



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FIRST LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN LEARNING AND TEACHING SIWATI AS A FIRST LANGUAGE

**Simile Tenele Shongwe,
Sithulisiwe Bhebheⁱ,
Zodwa G. Nxumalo**

University of Eswatini,
Faculty of Education,
Eswatini

Abstract:

In most African countries the mother tongue leans much on culture. There is a conspicuous relationship between first language and culture. This study sought to establish the relationship between first language and culture in teaching and learning siSwati as a first language. The study adopted an interpretive research paradigm where a qualitative approach was used. The qualitative approach was employed because it is mainly concerned with human behavior, and data collected in natural settings. In this study, a case study design was selected. The case study design enabled me to obtain data from a purposively selected sample of siSwati teachers. Schools were also purposively selected. Data was collected through interviews and observations. The findings of the study revealed that first language goes hand in hand with the norms and customs of the people of a particular society. It was a finding in this study that teachers teaching siSwati as a first language are also teachers of culture and that trying to separate the two is not feasible. The study concluded that it is impossible for one to teach siSwati as a first language without teaching the siSwati culture because culture has a continuous influence on first language. In fact, the two issues are closely correlated and interrelated. Language is the representational of Emaswati and depicts their culture. In other words, first language is emblematic of the siSwati culture. It was recommended that siSwati culture should dominate in the siSwati syllabus since it (culture) is a rich source of the siSwati vocabulary.

Keywords: culture, first language, teaching, learning, mother language

1. Introduction

Language is formed by culture, while culture is influenced and impacted by language. Mother tongue is a traditional term for a person's native language that is, a language

ⁱ Correspondence: email sithulisiwebhebhe@gmail.com, sbhebhe@uniswa.sz

learned from birth. Also called a first language, dominant language, home language, and native tongue (Nordquist, 2018). The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language (1998) defines first language as the language in which learners are competent when starting a new language. Garner (2006) is of the view that language is closely tied with identity. The language you speak defines who you are in a major way (Garner, 2006). Similarly, Mordaunt (2006) points out that speaking siSwati without understanding its complicated speech system would be socially disastrous because each language carries with it all of the history and culture of the country that it arises from.

1.1 Background to the study

In Kramersch (2013)'s view, learning culture of a language is a process including acquiring cultural knowledge and developing cultural awareness. This gradually leads learners to be closer to a higher level of cultural outcomes called cultural competence (Kramersch, 2013). Language is essential if we want that habits, institutions and beliefs acquire the meaning of what we call culture. In fact, these aspects must have meaning to become culture. Language, not seen as a linguistic system, but seen in context is, "*a coherent symbolic system for making meaning*" (Kramersch, 2013: 62).

In this sense, we cannot separate the study of first language learning from culture and the context that surrounds the learner, especially when we refer to the learning of a first language (Kramersch, 2013). To account for the role culture plays in first (siSwati) language learning and teaching, it is necessary to demonstrate the functions it may perform in the components of language learning and teaching, such as listening, speaking, reading, and translating (Kramersch, 2013).

Trying to avoid the culture of a language is almost impossible and a hard thing to do if learners are to learn a language to a thorough level and interact with its speakers (Hale, 2014). The political, social and economic conditions of the country influence its vocabulary and the shades of meaning of its words (Hickey, 2012). The cultural, sociological and economic factors should not be overlooked in language learning and teaching (Hickey, 2012).

Hattingh (2013) asserts that African culture is expressed in its arts and crafts, folklore and religion, clothing, music and languages. Expressions of culture are abundant within Africa, with large amounts of cultural diversity being found not only across different countries but also within single countries. Africa has influenced and been influenced by other continents arts and craft, folklore and religion, clothing, cuisine, music and language (Donahue, 2013). Genc and Bada (2005) concur with the latter by stating that the willingness to adapt to the ever-changing modern world rather than staying rooted to one's static culture is highly recommended in first language learning and teaching.

