ACTION RESEARCHING THE INTERACTION BETWEEN TEACHING, LEARNING, LANGUAGE AND ASSESSMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

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ABSTRACT

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Post-independence reform in Namibia has focused mainly on issues related to access, equity, democracy and quality at all levels of education. At the University of Namibia the issue of teaching and learning, and assessment have been of paramount concern. This concern has coincided with my own long abiding interest to explore issues related to teaching and learning.

In this present study I decided to focus on the views of lecturers and students on teaching and learning, with particular reference to the English language and assessment. Using Action Research I investigated various aspects related to selected aspects of teaching and learning. One of the purposes of Action Research is to improve the situation. If you research your own practice, it is very likely that you will also improve your work situation because you better understand your own situation in it; the action outcomes you achieve are also likely to benefit your own organization and/or your community, as elaborated in the conceptual framework chapter.

Results from interviews with lecturers and focus group interviews with students provided various perspectives about the challenges posed by communication in the English language. In both cases what emerges suggests that language is very important in teaching, learning and assessment. Whether people have passed in their programmes or not there is need to pursue the idea of making everybody competent in speech as well as in writing.

From the survey of lecturers' views about teaching and learning we conclude that lecturers are able to assess how language affects teaching as well as learning and are

able to assess the students' skills in language. The poor command of the English language by students makes it difficult for lecturers to teach effectively, and to cover the curriculum for a particular course in a year. From the perspective of students, they confirm that they have poor competence in English, and a significant number believed that the first year compulsory communication skills module was not particularly helpful to them. Students also indicated that they found it difficult to follow texts in English, and their inadequacy in English affected their ability to study and to get good grades. Both lecturers and students made extensive suggestions on how the situation could be improved.

In relation to me as researcher I made changes in my own teaching and assessment through a series of activities running through initiation, exploration, classroom observation and my own self-assessment. I believe that the exercise has improved my own teaching and I also believe that my colleagues have learned something through the interactive process through which we went in the course of the research. Similarly, I believe that the students have learnt ways to rely heavily on themselves in the process of 'learning how to learn'.

Overall conclusions indicate that teaching and learning are an important area in bringing about quality education. The views of both lecturers and students are that there are a number of factors, which militate against effective teaching, learning, language and assessment. There is need for improvement in these areas; including improving students' essay writing skills, and dealing with factors related to students' language background.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AL	Additional Languages
CA	Continuous Assessment
CES	Centre for External Studies
CLC	Community Learning Centre
COST	Centre for Out of School Training
EFA	Education for All
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as Second Language
GDLN	The Global Development Learning Network
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRN	Government of the Republic of Namibia
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
HIGCSE	Higher International General Certificate of Secondary Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDU	Instructional Design Unit
IGCSE	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
ILRC	Information and Learning Resource Centre
LC	Language Centre
LEP	Limited English Proficient
MEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
MHEVTST	Ministry of Higher Education, Vocational Training, Science Technology
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MLA	Monitoring Learning Achievement
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBL	Project-based learning
QWL	Quality of Working Life

SACMEQ	Southern African Consortium for the Measurement of Educational Quality
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TERP	Teacher Education Reform Project
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UCLES	University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNESCO	United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNISA	University of South Africa
UNISTAFF	University Staff Development Programme (run by the University of Kassel, Germany, at the Institute for Socio-cultural Studies).
UWC	University of the Western Cape

DECLARATION

I declare that *Action Researching the Interaction between Teaching, Learning, language and Assessment at the University of Namibia* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any other degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Laura Ariko Otaala November 2005

Signed: _____

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I wish to thank all my students, past and present, who have provoked me to desire to be a better communicator and aroused in me the need to continuously improve my teaching, and bring about quality assurance in tertiary institutions where I have spent most of my present career.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all my students; past and present, who have taught me to be patient and reflective in trying to empower them to “learn how to learn” and to my husband, Barnabas, who was always there for me during the good and bad times.

CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter a general background to the thesis is provided followed by a statement of the problem and purpose of the study. The three research questions are indicated, with a brief indication for their rationale. I provide a brief methodology of the study and the definition of terms and a brief statement on the significance of the study, before an outline of the thesis is provided.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Worldwide, for many years, concern about how learning and teaching take place has been focused on primary and secondary levels of education. In more recent years tertiary institutions, including universities, have recognized the role of teaching as well, for a variety of reasons, including concern for quality and standards. In order to attain quality and standards people need to find ways to improve teaching. Improving teaching may mean moving away from lecturing and using other approaches to teaching such as group work (Channon and Walker, 1984; Rudduck, 1978); problem-solving groups; seminars; tutorials; peer-group learning and cooperative/collaborative learning.

In Namibia, since independence in 1990, attention has been focused in education on issues related to access, equity, quality and democracy at pre-primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, including university level, (Ministry of Education and Culture Namibia, 1993). Several persons have also spoken about the need for curriculum change and teaching methodology to make them more relevant to the Namibian context and the new dispensation's goals (Angula, 1994; Grannis, 1998; GRN, 1996; Pflaum, 1998; Turner, 1991).

The increasing number of students entering the University of Namibia reduces the homogeneity of the learner population, and necessitates studies that will help tackle the problem of teaching and learning. In-depth research is needed to assess the

myriad factors that influence learning and performance, especially those who are taking classes in the English language for which for many it is a second or a third language. The communication in English language gaps that need to be bridged may be due to several factors such as the characteristics of the students; for example, their learning strategies, economic, social and cultural differences; their experience in English language communication. Other factors also come into play, including the teachers' attitude and teaching practices, as well as their competency in communication in English, to mention but a few.

In order to gain an insight into the problems posed by communication in English Language, and how these influence assessment, a number of considerations were involved. These among others include characteristics of the students, their background, motivation, learning strategies, and their views about what teaching, learning and assessment involve. They also include characteristics of the lecturers, including their general teaching strategies and practices, their competency in English Language communication, and their views about teaching and learning.

On an individual basis, I have had a long-abiding interest arising from my experience as a secondary school teacher and now as a university lecturer, on teaching and learning, focusing on teacher effectiveness and what constitutes effective learning on the part of students. In my own experience at the University of Namibia, it appeared that the general quality of teaching and learning seemed to leave much to be desired as students consistently complained about poor quality assessment procedures; ineffective and unenthusiastic presentations by lecturers; too much lecturing and not enough dialogue with students; failure to encourage active independent learning by students; unclearly specified course objectives and aims; and not being treated as partners in the learning process.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In several African countries where English is used as the language of education, the problems and challenges posed in communication have been a cause for concern as has been the problem of assessment. This was confirmed in findings such as those of Jackson and Young, 1987; Newton, 1990; Perkins, 1991; Dolence and Norris, 1995;

Grannis, 1998; Kelly, 1998; Pflaum, 1998; Otaala, 2003; and Teferra and Altbach, 2003. Because of the problem of English Language competency in tertiary education in Africa, including Namibia, the need to develop teaching methods that will motivate and interest students cannot be overemphasized (Maleki and Heerman, 1992; Pflaum, 1998).

There is a perception among some students that certain subjects, such as Mathematics are for people who are geniuses. Geary (1996) has indicated that poor performance in some subjects, such as Mathematics can be attributed to personal, contextual or cultural factors.

The question is: among Namibian university students would there be an influence of such factors in relation to teaching and learning? If so, remedial courses in English Language communication as well as alternative teaching methods might assist students to learn more effectively. The findings of this study about some of these factors provide guidelines to lecturers on how to develop teaching strategies that take account of the students' background, particularly their language competency, thus making them more effective in their teaching and making their students more proficient in learning.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Using an action research approach (model) the purpose of this study was to investigate the views of students and lecturers at the University of Namibia about teaching and learning. This was designed to assist me in my work of teaching English and in assessment, as well as the work of my colleagues. Specifically, the study determined the views of students and lecturers in relation to language, teaching, learning and assessment as well as what we might learn from analysis of these views to assist in improving teaching, learning and assessment.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main concern in this thesis was to establish how students and lecturers, my colleagues and I included, could improve our practices by listening to the subjective views of others. There were four research sub-questions. First, what were the subjective views of lecturers about factors that affect language, teaching, learning and assessment? Second, what were the subjective views of students about factors that affect language, teaching, learning and assessment? Third, what were some of the implications of these subjective views for the improvement of the quality of language, teaching, learning and assessment at university level, with particular reference to the University of Namibia? Fourth, specifically, what was the relationship between language, teaching, learning and assessment?

In order to obtain lecturers' views toward teaching and learning a questionnaire was prepared to elicit this information. The lecturers from the University of Namibia differ from other teachers country-wide in general in that they are in Windhoek and are therefore more likely to have a range of instructional material not available elsewhere. In addition, being in university, they are presumably influenced by the general orientation that, compared to the attention which generally is given to scientific research, the teaching function of universities had for a long time not received the due attention it deserved. Excellence in teaching, until relatively recently, and this in few universities, was not recognized and rewarded. As a rule university lecturers are appointed because of their above-average research achievements. A number of them lack, not only teaching experience, but also the ability to combine teaching and learning into "investigative teaching". Their own training has not in many instances, included management and organizational techniques. Given this background it was important to establish views of lecturers towards teaching and learning if any headway was going to be made to making helpful suggestions and recommendations to the university to improve teaching and learning; an area to which they appeared to be paying attention as evidenced by the establishment of the Unit for Improving Teaching and Learning.

I also considered students' views to be very important, not only in the improvement of teaching and assessment, but also in improving their own learning. Students are

important clients who can have a big impact on how they are taught. I worked out a questionnaire for their views as well. The students' questionnaire was closely aligned to the lecturers' questionnaire because the focus group interviews showed that there was a very close similarity between students' views and lecturers' views in many areas.

Reform of teaching in post-independence Namibia is intended to usher in a more "learner-centred" education. But speaking of "learner-centred" as a "concept" rather than a slogan or banner may impute more definition to the phrase than it currently enjoys in Namibia (Grannis, 1998). Its meaning was only hinted at in the bold policy document that set forth the principal goals and programme initiatives that the Namibian nation has been attempting to accomplish:

> As we made the transition from educating an elite to education for all we are also making another shift, from teacher-centred to learner centred education … What teachers do must be guided both by their knowledge of the concepts and skills to be mastered and by the experiences, interest and learning strategies of their students. Our challenge is to harness the curiosity of learners and the excitement of learning rather then stifling them … (Ministry of Education and Culture, Namibia, 1993: 10).

