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ABSTRACT

The introduction of South African Sign Language as a first language subject in schools for the deaf in Gauteng: Teachers' experiences

This Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis is about the exploration of the experiences of South African Sign Language (SASL) teachers and Deaf teaching assistants during the introduction of SASL as a Home Language subject in seven schools for the Deaf in Gauteng, South Africa. The research study focused on SASL teachers and Deaf teaching assistants' experiences and perceptions of the new SASL Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and its implementation. The SASL curriculum was being implemented officially for the first time in the history of Deaf Education in South Africa. Thus, the first-hand input from SASL teachers and Deaf teaching assistants about their experiences and perceptions of the implementation process was worthy of a review. The impact of the experiences of the SASL teachers and Deaf teaching assistants on their pedagogical strategies was also investigated.

The research study upon which this thesis is based was qualitative in nature and used a case-study method to explore the experiences and perceptions of SASL teachers and Deaf teaching assistants on the implementation of the new SASL curriculum in schools for the Deaf. Literature around the concepts of language rights and policies, legislation, sign bilingualism, curriculum implementation and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities were reviewed. The research study employed phenomenology where 26 SASL teachers and Deaf teaching assistants from seven schools for the Deaf participated to share their experiences and perceptions on the research topic. Thus, a phenomenological research theory was used to interpret the narratives of teachers to understand their experiences during the process of SASL curriculum implementation. The research used a purposive sampling and participants were selected based on research location and that they were teaching SASL subject in Grades One and Nine in the identified schools for the Deaf in Gauteng Province at the time of research. The research instruments used in the case-study to collect the narrative data was a semi-structured in-depth interview and a questionnaire to collect biographical data. This data collection approach was chosen for its feasibility and cost saving. An interview schedule was used to encourage participants to generate multiple views of their experiences and perceptions on teaching SASL as a school subject. The interviews were administrated by the researcher using SASL and recorded with a digital video camera. The qualitative data were then transcribed

from SASL into English for the purpose of data analysis and presentation. I worked with a professional SASL interpreter to transcribe data from SASL into written English.

A thematic analysis was used to manually organise the interview transcripts. The themes that were generated during the coding process framed the analysis of statements made by each of the participants. The research study showed that SASL teachers and Deaf teaching assistants are receptive of the SASL subject curriculum and most of them understand the need to have it in schools for the Deaf. They have positive feeling about the SASL CAPS, but pointed out the negative aspects of the SASL curriculum implementation. They reported positive experiences that facilitated the teaching of SASL as a school subject as: the training they received from the Department of Basic Education and private training providers, availability of resources, good support structure and a positive school environment. Their curriculum implementation concerns, which they feel inhibited successful teaching of SASL and which need to be taken into consideration in future policy, included: insufficient training, inadequate quality learning teaching support materials (LTSM), insufficient support and guidance and negative teacher and learner attitude towards SASL as an examinable subject.

The findings further indicated that SASL teachers and Deaf teaching assistants have varying knowledge levels of the SASL CAPS content and application among themselves. In addition, the study confirmed that SASL teachers and Deaf teaching assistants were not adequately prepared for the implementation of SASL as a school subject. As the direct implementers of the SASL CAPS, the teachers expressed the need for a more comprehensive training and orientation in SASL curriculum implementation and SASL subject. Teachers also expressed a need for a SASL teaching and learning environment which is more conducive in terms of appropriate resources, monitoring and support. The research study revealed that teachers require more orientation in teaching SASL at a Home Language level. The findings also highlighted that, despite the challenges experienced during the introduction of the SASL first language subject, there were some amongst SASL teachers and Deaf teaching assistants who acknowledged the training and support received from the Department of Basic Education, schools, and parents. The findings indicated that the SASL teacher and Deaf teaching assistants eagerly implemented the SASL CAPS in their schools and used the experiences to their advantage. Based on the findings, the study recommends among others, the establishment of district level support systems in the form of SASL subject advisors and peer reviewers in order to help improve the quality of learning and teaching of SASL as a subject. The findings of the

research study thereby augment knowledge in the field of Deaf Education and specifically in South African Sign Language curriculum implementation in the South African context.