According to Warsi (2017), language is more than just a means of communication. It is a repository of a community's collective history and heritage. Warsi (2017) argues that first language also provides an identity and a focus that binds a community together, which makes individual accomplishments easier. Rani (2013) concurs with the view from Warsi (2017) by revealing that the relationship between

language and culture is as old as mankind. Through the centuries, people and their living practices have evolved, resulting in wide-reaching changes in societal culture. This in turn, has influenced language to be what it is today (Rani, 2013). Simply put, spoken and written communication with pre-set meanings for each word written or uttered is what we refer to as language. Culture, on the other hand, is defined by the activities of people, sometimes governed by a geographical boundary (Rani, 2013). Harper (2017) however, observes that infants acquire language automatically through the native culture.

The only environmental influence of consequence is regular exposure to people speaking, or signing in one of the human languages (Harper, 2017). On the contrary, (Warsi, 2017) observes that without any instruction whatsoever, an infant will acquire whichever language is used in the home, becoming fluent by the age of three. On the same note, Warsi (2017) attests that babies are born language ready as they begin to pick-up their native language even before their muscles are agile enough to communicate. Similarly, Harper (2017) pointed out, speech is a different thing; it is grammar that comes pre-installed in the baby's brain. Warsi (2017) asserts that language competence does not only include the knowledge of grammatical principles and sentence construction, but also knowledge of the norms that link language to social and cognitive context. Culture has a role in the learning and teaching of siSwati as a first language.

Since cultures in the world have undergone centuries of transition, it is only natural that languages have also undergone such transitions, as seen by (Hale, 2014); languages have borrowed sounds, grammar and vocabulary from one another. Languages like English are now standardized, but the way English is spoken and used in different parts of the world, is a reflects the effects of culture diversity (Lewis, 2016). According to Lewis (2016) there is no definite conclusion to exactly how language and culture are related though it is evident that a relationship exists. Thus, the integration of culture should become an integral part of first language instruction, in the case of Eswatini, the first language is siSwati.

Language competence does not only include the knowledge of grammatical principles and sentence construction, but also knowledge of the norms that link language to social and cognitive contexts (Lewis, 2016). Teachers and students seem to lose sight of the fact that knowledge of grammatical systems has to be complemented with culture-specific meanings (Kovács, 2017). It is therefore essential for language teachers to approach language learning with culture in mind, as the understanding of this relationship is central to the acquisition of linguistic and cultural competency. Kovács (2017) postulates that generally, in language teaching, the emphasis is on the development of four separate skills: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, and speaking. However, language teachers and scholars often refer to a fifth skill, which is culture. It is difficult to imagine language teaching without referring to one way or another to the target culture; therefore, culture has always been present in the learning and teaching of first language (Kovács, 2017). In addition, Kovács (2017)

postulates that Language teachers must always be mediators between cultures, the primary sources of the target culture for their students.

SiSwati is regarded as an official language in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Eswatini (USAID, 2012). The language policy at Eswatini cannot be addressed without taking a historical perspective (Mordaunt, 2006). In Mordaunt (2006)'s perspective, the language policy is a matter of great importance to developing countries, particularly those that were under colonial rule prior to independence. Mordaunt (2006) analyzes the kingdom of Eswatini's language policy for schools and efforts to promote siSwati as a national language capable of fostering cultural pride and national unity.

Rosenberg (2010) observes that cultural activities impact on the way children participate in education. Cultural tendencies impact on the way children participate in education (Kambilima, 2017). Kambilima (2017) argues that teachers need to understand culture in order for them to appreciate why their learners behave in that particular manner. According to Kambilima (2017) once armed with cultural Knowledge, learning and teaching will be very interesting as we are going to understand our learners in both cultural perspectives. In addition, teachers manage the school environment indirectly and encourage learners to learn successfully without any challenges. Flavia (2008) contends that culture is the content of education; thus, first language education has to draw its content from culture.