Subsequent curriculum and in-service teacher education documents expand these ideas to include an active role for the learner, through interaction with the teacher, the investigation of problems and materials in the local environment, and cooperative learning.

All pre-service preparation of senior secondary teachers for Namibia takes place at the University of Namibia. Here, learner-centred education is a topic discussed in various meetings, but the extent to which it is practiced in the university classroom or indeed understood by the students is another matter, as witness by the following ascebic observation:

> Teaching and learning encompasses two elements: the teacher and the learner. The modern trend is to adopt learner-centred teaching approaches. Unfortunately, the majority of University teachers, except those in the Faculty of Education, never learned how to teach. Rather they lecture ….(The University of Namibia Annual Report, 1995: 26).

As in the case of lecturers it was felt important to identify the views of students on teaching and learning in order to establish whether or not they perceived their role as passive recipients of information or whether they viewed themselves as creators of knowledge, as active learners interacting with lecturers and their fellow students and as 'learning how to learn'.

In terms of implications of the findings I can say that leaving lecturers and students to their own devices in the hope that problems will sort themselves out amounts to an abdication of educational responsibility.

Based on the findings there are implications for the University of Namibia in terms of actions which could be taken to improve the situation. In my own case I wanted to improve my own work practice; which is why I alternated action research with critical reflection. The action took the form of change or improvement or implementation in my work place. The research consisted of learning and understanding and leading to the writing of this thesis. The data-driven research which I adopted was responsive to the situation, and was flexible. It offered advantage to me since I wanted to research my own practice and add to my own practice. In improving my teaching I would be simultaneously working on improving students' learning. In effect I used the writing of a thesis for a higher degree as a valuable personal and professional development and the development of my colleagues and improvement in learning of students who participated in the research.

1.6 **METHODOLOGY**

When I started this research I was working at two fronts: traditional research and Action Research. I was divided between using one of these approaches in my research. I chose to present the traditional approach partly because the people who read my initial drafts were more familiar with this approach than the Action Research approach. Yet at the same time I continued to investigate my own teaching along the Action Research paradigm.

Later in the research process after some of my earlier supervisors had left the University of the Western Cape I was allocated a supervisor who was more familiar

with Action Research. He encouraged me to go along the Action Research route. It was then that I resurrected the work that I had been keeping and started reporting on it. I abandoned the traditional approach and settled into the Action Research mode.

In my earlier work I used the teacher and student belief theories framework. Basically the belief theories are assumed to affect teaching and learning in that teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning lead them to teach in certain ways since they believe students learn best under those circumstances (Fox, 1983; Gow and Kember, 1993; Kember and Gow, 1994; Trigwell et al, 1999; Kember, 2001). Students' beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning may also influence how they approach learning (Schommer, 1993).

In the earlier phase I conducted interviews whose schedules covered major aspects of the teaching/learning situation. These included: teaching and learning objectives; lecturers' qualifications and experience; the curriculum; resources/teaching aids; lecturers' teaching styles; students' learning styles; the role of motivation; the role of language in teaching and learning; the role of students in teaching and learning; lecturers' conceptions of teaching and learning; lecturers' views of students; class size; assessment of students' learning, evaluation of teaching; and the role of the administration.

I started with a broad cover of the major areas of concern because I needed to convince myself and others that there were indeed areas that needed investigation in order for effective teaching, learning, and assessment to occur. I had my own hunches derived from personal experiences as well as from informal verbal exchanges with colleagues and students, but I needed to make the process formal through an interview process following a well-structured guideline.

With regard to language, which was my main interest, I had to find out to what extent it played a role in teaching, learning, and assessment. The views of other lecturers' and the views of students were necessary for the establishment of the significance of the role of language. The preliminary findings indicated that there were many factors affecting teaching, learning and assessment in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Namibia.

For example, availability of resources such as desks and chairs; library books; a well-stocked and effective bookshop; proper registration procedures; working chalkboards; students attitudes towards lecturers and towards learning; students previous academic, social, cultural and language background; lecturers' teaching styles; lecturers' and students' motivation; lecturers' background; students' conceptions of teaching, learning and assessment; and attitude towards students were all cited as having an influence.

Since the factors identified by the lecturers and students were so many and so varied, I realized that I could not deal with all of them, especially using a qualitative approach. I decided to focus on language since the preliminary findings indicated that language permeated many aspects of teaching, learning, and assessment. It affected lecturers' teaching styles; students' learning styles; students' motivation; students' ability to use library sources; and students' evaluation of teaching as well as assessment.

Observation of teaching also indicated that language, particularly English language, was a key factor in effective teaching and learning. Many students did not participate actively in class because of lack of competence in English communication. Reading of texts in class, especially literary texts, was a problem and it slowed down the process of teaching and learning since the lecturers had to spend more time daily with language issues instead of tackling issues in the plan for teaching and learning.

Armed with information/knowledge from the views of lecturers and students as well as from observation of teaching in the Department of English where I was a lecturer, I started to work on developing another questionnaire that focused on language issues. I settled on a quantitative approach this time, so as to carry out the research using a bigger sample drawn from the whole of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. I wondered to myself whether the problem of language, particularly English was widespread. Certainly both the lecturers and the students in the Department of English who were interviewed earlier acknowledged that lack of competence in the English language caused problems in teaching, learning and assessment.

My efforts to analyze students' essays in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences were also geared towards confirming whether or not the students' lack of competence in English affected their essay writing. The analysis of these essays indeed confirmed my hunch, because many essays showed lack of coherence, poor expressions, many grammatical sentences and sometimes incomprehensible paragraphs. A detailed statement of methodology is provided in chapter three.

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Since social scientists vary in their use of terms, it is most helpful to make explicit the definitions of a number of terms used in this study.

Action research is a process in which people take deliberate steps to study their situation and to improve it concurrently; enquiry and change are both built into the process, which can be described as cyclic. Its main features are: (i) the researcher is part of the research; (ii) it is s participatory and collaborative exercise; and (iii) it is eclectic in its methodology.

Assessment refers to a process by which information is systematically gathered about how effective the teaching and learning processes are, and involves measurement, through a variety of instruments and processes, to indicate achievements and outcomes; that is, whether or not students have met the stated learning outcomes of the course.

Learning occurs whenever our behaviour undergoes incremental change of a more or less permanent nature as a result of some observation we have made, or activity we have undertaken. Thus we can gain knowledge or skills, through studying or experiences, or through being taught.

Teaching is the process by which a teacher (lecturer) gives lessons to students by giving them information to help them learn a subject. In colleges and universities, the most frequent method of teaching is the lecture.

A lecture is a carefully prepared oral presentation of a subject by a qualified expert. It is usually rather formal.

A question and answer session is an organized follow-up of a formal presentation in which members of the audience direct questions to one or more presenters.

A discussion group is a group of persons who meet together to discuss informally and deliberate on a topic of mutual concern.

A seminar is a group of persons engaged in a specialized study led by an authority in the subject being studied. It may be a single session or a series of sessions.

Role play: in role play some members act out a real-life situation in front of the group. There is no script, no set dialogue, and they make up parts as they go along. The group then discusses the implications of the performance to the situation or problem under consideration.

A small group is a group designed to facilitate learning in various ways. A variety of small groups includes: a tutorial; a seminar; a discussion. And special forums such as brainstorming, buzz groups and a syndicates are organised.

Validity is concerned with whether an instrument or activity does what it is designed for. In the case of an assessment, the question is whether the assessment has measured what it was designed to measure. The validity of research data refers to the extent to which the data proposed and actually collected are true and represent an accurate picture of what is being studied.

Reliability is concerned with producing the same results under similar conditions if repeated. It is concerned with consistency. A reliable assessment for a student is one which gives a consistent and accurate picture of the learning process (and product) which he or she could express through the assessment.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

All developing nations are experimenting extensively to make teaching and learning more and more effective. In many tertiary institutions indications are that students are experiencing difficulties in the learning of their basic subjects, difficulties many allege are traceable to communication in the English language – a language which to many students and lecturers is their second, third language or fourth language, but which necessarily has had to be used as a language of instruction. It was expected that the findings would help lecturers to modify their methods of instruction and result in improved quality of students learning.

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Chapter one provides the general background and statement of the problem. In Chapter two I provide a description of the Action Research model in order to provide a conceptual framework for my study. I explore issues surrounding the nature of Action Research.

Chapter three deals with a review of the pertinent literature, and chapter four provides the research methodology that was used in the empirical study on the effects of language on teaching, learning and assessment.

In Chapter five I provide the results obtained from interviews with individual lecturers, and with student focus group interviews.

Chapter six provides the results of the lecturers' and students' views obtained from a survey which was undertaken to determine their views on teaching and learning and assessment.

Chapter seven provides the results of my own classroom practice and self-assessment on the project, as well as the practices of my colleagues and my assessment their practices in this project. Finally Chapter eight provides a discussion, recommendations, and conclusion over and above those provided in each of chapters

five, six and seven where the various results were already provided and discussed. The reference section is followed by a list of appendices.

1.10 **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have dealt with the general background related to educational changes in Namibia particularly since independence, which have necessitated a review of issues relating to teaching and learning, particularly in relation to language and assessment. The following chapter provides the conceptual framework for the study.

CHAPTER TWO: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have shown that there is a relationship between language, teaching, learning and assessment. In order to investigate the relationship between these aspects I chose to use an Action Research model. In this chapter I will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the present research. In this respect I will explore issues surrounding the nature of Action Research. There are several varieties of Action Research, each with a different emphasis and a different outcome. It should be noted here that the Action Research model was not developed to deal only with issues of education, but can also be used in other areas such as industry and business. Some examples will be discussed in this chapter. I will now briefly present some of Action Research. These include the definition of Action Research (evolution of Action Research and definitions of Action Research) principles of Action Research, uses of Action Research, situating Action Research in the research paradigm, current types of Action Research; teacher Action Research; research tools and concepts of generalisability and reliability and validity.

2.2 WHAT IS ACTION RESEARCH?

Evolution of Action Research

Kurt Lewin (1946), the famous social psychologist, has been credited with the development of the idea of Action Research. He coined the term 'group dynamics' over 50 years ago, and this is the basis of Action Research, where people work together on dealing with an identified issue. Other researchers, however, have applied the idea in different contexts. For example, in education, persons such as Ebbutt (1985) have influenced the adoption of Action Research.

