Group A, who said that:

I think that I can now teach with technology, ma'am. What I have learnt in class and from my friends will assist me during SBE I am lucky because my older sister helps me to plan my lessons at home. She is teaching at a private school where they have access to technology. I always consulted her before micro-teaching and that is why my lessons were good. Ma'am, I think that you should continue supporting us with ideas on which technology to use when we are at schools because it confuses sometimes. Remember not all of us are confident to teach using technology, so we still need your support during SBE.

Some participants from both Focus Groups A and B concurred that they were not ready to teach using technology.

Participant B from Focus Group A stated that:

I am ready to teach if I will teach using the chalkboard and textbooks. Ma'am, I am not yet ready to teach with technology. English FAL has many components and that confuses me when I want to plan teaching with technology. There is Literature and Language, all that require me to think about the technology to use. It is very difficult when it comes to Language, I must teach things like comprehension, parts of speech, and summary writing. I won't know how to select appropriate technology for all the language components.

Concurring with Participant B from Focus Group A was Participant D from Focus Group B who said that:

Imagine ma'am, I need to teach verbs, poems, essay writing and other components of ENG FAL. It is so difficult to think of the technology to teach different aspects of FAL. If I am asked to teach without using technology, I can easily do it because when I was a high school learner, I was taught ENGFAL without technology. Yes, we have been introduced to online micro-teaching but it's complicated. I only focused on a particular aspect during micro-teaching, I never practised everything. I watched my classmates teach online but, hey, it is not that simple. I felt comfortable when I practised teaching in a physical classroom, so I think that I will do well if I teach in the classroom during SBE.

Participant C from Focus Group B revealed another issue and said:

I feel that we did not have enough time to practice teaching using technology. Most of the time we were learning online and doing our micro-teaching online. That made it difficult for us to really learn how use technology. It would have been better in a physical classroom. To be honest with you, I am not confident to teach with technology. I have mastered the content and am sure that I can now teach at school but not teaching with technology. I need more practice ma'am if I am to confidently teach using technology during SBE. Language has a lot of aspects and Literature is something else, so more time is needed for us to master teaching using technology.

4. Discussion and conclusions

With regards to ENGFAL pre-service teachers' readiness to teach using technology, themes that emanated from the focus group discussions included, inadequate digital skills, lack of confidence, the need for more support, comfort in traditional methods of teaching, limited time to practice teaching English using ICT, preference for physical contact to online micro-teaching.

Considering the findings obtained from the focus group discussions, most ENGFAL pre-service teachers were not ready to teach using technology. Reasons cited were limited skills and lack of confidence. Our students had limited skills because they were only exposed to various technology to teach ENGFAL during the hard lockdown. Otherwise, we used to basically train them for physical contact teaching and learning. These findings support research findings obtained by (Nomass, 2013) who argued that we rarely incorporate ICT when training preservice teachers. We can safely state that our students' inadequacy was a result of little to no exposure at all on how to integrate ICT in teaching ENGFAL before the hard lockdown. These findings further support Abunowara (2016) who argued that the use of technology is usually disregarded in teacher training programmes. Hence, most of our students revealed that they were more comfortable teaching using the traditional methods of chalk and board. This is because we, the lecturers, disregarded the use of ICT in training ENGFAL preservice teachers, not knowing that there would be a sudden shift from traditional methods to online learning and teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This study was informed by TPACK, and it emanated from our findings that students most students had content knowledge. They preferred practising teaching using the chalk and board to ICT. A few had fair TPACK levels, such students were confident to select ICT and knew how the selected technology would assist them in achieving lesson objectives. Students who had little TPACK knowledge were comfortable using ICT such as projectors and PowerPoint presentations but feared using, for instance, an interactive whiteboard due to lack of practical exposure to the ICT. This is in line with (Hsu & Lin 2020) who argued that pre-service teachers' levels of TPACK determined the degree of ICT integration in future classrooms (Hsu & Lin 2020).

Deriving from findings of this study, we decided that we should start training our English student teachers to incorporate ICT at first year so that they master using technology in their lessons. Our current students will be on teaching practice in the middle of the year and are not ready to integrate ICT in their lesson plans. We, therefore, decided to continue supporting them during teaching practice by constantly visiting them at schools and assisting them to design technology supported lesson plans.

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