Education transmits culture through formal and informal curriculum. For example, teaching the first language as a tool for communication. Formal curriculum comprises of the various subjects taught such as languages, mathematics, physical sciences, biological sciences, social sciences and technical subjects (Flavia, 2008). According to Flavia (2008) for culture to be transmitted, it must have content. The values that the school transmits through can be seen as the culture of the society. It is culture that forms the content of first language learning and teaching, siSwati in this case. In promoting culture therefore, the school curriculum through the various subjects promotes and enhances the learning of culture. Cole, Hakkarainen and Bredikyte (2010) argue that culture plays an essential role in how children make sense of the world. According to Cole, Hakkarainen and Bredikyte (2010) a decisive difference between children's learning and any intelligent technical system is that technical systems can recognize and organize information, but cannot grasp its meaning. Development of signification and adoption of the appropriate cultural tools (symbols, meanings, scripts, goals) of human activity are basic challenges of early learning (Cole, Hakkarainen and Bredikyte, 2010).

Cole, Hakkarainen and Bredikyte (2010) conclude that the integration of both linguistic and cultural knowledge equips learners not only with linguistic competence, but with the ability to communicate in a way that is culturally acceptable and appropriate in the first language. This is illustrated by the use of many realistic situations, authentic pictures, and as much cultural information as possible (Coelho, 2012). To ensure the success of learners in learning SiSwati, every lesson incorporates the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. First language learning also germinates and flowers from culture.

2. Cultural identity

The first language is an imperative component of the learner's identity and a source of cultural pride and self-esteem (Coelho, 2012). The fact too that the kingdom of Eswatini, the home of the siSwati speakers, is well known for the vibrancy of its cultural traditions such as for example, the Umhlanga/ Reed Dance and the Incwala ceremonies, both of which showcase precolonial national tribute labor and spiritualism, is an added attraction for learning siSwati in order to be able to tap into this rich and resilient cultural heritage (National African Language Resource Center, 2000). According to The National African Language Resource Center (2000) if language is a social practice of meaning-making and interpretation, then it is not enough for language learners just to know grammar and vocabulary, but they also need to know how that language is used to create and represent meanings and how to communicate with others and to engage with communication of others. Kleeberger (2018) adds that this requires the development of awareness of the nature of language and its impact on the world.

In line with Kleeberger (2018), Salmon (2015) attests that language and culture are two sides of the same coin. Culture is needed for better understanding of the siSwati language and vice versa. Mitchell and Myles (2004) concur by stating that language and culture are not separate but acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other. One can say that language expresses cultural reality since it enables speakers to express their beliefs, ideas, attitudes and facts that can only be understood and appropriately interpreted when shared within specific cultural community (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). Yousefi (2016) asserts that many children lack interest in their education because they're missing some degree of personal connection to the things they're learning. Introducing them to their native language and culture as well as perhaps even instructing them in their native language, these children find a personal connection with their learning (Yousefi, 2016).

Furthermore, Yousefi (2016) argues that our native language not only allows us to communicate and connect with one another, but it allows us to understand and appreciate the history of our ancestors and our upbringing. According to Yousefi (2016) it cultivates an appreciation and understanding that is beyond beneficial for first language learners, especially those from diverse familial backgrounds. An understanding of language as open, dynamic, energetic, constantly evolving and personal encompasses the rich complexities of communication (Shohamy, 2007).

The siSwati language learners should be acquainted with the fact that cultures and languages always go together as Limbach (2002) states that if anyone would like to generate enthusiasm for the culture of a country, then he/she must encourage people in other countries to speak his/her language. Therefore, the language is always the first tool because it introduces others to specific cultural achievements. SiSwati language teachers should not underestimate the importance of cultural teachings (Tikly, 2001). Qu (2010) argues that since language is closely interwoven with every aspect of culture, the approach of teaching one's native language through culture is possible, when the

teachers involved are well informed and alert to cultural differences and thus, their students absorb the meaning in many small ways.