O'Brien (1998) says that Kurt Lewin "is generally considered the 'father' of action research", but also explains why this view is held by many to be so. Lewin's background is given by O'Brien (1998) as follows:

> A German social and experimental psychologist, and of the founders of the Gestalt school, he was concerned with social problems, and focused on participative group processes for addressing conflict, crises, and change, generally within organizations. Initially, he was associated with the Centre for Group Dynamics at MIT in Boston, but soon went on to establish his own National Training Laboratories (1998:5).

This background provides information on why Lewin gets the title of 'father' of action research. Action and participation seem to have been emphasized right from the early days. The actual coinage of the term 'action research' is recorded by O'Brien (1998:5) as being in 1946 in Lewin's paper "Action Research and Minority Problems", which characterized action research as "a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action", using a process of "a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the results of the action."

After Lewin others developed the idea of Action Research and applied it in different circles. One such person was Eric Trist, according to O'Brien (1998). Trist seems to have been involved in Action Research because of his background as a social psychiatrist working with others in the Tavistock Institutes of Human Relations in London engaged in applied social research, initially for the civil repatriation of German prisoners of war. The Action Research that was applied in this institute was, according to O'Brien (1998), large scale, and applicable in multi-organisational problems. These claims are all presumable genuine; but whoever is responsible for whatever, is not as important as understanding the principles by which the method operates. What we know now is that Action Research allows practitioners to share questions, concerns and results as they engage themselves in their work.

2.3 **DEFINITIONS OF ACTION RESEARCH**

There are many definitions of Action Research. I will attempt to discuss several of these definitions in an effort to bring to the fore some of the difficulties and advantages of working within this framework. To start with Action Research is considered to be part of the qualitative research paradigm. We will now look at the different definitions of Action Research.

O'Brien (1998) says that Action Research "is known by many other names, including participatory research, collaborative inquiry, emancipatory research, action learning, and contextual Action Research, but all are variations of a theme" (1998:2). O'Brien has two definitions of Action Research. The simple one says that Action Research "is 'learning by doing' – a group of people identifies a problem, does something to resolve it, sees how successful their efforts were, and, if not satisfied, tries again." His more succinct definition, in his words goes as follows:

> Action Research …. Aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously. Thus, there is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction.
>
> Accomplishing this twin goal requires the active collaboration of research and client, and thus it stresses the importance of co-learning as a primary aspect of the research process (1998:2).

Although there are activities that may look like Action Research, O'Brien (1998) makes a distinction between these activities and Action Research. He looks at areas of emphasis of the activity, the intervention made, and the methodologies adopted. This is what he has to say:

> What separates this type of research from general professional practices, consulting, or daily problem-solving is the emphasis on scientific study, which is to say the researcher studies the problem systematically and insures that the intervention is informed is informed by theoretical consideration. Much of the researcher's time is spent on refining the methodological tools to suit the exigencies of the situation, and on collecting, analyzing, and presenting data on an on-going, cyclic basis (1998:2).

Action Research is also different from other types of research in terms of aims, focus, methodologies used, and the outcomes. O'Brien (1998) says the following:

> Several attributes separate action research from other types of research. Primary is its focus on turning the people involved into researchers, too – people learn best, and more willingly apply what they have learned, when they do it themselves. It also has a social dimension – the research takes place in real-world situations, and aims to solve real problems. Finally, the initiating research, unlike in other disciplines, makes no attempt to remain objective, but openly acknowledges their bias to the other participants (1998:2).

We learn from the above statement that action research departs from the traditional approaches to research and creates situations where more people than the research actually learn and do something about an identified problem. This is different from the traditional research approaches where the purpose of the research is just finding information which may not be used for any particular purpose apart from informing others. Action Research is a deliberate, solution-oriented investigation that is group or personally owned and conducted. It is characterized by spiraling cycles of problem identification, systematic data collection, reflection, analysis, data-driven action taken, and, finally, problem redefinition.

The above description shows the cyclic nature of Action Research. It is different from the traditional approaches to research, which are linear in nature. The data that is collected is used for immediate action, unlike traditional research where the data may be presented to journals for publication as an end in itself.

We also see the importance of collaboration in the description. Those involved in Action Research work together to help one another in the design and conduct of the investigation of the identified problem in the work place. Practitioners who undertake Action Research expand their own role in searching for knowledge. They do not wait for other people out there to tell them what is good for them and their students.

Applied to teaching, it involves gathering and interpreting "data" to better understand an aspect of your teaching that interests or concerns you. Action Research is an important recent development in the broad territory of 'teachers' professional development." Action Research offers an alternative to teachers who have been

encouraged to look to others, rather than to themselves and their students, for ways to improve their teaching. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) see Action Research as a form of activity where a group of people undertake a study of their current initiatives with a view to future improvement, as well as the improvement of their respective institutions.

Action Research is a special kind of research. It is, simply, research people conduct to determine effectiveness of actions they take to improve the situation. In education, for example, Action Research is a way for educators to attempt to improve teaching and learning, and, as they do so, to conduct research into those efforts.

Action Research comprises a family of methodologies designed to follow action and research outcomes at the same time. It is a model of research which attempts to improve the educational world through improved shared practice (Kemmis, 1993). In addition to it being a process of professional learning, one of the key characteristics of the Action Research approach is collaboration, which enables mutual understanding and consensus, democratic decision making and common action (Oja and Smulyan, 1989). Within the broad definition of Action Research there are four basic themes:

1. Collaboration through participation.
2. acquisition of knowledge
3. social change
4. empowerment of participants.

The cyclic nature of Action Research

Action Research provides a framework for formalizing and the making of the process of learning by building on experience more effective. "In brief, it consists of an interactive and cyclic approach of action and research, with four major phases: plan, act, observe, reflect" (Zuber-Skerrit, 1993, pxiii). The basic underlying assumption which underpins theory and practice is the existence of experiential-based learning cycle (from Kolb, et al, 1979) that people can learn and create knowledge:

(i) on the basis of their concrete experience;

(ii) through observing and reflecting on that experience;

(iii) by forming abstract concept in new situations, leading to new concrete experiences, and hence the beginning of a new cycle.

This model is flexible with, in some projects, the phases being fewer than in other projects. Contemporary Action Research also allows the use of different techniques for data and information collection. These techniques may include semi-structured interviews; interviews; and/or focus groups; and the use of questionnaires.

A number of studies have examined the use of Action Research in different learning areas (Lewin, 1947; Hult and Lennung, 1980; Tesch 1990; McTaggart, 1991; Whyte, 1991; Selener, 1992; Baskerville and Wood-Harper, 1996; Baskerville and Pries-Heje, 1999; Mordock and Krasny, 2001). Most of these studies have focused on the use of Action Research to promote meaningful learning in a variety of instructional settings. Others have employed a five-cycle/phase Action Research with an intention to repeat Action Research after certain learning outcomes have taken place (Checkland, 1981). Checkland (1981), cited by Baskerville and Wood-Harper, 1996:237) applied Action Research in the methodology of systems development in Information Systems.

Principles of Action Research

O'Brien (1998:3) also gives a comprehensive overview of key principles of Action Research as follows:

1) Reflective critique, which is an account of the situation in the form of notes, transcripts or official documents that will make implicit claims to be authoritative, i.e., it implies that it is factual and true.

2) Dialectical critique, where reality, especially social reality, is consensually validated through dialogue.

3) Collaborative Resource, which is found in the working of participants as co-researchers, all contributing at different phases of the project in order to arrive at a common understanding.

4) Risk, in the form of fear, may occur at all stages of a project, may affect the initiator as well as other participants, and needs to be addressed for the good of everyone.

5) Plural Structure means having a multiplicity of views, commentaries and critiques which need to be made explicit and harmonization found before, during and after the project.

The Action Research Process

Kemmis (1989), in O'Brien (1998), has developed a simple model of the cyclic nature of the typical Action Research process. Each cycle has four steps, which are: plan, act, observe, reflect.

Susman (1983), in O'Brien (1998) gives a more elaborate listing, which includes a fifth step that constitutes the beginning of a new cycle. O'Brien (1983:3) summarises this elaborate listing as follows:

> Initially, a problem is identified and data is collected for a more detailed diagnoses. This is followed by a collective postulation of several possible solutions, from which a single plan of action emerges and is implemented. Data on the results of the intervention are collected and analyzed, and the findings are interpreted in light of how successful the action has been. At this point, the problem is re-assessed and the process begins another cycle. This process continues until the problem is resolved (1983: 3).

2.4 WHEN IS ACTION RESEARCH USED?

According to O'Brien (1998), Action Research is used "in real situations, rather than contrived, experimental studies, since its primary focus is on solving real problems", but it may also be used "by social scientists for preliminary or pilot research, especially when the situation is too ambiguous to frame a precise research question"

(1998:4). In most cases, "…and in accordance with its principles, it is chosen when circumstances require flexibility, the involvement of the people in the research, or change must take place quickly or holistically" (1998:4).

2.5 **WHO USES ACTION RESEARCH**?

O'Brien (1998) says that Action Research is often applied by "practitioners who wish to improve understanding of their practice, social change activists trying to mount an action campaign, or, more likely, academics who have been invited into an organization (or other domain) by decision-makers aware of a problem requiring Action Research, but lacking the requisite methodological knowledge to deal with it" (1998:4).

2.6 **SITUATING ACTION RESEARCH IN A RESEARCH PARADIGM**

In attempting to situate Action Research, O'Brien (1998) discusses other paradigms so as to allow a clearer understanding of Action Research. He discusses three paradigms, which are the Positivist Paradigm, the Interpretive Paradigm, and the Paradigm in Praxis.

The Positivist Paradigm

O'Brien (1998) gives the following understanding to the positivist paradigm:

> The main research paradigm for the past centuries has been that of Social Positivism. This paradigm is based on a number of principles, including: a belief in an objective reality, knowledge of which is only gained from sense data that can be directly experienced and verified between independent observers. Phenomena are subject to natural laws that humans discover in a logical manner through empirical testing, using inductive hypotheses derived from a body of scientific theory. Its methods rely heavily on quantitative measures, with relationships among variables commonly shown by mathematical means (1998:4).

O'Brien (1998:4) says that Positivism, used in scientific and applied research, has been considered by many, such as Susman and Evered (1978, and Winter (1989) to be antithesis of the principles of Action Research.