This awareness should be part of every language learning and teaching classroom where the teacher should orient the thinking of the students so that they will feel curious about such differences and become observant as they listen and read, applying what they have perceived in their active oral work (Qu, 2010). Moreover, the nature of language and culture maybe expressed as the person who learns language without learning culture risks becoming a fluent fool (Bennett, Bennett & Allen, 2003). To account for the role culture plays in language learning and teaching, it is necessary to demonstrate the functions it may perform in the components of language learning and teaching, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (Alonso and Convocatoria de Junio, 2012). Thus, culture finds its expression in language; so, learning a language without familiarity with its culture remains incomplete (Bowen, 2005).

Khemies (2015) propose the three subsequent culturally oriented goals, which are more authentic to pursue and largely adapted in language classroom everywhere. Khemies (2015) claims that knowledge is the ability to recognize cultural information or patterns; this goal focuses on factual information about selected patterns of the target culture, the student's ability to recall, recognize, and describe cultural information. According to Khemies (2015), understanding is another goal in which there is the ability to explain cultural information or pattern(s). The student needs to comprehend a cultural pattern in terms of its meaning, origin, and interrelationships within the larger cultural context (Khemies, 2015). This goal presupposes not only factual knowledge, but also implies reasoning ability. Students should see the logic of a pattern in its own cultural context (Khemies, 2015).

Lastly, Khemies (2015) views behavior the ability to use cultural information or pattern(s). This objective refers to behavioral skills such as the ability to act meaningfully, unobtrusively, and inoffensively in real or simulated cultural situations (Khemies, 2015). The goals cited on are purposeful with an end of permitting the learners to grow a maximal consciousness and a wider cognition about the target culture. These goals also serve as a means of obtaining strong control of the lifestyles in order to make sense of the morals of inhabitants to other countries cultures as well as define the dissimilarities between foreign culture and own culture, hence, making them qualified language user.

Drawing from Georgiou's (2011) idea of cultural knowledge, cultural awareness and cultural competence, Piątkowska's (2015) three approaches/ objectives of culture teaching, and the reviewed literature, Nguyen (2017) suggests a framework for examining learner outcomes in learning culture, including three levels:

Firstly, Cultural knowledge whereby learners are expected to gain, to a certain extent, information about the target language culture, their own culture or some other cultures. This information may include, but not limited to, people, customs and habits, folklore of everyday life, cultural products, literature as well as arts (Piątkowska, 2015). Secondly, cultural awareness in which learners should have good cultural knowledge. Nguyen (2017) argues that learners are expected to be able to raise their perceptions and

awareness of cultural values and beliefs, make comparisons and contrasts between other cultures and their own culture. At this level, learners understand strategic cultural cues or principles to communicate and integrate successfully in different cultural contexts, while still maintaining their own cultural identity.

Thirdly, learners should have cultural competence. Learners should have broad cultural knowledge and deep cultural awareness (Piątkowska, 2015). They are not only able to understand and participate successfully in cross-cultural contexts, but also able to self-experience, reflect, analyze, argue and construct their own critical views of different cultural issues and their positive cultural identity (Piątkowska, 2015).

The contrastive approach helps learners to be aware of similarities and differences between their own culture and the target language culture, and makes them to look for a connection between the two cultures (Piątkowska's, 2015). The intercultural communicative competence approach expects learners to develop their communicative skills which allow them to engage in interaction beyond the contexts of their own culture and the target language culture (Marczak, 2010). Similarly, Larzén (2005) proposes three objectives of teaching culture, including knowledge about other cultures, skills for intercultural encounters, and tolerance and empathy. With the first objective of providing cultural background information, learners are made to gain some knowledge of factual information on cultural products or ways of living and thinking related to the target language culture. The three-level framework of learner outcomes in learning culture, as previously discussed, can be a useful reference for setting pedagogical objectives in teaching culture in the language classroom, and for evaluating what learners gain from learning culture while learning a language (Nguyen, 2017).

The Education and Training Sector (2011) goals are to empower people in the kingdom of Eswatini to: think critically and analytically integrate and synthesize knowledge, and draw conclusions from complex material; make sound ethical and value judgments based on the development of a personal value system, on an understanding of shared cultural heritage, and knowledge of past successes, failures, and consequences of individual roles and societal choices; understand and appreciate the cultural diversity and live responsibly in an interdependent world; Acquire a base of knowledge common to educated persons and the capacity to expand that base over their lifetime; Communicate effectively in written, oral, and symbolic form; Understand the natural and physical world, the process by which scientific concepts are developed and modified; Appreciate the fine and performing arts; Develop technical, mathematical and quantitative skills necessary of calculation, analysis and problem solving; Understand the principles essential for continual mental and physical well-being. Engender a sense of civic mindedness and to foster the skills necessary to participate effectively in a democratic society that reflects the socio-cultural context of Swaziland; Take advantage of opportunities for lifelong learning with creative minds; Develop the intellectual, moral, aesthetic, emotional, physical and practical capacities as well as be equipped with capacities needed to shape and adapt to a fast changing, complex and uncertain socio-economic environment.

3. Theoretical framework

The Socio-cultural theory offers perspectives on learning that are drawn upon in recent work on this topic. Cherry (2018) asserts that the socio-cultural theory grew from the work of psychologist [Lev Vygotsky](#) (1978), who believed that parents, caregivers, peers, and the culture at large were responsible for developing higher order functions. The interaction of cultures in language learning and acquisition from the socio-cultural perspective situates the central dimension of the process of learning straight in relation to affective concerns such as inspiration, subjective, inter-subjective relationships and participants' motives (Ansari and Ansari, 2016).

A sociocultural perspective amounts to an argument that students learn new academic 'cultures' at school (new ways of acting, interacting, valuing and using language, objects and tools) and, as in the case of acquiring any new culture, the acquisition of these new cultures interacts formidably with learners' initial cultures (Ansari and Ansari, 2016). Vygotsky's theory suggests that, although children are born with the skills for language development, development is affected and shaped by cultural and social experiences. The culture in which a person develops will have its own values, beliefs and tools of intellectual adaptation. These all have an effect on cognitive functions, including language development. Vygotsky also believed that language is a result of social interactions and that language is responsible for the development of thought Ansari and Ansari (2016).

According to Ansari and Ansari (2016) Vygotsky had belief in the active theory method that emphasized the socio-cultural communication. The socio-cultural communication assists learners to acquire from each other and from abler peers for instance, parents, and teachers and so on (Ansari and Ansari, 2016). Ansari and Ansari (2016) postulate that the socio-cultural theory was originated by Vygotsky; and in his writings, he placed education between an individual and culture. Vygotsky's theory is important as it is instrumental in creating an awareness of the relationship between sociocultural and cognitive factors of learning as well as the collective and individual factors determining cognitive development.

4. Research problem

Teachers are teaching the first language without the necessity of cultural orientation (Cakir, 2006). This has led to most learners under performing in their siSwati Swaziland Primary Certificate (SPC) (SiSwati paper examination report, 2017). According to Castello (2015), when first language teachers introduce learners to their native culture, they find a personal connection with their learning. This is contrary to Sun (2013) who contends that the relationship between language and culture is dynamic. Additionally, Sun (2013) affirms that language is an important part of culture, and that it is the primary vehicle by which a culture transmits its beliefs, values and norms as well as the circumstance that language is influenced by culture.

Similarly, Krasnoff (2016) attests to this by stating that as teachers and teacher educators understand the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of their society and that they enter first language classrooms with their own social identities and cultural biases. Balogun (2009) upholds that the classroom provides equal opportunities for all students. If one recognizes the decisive role that a student's culture plays in his or her ability to succeed, they will also recognize the importance of using approaches that take into account the culture of non-mainstream students (Balogun, 2009).

4.1 Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to:

- Establish the benefits of teaching siSwati as a first language through culture.
- Explore how the teaching of language could be best connected to culture.

4.2 Research question

The following research question steered the investigation in the way it took:

- What are the benefits of teaching siSwati as a first language through culture?
- How may the teaching of language be best connected to culture?