Interpretive Paradigm

O'Brien (1998) gives a description of a new paradigm that seems to have moved away from the positivist paradigm. This new paradigm is the Interpretive paradigm, which O'Brien describes as follows:

> Over the last century, a new research paradigm has emerged in the social sciences to break out of the constraints imposed by positivism. With its emphasis on the relationship between socially-engendered concept formation and language it can be referred to as the Interpretive paradigm. Containing such qualitative methodological approaches as phenomenology, ethnography, and hermeneutics, it is characterized by a belief in a socially constructed, subjectively-based reality, one that is influenced by culture and history. Nonetheless it still retains the ideals of research objectivity, and research as passive collector and expert interpreter of data (1998:4-5).

The above description seems to suggest that there are aspects of this paradigm that are similar to Action Research, but there are also things that do not fit in with Action Research.

Paradigm of Praxis

This seems to be home of Action Research, in the view of O'Brien (1998). This is because there are researchers such as Lather (1986) who feel that neither the Interpretive Paradigm nor the positivist paradigms "are sufficient epistemological structures under which to place action research …" (O'Brien, 1998:5). O'Brien (1998) elaborates on this paradigm of praxis as follows:

> Rather, a paradigm of Praxis is seen as where the main affinities lie. Praxis, a term used by Aristotle, is the art of acting upon the conditions one faces in order to change them. It deals with the disciplines and activities predominant in the ethical and political lives of people.

> Aristotle contrasted this with Theoria – those sciences and activities that are contrasted with knowing for its own sake. Both are equally needed to thought. That knowledge is derived from practice, and practice informed by knowledge, in an ongoing process, is a cornerstone of action research. Action researchers also reject the notion of research neutrality, understanding that the most active researcher is often one who has most at state in resolving a problematic situation (1998:5).

Current Types of Action Research

O'Brien (1998) has identified 4 types of Action Research that have evolved since the 1970s: traditional, contextual (Action learning), radical, and educational Action Research.

Traditional Action Research

Traditional Action Research, according to O'Brien (1998), stemmed from Lewin's work within organizations and "…encompasses the concepts of practices of Field Theory, Group Dynamics, T-Group, and the Clinical Model" (1998:6). Traditional Action Research has also been applied in areas of Organisation Development, Quality of Working Life (QWL), Socio-Technical systems (e.g. Information Systems) and Organizational Democracy because of the growing importance of labour-management relations. The model, however, tends to be "conservative, generally maintaining the status quo with regard to organizational power structures" (1998:6).

Contextual Action Research (Action Learning)

O'Brien (1998) says of this type of Action Research that it is an approach derived from Trist's work on relations between organizations. It has three features: it is contextual, domain-based, and holographic. O'Brien (1998) explains what is meant by those terms as follows:

> It is contextual, insofar as it entails reconstituting the structural relations among actors in a social environment; domain-based, in that it tries to involve all affected parties and it stresses that participants act as project designers and co-researchers. The concept of organizational ecology, and the use of search conference come out of contextual research, which is more of a liberal

> philosophy, with social transformation occurring by consensus and normative incrementalism (1998:6).

Radical Action Research

The Radical Stream, according to O'Brien (1998), is one "which has roots in Marxian 'dialectical materialism' and the praxis orientations of Antonio Gramsci, has a strong focus on emancipation and the overcoming of power imbalances" (1998:6). This is where Participatory Action research fits in. O'Brien (1998) explains that Participatory Action Research is often found in liberationist movements and international development circles, and Feminist Action Research which both strive for social transformation via an advocacy process to strengthen peripheral groups in society.

Educational Action Research

O'Brien (1998) explains what Educational Action Research is, along with its origin, focus and practitioners in the following statement:

> A fourth stream, that of Educational Action Research, has its foundations in the writings of Thomas Dewey, the great American educational philosopher of the 1920s and 30s, who believed that professional educators should become involved in community problem-solving. Its practitioners, not surprisingly, operate mainly out of educational institutions, and focus on development of curriculum, professional development, and applying learning in a social context. It is often the case that university-based researchers work with primary and secondary school teachers and students on community projects (1998:6).

Action Research is a process of empowering those on the 'front lines' of action to conduct research into their own practices, rather than relying on research findings of 'outsiders'. In education, teachers are encouraged to conduct research and curriculum development into their own teaching activities and into their students learning activities. Educational Action Research is a technology in which teachers take action to improve students learning and, at the same time, gather data to demonstrate possible reasons for and usefulness of that action. It is ongoing questioning by teachers to develop the best possible learning experiences for teachers (p.3). As Carr and Kemmis (1986) state, Action Research is a "form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve:

- the rationality and justice of their own approaches;
- their understanding of these practices, and
- the situations in which the practices are carried out" (p.162).

It is helpful at this stage to elaborate teacher Action Research since it is relevant to my own work.

Teacher Action Research

A view of Action Research is presented by Newman (2000). She calls it "practice as inquiry" which is identified variously as 'teacher research' (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993), 'action research" (Carr 1989), 'reflective practice' (Schon 1983, 1987). Although given different names, these various types of teacher research, share many features, which include being more open about what we are doing, reflecting on our activities, and inventing methodology as we go along.

Newman (2000) says there are many forms of teacher/Action Research and that each version "provides useful tools for taking a critical look at our professional work" (2000:2). She discusses several forms and provides the sources. For example, narrative inquiry is associated with Connelly and Clandinin (1988) and "allows us to explore our personal histories in an effort to understand how who we are impacts on what we value and what we do". As far as more traditional 'teacher research' (Rudduck and Hopkins 1985) is concerned, Newman says that "it compiles different sorts of evidence" including "documentary evidence of various sorts – journal entries, students' work, policy documents from school divisions and provinces, newspaper accounts" (2000:2).

As far as critical inquiry (Boomer, 1987; Smith, 1992) is concerned, Newman (2000) says that it "has a more overt political flavour from the outset" (2000:2), which is different from narrative inquiry and traditional teacher research where there might be some sort of political pressure that impacts on what the teachers do, and which teachers want to deal with. Evidence for critical inquiry can be found in policy documents, correspondence of all kinds, newspaper sources, and students' work.

Case studies are also included in Newman's (2000) analysis of the tools of teacher/action research. Newman (2000) quotes Winter's (1986) view when she says, a "careful examination of an individual student or a small group of students, can be the basis of a teacher/action research project" since you can "learn from the situation how to act in it to discover the kinds of decisions we make and to think about the theoretical reasons for making them (2000:2). Evidence includes personal reflections, lesson plans, students' work, student/parent/colleague interviews, etc. Newman (2000) believes that case study work would qualify as teacher/Action Research; the focus would be on uncovering the assumptions which are driving our teaching; learn from the learners how to make teaching a learning enterprise (2000:2-3).

On Schon's reflective practice (1983, 1987) Newman sees many possibilities for teachers to explore their practice. Every teacher can make any teaching situation problematic for her/himself since there are no pre-ordained states for any teaching situation. The teachers creates her own construction of reality and proceeds to test her constructions by "bringing to the surface, juxtaposing, and discriminating among alternative accounts of that reality" (Newman, 2000:3).

Critical incidents (Newman 1987, 1991) also pass as teacher/Action Research, in Newman's (2000) view, because they "allow you to stand back and examine your beliefs and your teaching critically" (2000:3). Critical incidents, according to Newman can occur "in the midst of teaching, through reading, or overhearing a comment, noticing how someone else is doing something you've always taken for granted, or suddenly seeing your own learning differently" (2000:3).

In summary, all the above variations of teacher/Action Research focus on the researcher as he/she attempts to examine his/her own understanding of different situations in the work place and how these can be influenced by outside and inside factors. In other words, it is about unraveling the intricacies of a complex teaching and learning situation.

2.7 ACTION RESEARCH TOOLS

Since Action Research "is more of a holistic approach to problem-solving rather than single method for collection and analyzing data" it "allows for several different research tools to be used as the project is conducted" (O'Brien, 1998:6). These methods are generally common to the qualitative research paradigm, and include: keeping a research journal, document collection and analysis, participant observation recordings, questionnaire surveys, structure and unstructured interviews, and case studies. O'Brien (1998) does not elaborate on these methods further since he believes they are familiar enough to be left out in the discussion. However, he discusses one tool, the search conference, perhaps because he considers it to be unfamiliar to some researchers.

2.8 THE SEARCH CONFERENCE

According to O'Brien (1998) "Of all of the tools utilized by action researchers, the one that has been developed exclusively to suit the needs of the Action Research approach is that of the search conference, initially developed by Eric Trist and Fred Emery at the Tavistock Institute in 1959, and first implemented for the merger of Bristol-Sitddlely Aircraft Engines in 1960" (1998:6). It is interesting to note that this tool was first used in the engineering area, not the social sciences. O'Brien (1998), however says that the search conference format "has seen widespread development since that time, with variations on Trist and Emery's theme becoming known under other names due to their promotion by individual academics and consultants" (1998:6-7), and they include: Dannemiller-Tyson's Interactive Strategic Planning, Marvin Weisbords Future Search Conference, Deck Axelros's Conference Model Redesign, Harrison Own's Open Space, and ICA's Strategic Planning (Rouda 1995).

O'Brien (1998) says, "Search conferences have also been conducted for many different circumstances and participants, including: decision-makers from several countries visioning the 'Future of Participative Democracy in the Americas'; practitioners and policy makers in the field of health promotion in Ontario taking charge in an era of cutbacks; and Xerox employees sorting out enterprise re-organization" (1998:7).

We learn from the above description that the search tool can be used in all disciplines so long as the circumstances and the people involved allow its use. O'Brien gives a summary of the process of the search conference as follows:

> Searching …. is carried out in groups which are composed of the relevant stake holders. The group meets under social island conditions for 2-3 days, sometimes as long as five. The opening sessions are concerned with elucidating the factors operating in the wider contextual environment – those producing the meta-problems and likely to affect the future. The content is contributed entirely by the members. The staff are facilitators only. Items are listed in the first instance without criticism in the plenary session and displayed on flip charts which surround the room. The material is discussed in greater depth in small groups and the composite picture checked out in plenary. The group next examines its own organizational setting or settings against his wider background and then proceeds to construct a picture of a desirable future. It is surprising how much agreement there often is. Only when all this has been done is consideration given to action step … (1998:7)

2.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

On ethical considerations O'Brien (1998) says, "Because action research is carried out in-real-world circumstances, and involves close and open communication among the people involved, the researchers must pay close attention to ethical considerations in the conduct of their work" (1998:8). He presents a number of principles as far as these issues are concerned. They are:

- "Make sure that the relevant persons, committees and authorities have been consulted, and that the principles guiding the work are accepted in advance by all.
- All participants must be allowed to influence the work, and the wishes of those who do not wish to participate must be respected.
- The development of the work must remain visible and open to suggestions from others.
- Permission must be obtained before making observations or examining documents produced for other purposes.
- Descriptions of others work and points of view must be negotiated with those concerned before being published.