4.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to establish teachers' views on the relationship between siSwati as a first language and culture in learning and teaching the first language.

5. Research methodology

The research paradigm and methodology used in this study were guided by the research objectives and questions which were set to establish both school administrators and first language teachers' views on the relationship between siSwati as a first language and culture in learning and teaching the first language. The research process, data collection procedures and data analysis procedures are highlighted.

5.1 Research paradigm

The study was located in the interpretivist research paradigm. Interpretivist researchers use professional judgments and perspectives in the interpretation of data (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Mason (2013) state that the interpretive perspective epistemologically believes that social meaning is created during interactions, implying that different social actors may, in fact, understand social reality differently, producing different meanings and analyses. In this study I interacted with the heads of schools and siSwati teachers to attain information on the relationship between first language and culture in learning and teaching siSwati as a first language in Eswatini's primary schools.

5.2 Research approach

The study was conducted within the qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as a set of interpretive materials that make the world visible. Merriam (2009:14) states that in qualitative research “*the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning*”. This approach was relevant to the study in that through the qualitative approach an understanding of the relationship between first language and culture in learning and teaching siSwati as a first language in Eswatini’s primary schools was going to be revealed.

5.3 Research design

This study adopted a case study design by Yin. Yin (2002) defines case as a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context. Litchman (2013) states that a case study is often recognised as one vital approach to qualitative research. The entity used could be as small as one individual or as large as an entire school or community. Rule and John (2011) concur with this view by saying, “*A case might be a person, a classroom, a programme, a process, a series of developments, an institution or even a country.*” What makes it to be said a case is a singular and distinct nature that warrants it to be studied. In this study, I chose to engage the school administrators and siSwati teachers to attain information on the relationship between first language and culture in siSwati learning and teaching.

5.4 Population

A population in a research context is any target group of individuals that have common characteristics that have information relevant to the researcher concerning the study in question. Landreneau (2012) views a population in a research context “*... as any target group of individuals that has one or more characteristics in common that is of interest to the researcher for purposes of drawing conclusions.*” In this study, head teachers and first language teachers were chosen as they are the siSwati as a first language curriculum implementers. In full support of this is Creswell (2012) who argues that a purposive sample is where a researcher selects a sample based on their knowledge about the study and population.

5.5 Data collection instruments

Qualitative research methods can be identified by the type of research instruments and data gathering procedures that generate words rather than numbers (Patton & Cochran, 2002). On another note, Jameel, & Shaheen, & Majid (2018) reveal that interviews are employed to gain insight into participants’ personal experiences and situations while Oates (2006) argue that interviews are suitable data-collection instruments for gathering detailed data and investigating sensitive social issues. Observation methods are useful to researchers in a variety of ways. They provide researchers with ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how

participants communicate with each other, and check for how much time is spent on various activities (Slack & Hallam, 2012). In this study on teachers' and head teachers' perceptions on the the relationship between first language and culture in learning and teaching siSwati as a first language, face-to-face interviews and observations were the data gathering methods employed.

6. Research findings

6.1 Benefits of teaching siSwati as a first language through culture

A variety of views on how teaching siSwati through culture can benefit primary school learners of Eswatini were expressed. Gay (2013) notes a culturally responsive approach to teaching connects students' experiences in and out of the school, supports educational equity and excellence, and empowers students by giving them the skills to effectively negotiate and impact the world around them. This type of teaching approach and the inclusion of indigenous languages is not detrimental to academic achievement; rather, it promotes academic achievement and cultural knowledge, preparing youth to be leaders of their communities (McCarty & Carta 2014). SiSwati teacher number 1 pointed out that, *"Culture improves the learners' vocabulary as well as provide learners of siSwati with a wide choice of words. Learners will be more fluent in the target language while interaction skills are improved."* This concurs with siSwati teacher 3 who revealed that:

Language encompasses culture. Through culture the first language can be deeply enriched. Culture produces thick vocabulary whereby deep terms in the siSwati language such as "sicholo", "sigeja", "ummemo", "lilima" ... just to name a few. A culture rich environment provides learners of siSwati with extensive knowledge of the siSwati language and thus able to explain and grasp siSwati concepts with ease.

Integrating the siSwati culture with siSwati lessons is significant in that:

"Cultural context and anecdotes bring the language to life and make they are more memorable. Learning siSwati requires a learner to get a feel for the culture from which it comes. Even with the globalization that is affecting most learners, there is still culture that is specific to our country and this supports learners' learning of our mother tongue."

This is in line with Warsi (2017) who reveals that without an appreciation of that, learning a language can be more difficult.

SiSwati teacher number 3 revealed that:

"Culture can certainly help any language learner in their efforts to improve their language learning. This is because culture and language depend on each other. For example, idioms and proverbs are as a result of cultural significance and historical relatedness. In short, culture dictates which words are used."

In this regard, siSwati teacher number 2 revealed that:

“Having culture specialists in the schools that would reinforce the use of culture during siSwati lessons could be beneficial. She emphasized that primary schools need indigenous people with pure siSwati and skills to put what teachers theorize into practice for effective teaching and learning of siSwati as a first language.”

This is in line with Nguyen (2017) who asserts that culture imitations influence language use; hence language is a product of culture. The culture in which a person develops will have its own values, beliefs and tools of intellectual adaptation. These all have an effect on cognitive functions, including language development. Vygotsky (1978) also believed that language is a result of social interactions and that language is responsible for the development of thought.

SiSwati teacher 4 revealed that:

“Culture provides learners with enough comprehensible input in the first language to maintain and further develop it, since children will have more exposure to siSwati outside the classroom. Parents can help their children maintain their siSwati language and culture at home while, at the same time, incorporate the elements of the first language (siSwati) and culture into their life.”

SiSwati teacher 5 also concurs with siSwati teacher 4 by stating that,

“Culture increases learners’ vocabulary since cultural activities are rich in language. They will learn good communication skills because culture teaches them the norms and values of a society. The knowledge of the siSwati culture will make the siSwati learners aware of what to say, when to say something because some words are a taboo to use. Most of our cultural activities are done by groups and not individuals, so the siSwati learner will also learn some social as well as public speaking in the siSwati language.”

Kovács (2017) concurs with siSwati teacher 4 and 5 by stating that generally, in language teaching, the emphasis is on the development of four separate skills: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, and speaking. However, language teachers and scholars often refer to a fifth skill, which is culture. It is difficult to imagine language teaching without referring in one way or another to the target culture; therefore, culture has always been present in the teaching and learning of first language (Kovács, 2017).

6.2 The relationship between siSwati as a first language and the siSwati culture

I enquired from siSwati teachers about the relationship between siSwati as a first language and the siSwati culture. SiSwati teacher number 1 responded by indicating that, *“siSwati language stems from the siSwati culture.”* The view from first language teacher number 1 concurs with declaration from three other siSwati teachers, who assert that the two are intertwined, stating that language is a theory while culture is more practical. SiSwati teacher number 2 responded that, *“siSwati is part of culture”* and

extends to say that, *“SiSwati as a first language goes hand in hand with the norms and customs of the people of Eswatini.”* SiSwati teacher 3 gave a complementary response stating that:

“As a young learner is learning siSwati as a first language, it is given that he/she has limited grammatical competence. Therefore, a culture rich environment provides a certain degree of confidence to learn siSwati because it provides the learner with a home environment which enhances them to grasp abstract concepts with ease.”