- The researcher must accept responsibility for maintaining confidentiality." (1998:8)

O'Brien (1998) adds some ethical principles of his own, which are:

- Decisions made about the direction of the research and the probable outcomes are collective.
- Researchers are explicit about the nature of the research process from the beginning, including all personal biases and interests.
- There is equal access to information generated by the process for all participants).
- The outside researcher and the initial design team must create a process that maximizes the opportunities for involvement of all participants (1998:9).

2.10 THE CONCEPT OF GENERALISABILITY

With regard to generalisability in research, Northfield (1996) says, "Generalisability is not a claim teachers would wish to make from their findings and when they do write accounts they are inviting the reader to link the account with their own experiences (1996:5)". This means that teachers' research is validated when other teachers recognize their own classrooms or experiences in the work that is being reported. That is enough evidence that what has been identified as a problem, and the ways it has been handled applies to many teachers' work situations."

The second type of generalization that can be seen in teacher research, according to Northfield (1996) is seen in the collaborative process that has preceded the publication of many teacher accounts. This means that "ideas and first drafts are developed among networks of teachers where the generalization criterion has been the basis for deciding to continue to prepare a final product" (1996:5). At different stages ideas are tested and new ideas developed.

2.11 **RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

In teacher research, just like in other types of research, concerns about subjectivity and bias needs to be taken into account. There are a number of checks that Northfield (1996) considers to be enough to guarantee reliability. They include:

1. students' voice and work;
2. teacher voice in the effort to relate what is presented with their own experience;
3. triangulation of data around an issue;
4. linkages to other teacher accounts;
5. educational literature.

On reliability, we learn from Northfield (1996) that reliability can be established through:

1) the involvement of colleagues and teacher networks;
2) and examination of student's responses and other data sources;
3) the authenticity of work described; and
4) comparisons with other similar situations (1996:5).

As far as validity is concerned, Holian (1999) says that it "can be defined in a number of ways and what is considered to be an adequate measure and standard of validity is closely linked to the matter of research paradigm" (1999:7). This is the same idea that Susman and Evered (1978) in Holian (1999) expressed, that the parameters of a positivist paradigm cannot be used to judge the legitimacy of another paradigm, such as action research or cooperative inquiry. This is because those paradigms that rely on the accumulation of facts and the separation of theory from practice differ from those which regard theory and practice as contingent and interdependent.

2.12 **CONCLUSION**

Action Research is potentially attractive to many subject disciplines, including education and the humanities-oriented subjects. Action Research is identified as a continuous of definitions and philosophies rather than a single approach, caution is expressed that the search for definition may obscure the underlying process of change. Action Research is valuable in individual practitioner's development, as well as in fostering collaboration between various stakeholders (Badger, 2000). Action Research has the potential to generate genuine and sustained improvement in institutions of education, including universities. It gives educators new opportunities to reflect on and assess their teaching; to explore and test new ideas, methods and materials; to assess how effective the new approaches were; to share feedback with fellow team members; and to make decisions about which new approaches to include in the team's curriculum, instruction and assessment plans.

In this study I decided to use the Action Research approach as I thought it was appropriate for my purposes and context. I now turn to a review of the pertinent literature in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Learning has been defined in various ways but it can generally be considered an enduring change in how we feel, think and act about things. It occurs as a result of some observation we make, or activity we perform. And as has rightly been observed by many teaching is only teaching when learning takes place. This is the basic principle for all people who work with students. In universities learning is influenced by a number of factors such as the teaching-learning philosophy; the qualifications and experience of the lecturers, the background of the students, and the learning style of students, but also by the subjective views lecturers have about the factors that affect teaching and learning, as well as the subjective views students have about teaching and learning and the role they should play in those activities.

In the following sections we provide a general statement on conceptions of teaching and learning, following which we deal with issues directly relevant to the issues that the research was concerned about in this project – language; learner-centeredness; assessment, and grouping, as well as other related aspects.

3.2 GENERAL CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

In literature two main teaching and learning approaches are differentiated which can be applied to school education as well as to the university set-up: the so-called teacher-centred approach and the so-called learner-centred approach. Both approaches have been extensively discussed for many years. The learner-centred approach is widely favoured by educationalists. In Namibia, after independence in 1990 and along with the change of the educational system, the learner-centred approach is strongly encouraged, amongst other reasons to support the establishment of a democratic society (Ministry of Education 1993). However, proposing the learner-centred approach does not necessarily mean that it is indeed implemented and practiced, either at school or at university level. Reasons might be the lack of information and training about it. Also subjective views and attitudes of the teachers

towards the learner-centred approach might jeopardize its implementation. Let us briefly look at these two approaches.

The teacher-centred approach is largely direct instruction, with the lecturer mostly telling and the student listening or taking notes. This approach emphasizes the transfer of basic information to students. The learner-centred approach in contrast is indirect, with the lecturer helping the student to find out by posing questions, guiding, indicating sources of information and sharing ideas, problems and solutions. Ramsden (1992) summarises the characteristics of these two approaches as follows (figure 1).

Figure 1: Teaching and Learning Characteristics

Focus	Teacher-Centred	Learner-Centred
Approach	Expository: "Talk and chalk"	Discovery: "dialogue and inquiry"
Purpose	Transfer of information	Development of individual potential
Rationale	Education as technology	Education as liberating process
Strategy	Surface learning	Deep learning
Teaching link	Direct	Indirect
Teacher role	Authoritative: "all knowing expert"	Facilitative: "developer"
Teacher activity	Telling, checking, correcting	Guiding on route, resources, interpretations
Student role	Rote learning	Self-direction for meaning
Student activity	Listening, note-taking, regurgitating	Exploring, reflecting, questioning
Methods	Lecture, seminars, demonstrations	Discussions, simulations, problem-solving activities

(Adapted from Ramsden, 1992)

This figure makes it clear that the learner-centred approach seems to offer better characteristics in regard to the outcome of learning. However, the figure also indicates that the teacher-centred approach might be the one which was common teaching practice at universities of the past and might probably be still a common practice in many university of today, mostly due to the architectonic structure of lecture halls and large student numbers. However, attempts are undertaken to implement the learner-centred approach at universities and predictions have been made that a lecture-style class will be unique in the twenty-first century (Kolb, 1983). Classrooms are becoming more interactive, especially with the constant advancement of technology.

Learner-centred education is variously defined (Cook, 1990; Zietsman, 1996; Basson and Nonyonjo, 1997 but basically it refers to that education in which:

I. teaching and learning are based on students' experiential, developmental and scholastic background, interests, goals, hopes, aptitudes and learning needs;

II. students are considered as active participants and partners in their own education;

III. students and teachers are co-learners and co-teachers;

IV. the major tasks is that of striving for understanding, competence, knowledge, skill mastery and application, and the quest for excellence;

V. the continued mutual and interactive growth, development, learning and intellectual emancipation of students and their teachers are emphasized;

VI. students and teachers are supposed to reconcile their different perceptions and views of reality, preoccupations, doubts, needs, problems, hopes and fears and come up with a negotiated conception of their shared understanding, purposes, visions and goals; and

VII. reflective learning and teaching are not ignored.

When teaching and learning processes are understood in this way, the teacher and the student make a team of cooperating individuals whose main task is that of facilitating and promoting the understanding of subject matter. The teacher ceases to be the sole source of knowledge and the student becomes not merely a receiver of 'knowledge' but a constructor of meaningful knowledge. Another dimension that needs to be noted here is that the teacher does not exclude himself or herself from the learning process by expecting the student to learn independently without guidance and support.

In the learner-centred approach 'learning' also becomes viewed from a participatory perspective, emphasizing two types of learning, that is, the 'active learning' type and the 'experiential learning' type. Both types are also of relevance for learning at university level.

Active learning includes four features:

(i) a search for meaning and understanding:

Undergraduate study involves more than assimilating information for examination purposes; it involves gaining a grasp of key concepts, procedures and principles; analyzing and reflecting on them; and being able to relate and apply them in an appropriate range of contexts and situations.

(ii) greater student responsibility for learning:

Students should have the opportunities to be challenged to think things through for themselves, to identify and tackle problems, and to share and discuss ideas with others. This would also imply that learning involves activities beyond lectures and tutorials, some of which involve students working on their own and in collaboration with other students.

(iii) concern with skills as well as knowledge:

Active learning involves purposefully nurturing skills, rather than learning them incidentally and providing opportunity to practice and review them. The end result would be not only obtaining knowledge, but skills, which can be transferable to other situations, including problem-solving skills; initiative and efficiency; interactional skills; and communications skills (Brown et al., 1997; Candy et al., 1994).

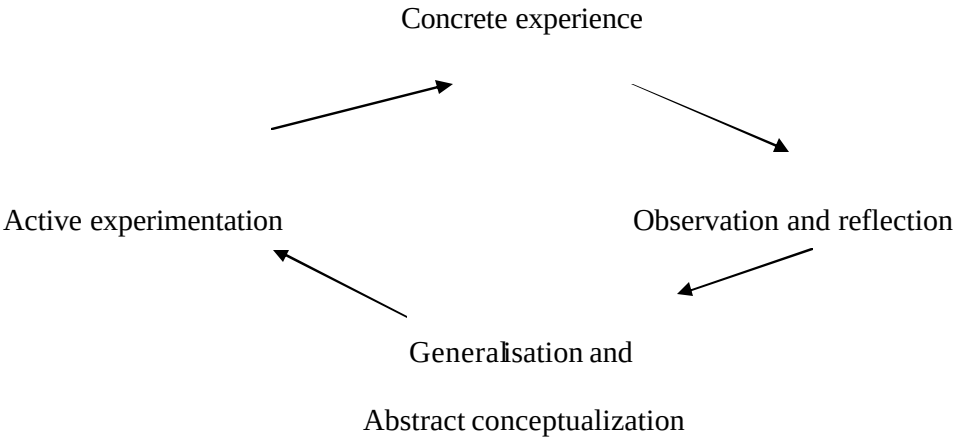
(iv) beyond graduation to wider career and social settings:

Active learning involves looking beyond the university to the world of work. It assumes that students have searched for meaning and understanding and should be able to draw on what they have learned. Similarly students who have been able to take responsibility for their own learning will be better placed to update and enlarge their expertise to meet the new challenges and changing demands in an increasingly technological world. And students with transferable skills should be able to apply these in new and similar situations and extend them to a variety of social and professional settings.

Experiential learning is based on the assumption that if students are able to put theory to practice, they will be better able to grasp the concepts and apply them to their own lives.

Kolb (1984:30) claims that there are four elements in learning: concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. These are placed in sequence in his model which he then regards as being cyclical, so that it is possible to begin the learning process anywhere in the cycle. See figure below.

Figure 2: Kolb's learning cycle



The cycle begins with a concrete experience. As the individual participates in the experience, he/she must constantly reflect upon what he/she is doing (reflective observation). By doing this he is able to formulate ideas of how the world works, or at the very least, how the world works for someone else (abstract conceptualization). Then he would be able to take these ideas and apply them to the experience he is currently having or one that he may have in the future (active experimentation).

This type of learning is based on the interaction of people. Many teachers internationally have chosen to incorporate it into their classes by means of group projects. They enable students to enhance their communication skills, teamwork skills, time management skills, and they are able to exhibit leadership and followership.

Although this model does not explain all aspects of learning at least it provides a plausible explanation as to how our concrete experiences lead us to observe and reflect on some situations from which we form generalizations.

Another embodiment of experiential learning is the addition of a service component into existing curricula. Some universities (including UNAM) have or intend having a

mandatory number of service hours required for every student. However, this should be taken one step further. Students should be asked to reflect upon their experiences so that they are truly learning from their contributions to their community. This allows them to see and learn about things that a lecture room will not provide.

Active and experiential learning have to be seen together with the assumption that the learner-centred approach would lead to "deep learning" contrary to the "surface learning" of the teacher-centred approach (cf. Ramsden, 1992). The crucial difference lies in the contrasting intentions shown by students.

A deep approach stems from an intention to develop a personal understanding of the material presented. To do this, the student has to interact critically with the content, relating it to previous knowledge and experience, as well as examining evidence and evaluating the logical steps by which conclusions have been reached. This then, describes one aspect of what is involved in active learning within an academic discipline.

A deep approach is essentially transforming; that is:

- intending to understand material for oneself;
- interacting vigorously and critically with content;
- relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience;
- using organizing principles to integrate ideas;
- relating evidence to conclusions;
- examining the logic of the argument.

In contrast, a surface approach is more passive and essentially reproductive. It involves an intention simply to satisfy the perceived requirements of the lecturer, which are seen as external impositions largely remote from the student's own

interests. The surface approach can still be active, in the sense of putting a good deal of effort into working, but the direction of that effort does not lead to understanding.

As already stated, a surface approach is essentially reproductive; that is,

- intending simply to reproduce parts of the content;
- accepting ideas and information passively;
- concentrating only on assessment requirements;
- not reflecting on purpose of strategies in learning;
- memorizing facts and procedures routinely;
- failing to recognize guiding principles or patterns.

The approach to learning, with its intention to learn actively or passively, crucially affects the level of understanding actually reached by the individual student. Extracting meaning demands an active, concentrated approach to the work. Students sometimes see this as a distinction between really understanding something, and a passive acceptance of what they have been told.

The terms deep approach and active learning have a good deal in common. They do differ, however, both in their origins and their emphases. A deep approach initially describes what students have to do within the existing higher education system to ensure that they develop effective conceptual understanding. The ideas on active learning derived in part from attempts to make teaching methods in higher education more imaginative and student-centred. Changes which would necessitate marked changes in attitudes and assumptions among teachers in higher education. One of the origins of this way of thinking comes from research on adult learning. When adults learn for themselves they usually do so because they 'care' about what they are learning. They engage with the ideas or information presented. In much formal education, whether in school or in higher education that quality of engagement is often lost through the formality of presentation and through the assessment

requirements. The emphasis has traditionally been on the subject content, whereas in active learning the emphasis is on the learner and the learning process.

Another main emphasis within active learning has been on the social nature of the learning process. Higher education has traditionally fostered individuality and competition, whereas teamwork and collaboration have become crucial in the workplace, as in everyday life. Methods associated with active learning are typically ones in which students work together and make use of shared experience more directly. These techniques fit well with the greater priority given to skills in active learning, and with the sense of responsibility for oneself as a learner that goes with that. Above all, the linkage to 'real life' situations however possible encourages greater use of personal and shared experience, of experimental learning.

Students' Conceptions of Learning

Marton and Saljo (1997) indicate that there are five ways in which they (the authors) conceived learning:

- conception (i) increasing the quantity of information of which the individual is aware;
- conception (ii) memorizing;
- conception (iii) the acquisition of facts, methods, etc., which can be retained and used when necessary;
- conception (iv) the abstraction of meaning;
- conception (v) an interpretative process aimed at understanding reality.

Several studies since have found a similar range of conceptions, and in one of them (Marton, et al, 1993) described a sixth conception:

- conception (vi) learning as changing as a person.

The question remains open as to what kind of subjective views concerning such learning types can be found amongst lecturers and how they might affect their teaching behaviour. Against this background of general conceptions of learning and teaching we shall focus more specifically on the areas that were of concern in this study, as we know about them, in Africa in general, in Namibia in particular: the issues of language; the issues of learner-centeredness; and the issue of assessment, in bringing about change or transformation in education.

3.3 **LANGUAGE**

Language is known to play an important role in the acquisition and therefore understanding of concepts (Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian 1986. In the Southern African context, although there is a dearth of information on language issues and how these impact on ability to learn there is a growing interest on the need to explore these issues to provide a clearer understanding of the need to support students who experience persistent learning problems that are experienced by second language speakers. The problem of western languages as an instrument of educational delivery, and their impact on higher education on nations across Africa have been depicted by many authors (Jibril, 2003; Seyon, 2003; Wondimu, 2003; Ngome, 2003; Otaala, 2003; Subotzky, 2003).

The competency of a good number of African students in European languages, leaves a lot to be desired. Poor levels of proficiency in the language of instruction is a major factor in the declining quality of higher education in Africa. Also the high student attrition rates are attributable to the inability of students to function effectively in the language of instruction. In Nigeria (Jibril, 2003) reports that proficiency in English has been on the decline at all levels of the educational system, and poor communicative competence is a major cause of failure in examinations both at the secondary levels and the higher education educational levels.

In Liberia (Seyon, 2003) reports that higher repeater and attrition rates throughout the system are more closely linked to the language problem than to poor quality teachers and the lack of instructional materials, which are often assigned the blame.

In Ethiopia, according to Wondimu (2003) many tertiary institutions have a "freshman programme" the primary objective of which is to ameliorate academic deficiencies by improving students' English skills, since English is the medium of instruction in universities and other tertiary institutions.

In Kenya Ngome (2003) reports that the failure rate of students in university examinations is rising. The labour market continues to voice concerns about the poor quality of graduates from Kenyan universities. The decline in standards is further demonstrated by the university students' poor command of English language which is the medium of instruction in the Kenyan systems of education.

In Namibia, Otaala (2003) points out that many students have difficulty with English as the language of instruction, since English is often their second or third language. Consequently they often experience difficulties in following lecturers and taking notes or engaging in discussions, at least initially. Regarding course materials, many textbooks do not include relevant local or contextualized issues or illustrations. In addition the language of the textbooks may be too difficult for students to comprehend, considering that it is written in the students' second or third language.

In South Africa, Subotzky (2003) points out that one of the major challenges in higher education is improving graduation rates of students. He argues for better support measures to ensure that university and technikon students are equipped with the basic language and academic literacy skills that they so often lack as a consequence of poor quality of primary and secondary school.

Some of these problems are traceable to difficulties in reading, and it may be helpful to explore a few studies that have dealt with this issue in relation to academic achievement. One issue we deal with is the teachers' attitude to English.

(i) Teachers attitude to English

In Namibia, Pflaum (1998) in order to understand teachers' attitude toward English in the curriculum, applied a questionnaire to teachers at the University of Namibia. In one question about their goals for learners' use of English in their classes the teachers ranked the five most important goals from a list of ten. The rankings presented below suggest that teachers have preferences about the goals for English in their academic classes.

Figure 3: Ranking About Goals for Learners' use of English

Goal	Ranking
Ability to discuss ideas	46
Accurate comprehension of text	34
Understand and evaluate text	30
Understand directions	22
Read and enjoy literature	20
Accuracy in writing	19
Write creatively	16
Accurate speech	11
Write logical essay	9
Understand oral discourse	4

Except for ability to discuss ideas essential for classroom learning and critical to communication, the teachers selected reading comprehension goals as important, consonant with expectations in the International General Certificate of Secondary

Examination (IGCSE) system. This component of English was ranked above writing, speech, listening and reflects an important part of the requirements for success on the examinations. However, it is clear that writing, a necessary component for success, is not highly valued by these teachers. The selection may reflect a lack of understanding of how learners may be best prepared for examinations.

The student teachers were ambivalent about the policy of English as the medium of instruction. Only 38% agreed that "The use of English through the grades on the medium of instruction is appropriate". One student teacher wrote:

The use of English is limited to classroom only. During intervals, at home and everywhere most of the learners as well as teachers speak their mother tongue which in most cases is not English. English the medium of instruction to (sic) my opinion does more harm than good in a multi-cultural/multi-lingual society.

Another wrote: We still have a long way to go before all learners can master English in order to understand the subject matter. But this will not be possible while the teachers themselves are struggling (Pflaum 1998:29). We also deal with reading ability of students and how this is related to academic achievement.

(ii) Reading ability and academic achievement

Reading, according to Pretorius (2002) is a cognitive-linguistic activity comprising several component skills. One of the components - - decoding involves those perceptual and parsing aspects of reading activity whereby written signs and symbols are translated into language. Comprehension, the other main component, refers to the overall understanding process whereby meaning is assigned to the whole text. Comprehension cannot effectively occur until decoding skills have been mastered, although, skill in decoding does not necessarily imply skill in comprehension. This means that many readers may readily decode text and yet still have difficulty understanding what has just been decoded.

In the domain of reading tests a distinction is made between three levels of reading ability appropriate to a specific maturational level:

(i) At the independent level, the reader should read with 98% decoding accuracy and have at least 95% level of comprehension. There are highly skills readers who can independently access information from texts, and can effectively learn from texts appropriate for that specific maturational level.

(ii) At the instructional level, the reader should read with 95% decoding accuracy and 75% comprehension. These are readers who do not have major reading problems but who can benefit from reading instruction at their maturational level.

(iii) At the frustration level, the reader reads with less than 90% decoding accuracy and 60% or less comprehension. These are readers who have major reading problems, especially in regard to comprehending written information, and who are reading well below their maturational level. They need intensive reading programmes to increase their reading level. (Pretorius, 2002:171).