SiSwati teacher number 2 and 3 gave identical responses; according to them when learners learn the first language, it not only involves learning its alphabet, the word arrangement and the rules of grammar, but also learning about the specific society's customs and behavior. *‘When learning or teaching siSwati as a first language, it is important that the siSwati culture where the language belongs be considered because language is deeply rooted in the culture.’* SiSwati teacher number 4 responded that, *‘Young children learn their native language and culture from the society they were born in. The learners’ first language cannot be separated from their culture as culture provides the learners of siSwati with real life examples and practical surroundings.’*

SiSwati teacher number 5 put forth the idea that culture is the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. This concurs with siSwati teacher number 4 who responded by acknowledging that; *“teachers of a language are also teachers of culture.”* He continued to state that, *“trying to separate the two is so impractical.”* This concurs with a study by Tong (2014) who asserts that teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage. If one teaches language without teaching about the culture in which it operates, the students are learning empty or meaningless symbols or they may attach the incorrect meaning to what is being taught.

SiSwati teacher number 3 responded that, *“culture practices contribute to the development of first language. Culture breaks the communication barrier among native speakers of siSwati.”* This too supports the assertion by siSwati teacher number 4 who stated that teachers of siSwati as a first language are also teachers of culture. Hall (2012) also concurs by stating that language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next. Consequently, teachers of a language are also teachers of culture. However, in my observation language teachers did not instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage, choose culturally appropriate teaching styles, and explore culturally based linguistic differences to promote understanding instead of misconceptions. Additionally, the language policy did not create an awareness and understanding of the siSwati culture. There was very little on what was written to incorporate the cultural values of the siSwati learners. This is in line with siSwati teacher number 5 who revealed that:

“Culture should dominate in the siSwati syllabus since it (culture) is a rich source of the siSwati vocabulary. It is therefore impossible for one to teach language without teaching

culture. Culture has a direct effect on siSwati. In fact, the two issues are closely correlated and interrelated. Language is the symbolic presentation of a nation or a specific community. In other words, siSwati as a first language is representative of culture."

In support of this, Choudhury (2014) reveals the relationship between language and culture from three different perspectives: sociological, psychological and linguistic. In the first perspective, language and culture can be separable, since it is possible for a language to express or create, as Kramsch (2009) would say, different realities or cultures. In the psychological perspective these two are inseparable, since an individual carries all the linguistic and cultural experience within oneself. The third perspective is valid only in the practice of linguistics where language is analyzed outside of its cultural context.

7. Conclusions

This study concluded that there is a detectable relationship between the first language and culture. The relationship between siSwati as a first language and culture is definitely mutual as one cannot function without the other. The learner comes to the learning environment such as the classroom with all the ideas borne in mind, so the teacher's task is to build on what the learner is familiar with. In this way, for the learner to understand and grasp the new matter, new knowledge should be based on existing knowledge. It was also concluded that culture accelerates good communication skills because culture teaches them the norms and values of a society and that it has a direct influence on first language learning and teaching. In this study it is also concluded that siSwati and culture are intertwined, one cannot operate without the other. Both siSwati teachers and learners need to be aware of detailed culture meanings embedded in siSwati as a first language

7.1 Recommendations

It is recommended that learners of siSwati as a first language learners should use words and expressions more skillfully and authentically and also to have a deep understanding of their language as well as place it situational appropriate. SiSwati teachers may also consider using debates as an interactive activity. Teachers should ensure that learner talk occurs at higher rates than teacher talk. In fact, a more learner centered classroom environment with real life siSwati culture activities would be ideal. By so doing, challenged or struggling learners will be provided with experiences that show abstract concepts are drawn from and applied to the everyday world.

It is recommended that siSwati teachers and learners alike incorporate cultural knowledge into classroom practice in order to make sense of the world. Thus, in such an environment the siSwati teacher cannot solely be in charge of the learners' learning, since everyone's view of reality is different and the learners come to learning already possessing their own constructs of the world. Just like their learners, teachers of siSwati should display vast knowledge in their culture to provide a culture rich classroom

environment. Also, when learning or teaching siSwati as a first language, it is important that the siSwati culture where the first language belongs be considered because language is deeply deep-rooted in the culture. It is also recommended that siSwati teachers should indoctrinate the beliefs and practices governing the life of siSwati society for which a native language is the vehicle of expression.

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