In many SADC countries there are no formal assessment procedures (apart from the work reported by Kelly, 1998) or standardized reading tests for students whose first language is not English. But anecdotal and research evidence suggests that students, including tertiary level students, do experience reading problems serious enough to affect their learning achievement.

The work reported by Kelly (1998) covers the Southern African Consortium for the Measurement of Educational Quality (SACMEQ) project which was conducted with the support and direction of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) at UNESCO, and covered thirteen countries (Mauritius, Namibia, Zanzibar, Zambia,

Zimbabwe, Angola, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland and Tanzania).

The levels of reading achievement in Grade 6 pupils were evaluated by purpose-designed reading tests in the three key domains of reading literacy: narrative (telling a story), expository (describing, explaining, giving an opinion) and documents (searching for, locating and processing information). The tests were constructed so that they conformed to the reading syllabi for Grade 6 in all of the participating countries, but with reading specialists in the different countries reviewing the items so as to eliminate those that were unsuitable due to content, language or cultural bias. A panel of local specialist Grade 6 teachers and Ministry Inspectors identified those items within the reading test which it regarded as essential for Grade 6 pupils to master if they were to move successfully into secondary school. These specialists also agreed on what would be the minimum acceptable level of performance on these items and what would be a desirable level.

The findings indicate, among other things, what was known for some time:

(i) schools are grossly under-resourced;

(ii) a high level of inefficiency characterizes the primary school system;

(iii) levels of actual learning achievement (as indicated by reading abilities) are extremely low;

(iv) performance in rural schools in general was considerably lower than in city schools;

(v) boys performed better than girls;

(vi) the percentage reaching minimum mastery level correlates almost perfectly with socio-economic level; the performance of those in the highest socio-economic group being more than two times better than that of those in the lowest group.

At university level, Perkins (1991) found that 25% of University of Transkei students were unable to cope without assistance. At the University of Pretoria, Webb (1991) reported that many first year students whose first language was not English, had reading levels of grade 7 – 8 learners. And Pretorius' Study of UNISA Psychology students indicated that they were reading at "frustration level", well below their assumed level.

Perkins (1991) reports that of the undergraduate students at the University of Transkei who were given the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, only 13.8% of the students had the reading skills necessary to comprehend their textbooks and 25% were found to be unable to cope without assistance (Perkins, 1991, 232).

Two later studies by Pretorius (2002) at UNISA investigated the relationship between reading skill and academic performance at undergraduate level. The findings showed clear consistent differences in reading ability between the different academic groups, with reading skills improving in the higher academic group.

The findings indicate that many additional language (AL) students have serious reading comprehension problems, which means that they have ineffective and limited access to the rich sources of declarative knowledge provided by print-based materials in the learning context. Pretorius argues that academic success requires competence in using and understanding language in context-reduced situations where students cannot rely on non-verbal elements of communication. She observes that reading ability is a cognitive-linguistic activity that develops on extensive and intensive exposure to written texts, and as long as this principle is recognized, the reading abilities of students will continue to remain weak; as will their academic performance.

Pretorius (2002) observes that reading constitutes the very process whereby learning occurs and it lies at the root of academic performance; if one wishes to improve academic performance at all levels of schools, then one needs to improve reading ability. Pretorius concludes "Reading is a powerful learning tool, a means of

constructing meaning and acquiring new knowledge. If developing countries aim to produce independent learners, then serious attention will need to be given to improving the reading skills of students, and to creating a culture of reading. Reading is not an additional tool that students need at tertiary level; it constitutes the very process whereby learning occurs" (Pretorius, 2002:169).

Meyer (2000) has asserted that there are many and predictable areas of confusion for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students when a lesson is taught in English. If the teacher (lecturer) has not done the instructional work to help construct their understanding and participation, many students will find the lessons confusing, if not overwhelming. Meaningful learning can only be restored through teaching strategies which create conditions for this to happen. Meyer identified four significant barriers, to meaningful learning: cognitive load; culture load; language load; and learning load. These barriers are tightly inter-related and to overlook their inter-connectedness can lead to inappropriate teaching adaptations. In their work teachers should, therefore, make sensitive efforts to lighten these loads.

3.4 THE LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH

In Namibia many educators at all levels, including tertiary levels, are struggling to break away from the traditional system of education, and they claim that the new system is going to be learner-centred in its approach. In Namibia the lead is provided in the report Towards Basic Education for All in which it is stated:

> As we make the transition from educating an elite to education for all, we are also making another shift, from the teacher-centered to learner-centered education. What teachers do must be guided both by their knowledge of concepts and skills to be mastered by the experiences, interests and learning strategies of their students (MEC, 1993:10).

Student self-evaluation is student-centred and the students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning (Klenowski, 1996). This is opposed to teacher-centred approaches to education where the teacher controls all learning processes. In

a student-centred approach the teacher' role remains vital because the teacher is responsible for developing a structured learning environment where students are given support and guidance to attain skills in self-evaluation and independence in their learning.

This is a noble educational goal. However, it seems to be causing problems with regard to its meaning especially at the implementation stage.

Grannis (1998) realizes the problem when he observes that "… to speak of 'learner-centered' as a 'concept' rather than a slogan or banner may impute more definition to the phrase than it currently enjoys, in Namibia or elsewhere."

Grannis, however, concedes that in his own teaching at the University of Namibia the enactment of learner-centred approach was very difficult. This was largely due to the fact that there were large classes, and 40% of the course mark was based on externally moderated examinations. His idea of learner-centred approach expresses a situation where the learners are involved in the setting out of the learning process which would include the formulation of the educational objectives, and the evaluation strategies. With that meaning in mind, Grannis argues for a case where the teacher and the learner are partners in the learning process rather than a situation where either the teacher or the learner has total control.

In the evaluation report on the Teacher Education Reform Project (TERP) in Namibia, Marope and Noonan (1995) also noted the somewhat confusing nature of the learner-centred approach and other related concepts both at policy and implementation levels. In some respects learner-centeredness is presented as an approach to education which is characterized by such broad curricula processes as sequencing, selection of content, teaching methods, and learning experiences. At other times the emphasis is laid on the use of diverse teaching methods (including lecturing) to support the learner-centred approach education. Dahlström (1995) observes that although educational practitioners and administrators perceived learner-centred education as an integral

part of the new philosophy, uncertainty and disparate ideas about the practical implications of learner-centred education abounded.

From the perspective of learners (students) they might reject learner-centred methods. Students have traditional expectations about education and could subvert attempts by teachers to transform themselves by resisting the invitation to participate. Many students, particularly those coming from poor economic backgrounds, worry about their futures, they would usually see education in purely utilitarian terms. The question that would concern most students would be "How do I get a good job out of this education?" From this perspective they might view experimental pedagogy as a waste of time.

As Wainaina (1999) explains, in his discussion on this subject, two distinctive meanings of learner-centred education seem to emerge: a learner-centred approach which is based on the interest and uniqueness of the learner at the psychological level. This sense of learner-centeredness allows for the classroom techniques of content delivery associated with group work, discussion, and projects, all aimed at maximizing the participation of the learner in a learning and teaching process. It is the sense of learner-centeredness that is related to the old child-centred education approach as proposed by the pre-20th century educational thinkers such as Comenius and Pestalozzi, for example. At this level, the learner's interests are taken care of but that does not necessarily mean that the learner controls the educational objectives, the content and the evaluation process. Here the teachers are still in control. The other meaning of learner-centeredness seems to go beyond the interests of the learner at the psychological level. Here the sense of learner-centeredness is rooted in Rousseau's or Dewey's meaning of child-centeredness. At this level, the learners' interests are perceived as being different from those of the adults. Added to this meaning is the idea of freedom of choice and participatory democracy. For lack of a better phrase, this could be referred to as the socio-economic meaning of learner-centred approach to education. The important notion here is that apart from recognizing the interests and nature of the learner at the psychological level, hence the use of various teaching methods, the education provider has to also take into account the learners' socio-

economic needs and interests. Further, the educators are expected to fully co-operate with the learner in determining the course content, the learning experiences and the competencies to be acquired at each educational level. The socio-economic meanings of learner-centredness seems to be echoed by the Social Market perspective as described by Elliot (1993), where learners are perceived as clients, who are aware of what they want in an educational system.

These various statements and views clearly argue the case for a paradigm shift in the Namibian context. It is suggested that given the need for educators to accommodate the 'new learner' who has, because of inadequate general and specific skills to handle academic tasks; inadequate preparation in both primary and secondary education, and a multiplicity of other factors, had difficulty in effective learning, there is need for a paradigm shift in the way that we have traditionally undertaken the task of teaching. This shift could include a consideration of the way the curricula are designed, the way individual courses are taught, the identification of who should do the teaching and how teachers should be prepared to teach.

3.5 ASSESSMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

I briefly define 'assessment' before providing the origin, purpose, guiding principles and types of assessment and the general outcomes of assessment as well as fairness in assessment. I then briefly refer to the relationship between teaching, learning and assessment.

Definition

Assessment is the process of gathering and analysing information in order to make judgments about students' learning and achievement in relation to curriculum goals and outcomes. It can be divided into basically two forms: continuous assessment (CA) and examinations. Continuous assessment is formative and it is done during teaching throughout the year. Examinations are summative and are given at the end

of a unit, year, semester, term or cycle. Brown and Knight (1994) warn that to ensure the quality of assessment, tests and examinations have to be relevant to teaching objectives. Only when the questions are set to suit the teaching can they be considered relevant.

Purposes of assessment

Assessment in short, has a number of purposes and functions which can be summarized as to:

- show whether teaching activities resulted in learning by students;
- clarify whether the aims and objectives of the teaching/learning encounter were achieved;
- show the progress made in curriculum implementation;
- indicate any gaps, or difficulties and problems experienced by students in general or in particular cases;
- motivate students to work harder;
- provide feedback to students or their parents/guardians/sponsors regarding their progress in a certain course or programme. (Gibbs, 1992: Ramsden, 1992; Angelo and Cross, 1993; Brown and Knight, 1994; Knight, 1995).

It is generally believed that assessment procedures employed in tertiary institutions, including universities, are not always efficient, effective, and without flaws. Researching about one's own immediate situations, which was my own interest and concern at the University of Namibia, is not only helpful in solving day-to-day problems in teaching and learning situation in the short term, but also in providing specific research data available for long-term and policies and practices.

Rowntree (1987) emphasizes the educational relevance to teaching that should precede assessment; that is, the need for the means, modes and tools for assessment to be relevant in terms of the learning experiences actually provided. These criteria and procedures should be in conformity with the curriculum content and the teaching and learning process.

In addition to the question of relevance of the assessment procedures is the question of quality of the course or programme to ensure its successful recognition by all stakeholders in education, including parents, students themselves, employers and other educational institutions. This assurance of quality would normally be through a variety of procedures including the use of external examiners, or, which is increasingly the case, the use of external audit.

Finally, there is the issue of the lecturers' and students' view on improving the quality of teaching and learning and performance of students through assessments. Several researchers observe the usefulness and relevance of taking into account lecturers' and students' views in relations to teaching and learning. Balla and Boyle (1994) observe that lecturers' and students' views are pertinent in improving student performance. Lecturers develop personal constructs themselves and they recognize gaps in the system and recognize, although they may not always, suggest remedies or solutions, for a variety of reasons. For instance Ramsden observes that "… many well-informed changes to teaching fall foul of the apathy or departmental colleagues" (1992:7).

Lecturers' suggestions on strategies to improve student learning and performance in terms of what both the lecturers and students can do have relevance for quality improvement. Similarly students can and do recognize gaps in the teaching/learning environment which they may or may not bring to the attention of the institution. On students' views on improving assessment, Falchikov states "… it seems likely that (students') recommendations about strategies for improvement are the most useful of all types of feedback" (1995:165). Students' suggestions on strategies, in terms of what the lecturers, students, departments and Faculties in particular, and the

institution, in general, can do to improve the quality of teaching, student learning and performance can be rich sources of information.

Assessment outcomes

Reform in education in recent years has meant changes in theories of learning, in curricula, in technology, and in assessment practices. Often there are no clear-cut boundaries between these because change in one often means change in the others.

As far as assessment is concerned it has been found that students may benefit from particular formats of assessment, particularly for those with limited proficiency in English, poor reading skills, those from low-income families, and girls (Caygill and Eley, 2001). Caygill and Eley examined the different effects of measured student achievement in mathematics and science on four tasks formats: one-to-one interviews, station tasks requiring physical performance as well as an written response, paper and pencil tasks requiring written responses, and multiple-choice tasks. These different formats were supposed to find if there are any differences in outcome in students' performance.

Mowl's (1996) guide discusses the characteristics and mission of innovative assessment. He contrasts traditional and innovative assessments, thus providing the reader with a choice based on knowledge rather than hearsay. The focus of the guide is on the use of assessment to improve student learning rather than 'just attain grades on the part of the students.

According to Mowl (1996) innovative assessment aims to achieve several outcomes: The first of these is to produce students who are:

- here
- 'deep' rather than 'surface' learners
- highly motivated and committed

- enterprising
- equipped with a range of transferable skills
- capable of self-criticism and evaluation
- fairly and reliably assessed
- active and reactive participants in the learning process, capable of 'creative dissent' rather than simply passive, uncritical recipients of other people's knowledge.

The second aim is to produce a more fertile learning environment and a more rewarding experience for all teachers and students.

Fairness in assessment

Dietel, Herman and Knuth (1991) discuss the issue of fairness in assessment. They say that fairness should not only be seen in the selection of performance tasks, but also in the marking of tests and assignments. Marking procedures should be designed to assure that the outcomes reflect the examinee's true capabilities and not just perceptions and biases of the people assessing the work. This kind of preparation, however, requires training. Teachers who have been practicing tradition ways of teaching and assessment for years cannot suddenly change to new ways without additional training, and this will require increase in other resources as well, thus raising costs.

Lam (1995) says that a fair assessment is one in which students are given equitable opportunities to demonstrate what they know. They also have the advantage of developing higher order thinking skills in students. The question of fairness in assessment is an important one in education. According to Lam (1995), the intended purpose is unfair if:

1. students are not provided with equal opportunity to demonstrate what they know;
2. these biased assessment are used to judge student capabilities and needs; and
3. these distorted views of the students are used to make educational decisions are used to make educational decisions that ultimately lead to limitations of educational opportunities for them (1995:2)

It is possible that some lecturers are aware of some of these ideas, and try to follow these guidelines some of the time. It is however necessary to keep working rigorously on making assessment meaningful and fair as we mark on this "journey" of learning together.

The relationship between assessment and learning has also been found by Struyven, Dochy and Jansen (2002) in their review of the literature. In their investigation of the characteristics and impact of assessment from the point of view of students they found that either the students perceptions of assessment influences their approaches to learning or that students' approaches to learning influence their perceptions of assessment. The students' views about their preferred methods of assessment were also examined and it was found this varied more according to the specific methods compared rather than in general terms.

Biggs, (1996) sees a close connection between assessment and learning. He says, "Learning is driven by assessment, making it vital that high-level assessment tasks are set that truly reflect the overall aims of the institution and the particular course objectives" (1996:11). He illustrates how assessment can drive learning when the mode of assessment, rather than the aims of the curriculum, determine the nature of the understanding the student derives from the taught content.

Entwistle (1993) concludes that when students are engaged in evaluating their own work, they are thinking about what they have learnt and how they learn. They are consequently aware of their thinking and learning processes which encourages deep, as opposed to a surface, approach to learning.

3.6 **CONCLUSION**

"Good teaching is teaching that encourages high quality learning" (Ramsden, 1992:86). 'Quality learning' is understood to mean learning that develops the students' conceptual and critical abilities, and that empowers them to become independent learners capable of learning throughout their life time.

In this chapter a review has been undertaken of pertinent literature dealing with general conceptions of teaching and learning. Particular attention was then focused on issues related to language, learner-centred approaches, assessment and peer-tutoring. We deal with the methodology of the study in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will describe the methods used in the study on the effects of language on teaching, learning and assessment in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, at the University of Namibia.

This study follows both the qualitative and quantitative approach to methodology. Plattner (2001) compares quantitative and qualitative researches. She observes that quantitative approaches have had a longer tradition than qualitative ones. The two approaches differ in that quantitative approaches use "experimental designs, standardised tests, questionnaires, and systematic observation" while qualitative research paradigms are "interested in *what people have to say.*" She elaborates on the differences between quantitative and qualitative research in the following statement:

> The difference between quantitative and qualitative research might be an artificial construct in view of the fact that each quantitative study also has a qualitative component, at least at the stage of designing research questions or an instrument for data gathering. However, it is useful to be aware of major differences between quantitatively and quantitatively oriented research. While quantitative research usually intends to *explain*, qualitative research rather aims to *understand*. Quantitative research is mainly interested in numbers and correlation in order to answer, for instance, questions like 'how many people have a certain attitude and what factors cause these attitudes?' In contrast, the aim of qualitative research is rather to *explore* new domains of knowledge (2001:3).

Following the Action Research paradigm, the research process was a cyclic one, with different stages contributing to the total outcome. I will describe each cycle and its focus and show how each cycle relates to the others.

4.2 PHASE 1: CHANGING MY OWN TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT METHODS

After my return from attending an intensive course on improving teaching and learning in higher education held at the University of Kassel, Germany, as described

in Chapter 1, I sought ways of improving students' learning through improving my own teaching and assessment methods. I have gone through several cycles within this phase, covering a number of years.

My first attempt to change my teaching and assessment methods was conducted with a third year class taking the module **Psycholinguistics**. This was a class of forty five students. I wanted to change my teaching and assessment methods for a number of reasons. One was that many students were very passive, and often sat back waiting for me to give them notes which they would memorise and reproduce in assignments and examinations. The second reason for the change was to encourage participation in class, which would foster more active learning. The third reason was related to the students' English language competence. Through experience, I found that although the students who enter the University of Namibia are admitted on the strength of a C Grade in English in the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), many of them were not competent in the actual use of English. They could not follow lectures well and the outcome of their reading was often not satisfactory. Through discussion with the students in class and outside it became clear that their understanding of the required texts was very low. Even their oral communication was often incomprehensible.

Because of the above reasons I set out to give students opportunity to develop skills which would enable them to do better at their studies. One of the things I did was to reduce the amount of lecturing that I did in order to encourage more student participation. The lecture method has its advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that the students remain passive throughout the lecture. Another is that students never really get to know their lecturers. In the case of the University of Namibia where there is no tutorial system, the lecture method is not sufficient to ensure that students have understood the material that is being provided in the lecture. In universities where there is a tutorial system students engage in discussions where they consolidate the knowledge acquired in lectures. Since the University of Namibia lacked such a system I considered it necessary to find ways of giving students an opportunity to improve their learning outside the lecture method. My efforts to move away from the lecture method were directed at overcoming the disadvantages identified above.

My first efforts at adopting a new approach to teaching and assessment were taken in the module identified above. I had a variety of approaches that I used.

Group Discussions

Since the module **Psycholinguistics** contained knowledge that was quite different from the subjects that students took at secondary school level, many students found it quite difficult. When the students first registered for the subject English, many of them thought that it was just a continuation of the grammar that they covered in secondary school. It was a shock for them to find that there was a lot more to the subject English than they thought. In order to overcome the fear and difficulty of the module, I spent a lot of time engaging students in small group discussions. I varied the approach each time I went to the class.

One way in which I encouraged discussions was to start with group discussions, followed by plenary and then summary. What I used to do was enter the class, write on the blackboard, a topic or several topics for discussion and then ask the class to get into groups of four or five. If there was only one topic, each group would discuss the same topic and come up with its own views on the topic. If there were more than one topic each group would get one topic. Each group was to choose a secretary who would record the ideas that the group agreed upon, and then present those ideas to the rest of the class during plenary. There was always a specified amount of time allocated for each activity. During the group discussions I would go around the class, helping those who had some difficulty, or simply encourage everybody to participate. I made it clear from the start that if there were any difficulties the students were to ask for help.

Plenary sessions involved the whole class with everybody engaged in further discussions, with the ideas provided by the groups as guidelines. I would write, on the blackboard, the ideas provided by the groups, in the way that they were provided. After all the groups had given their input, I asked the whole class to review the ideas on the board. I would ask some challenging questions to help the students to focus their thinking, but often I started by asking the students to ask each other questions

about their own presentations. There were sometimes heated arguments where students did not agree with their neighbour's presentations, but they went ahead with finding solutions to problems. At the end of the group discussions and the whole class plenary sessions, I would then summarise the main ideas on the given topics in the form of a mini-lecture.

A variation of the above process was to start with a mini-lecture in which I introduced the topic of the day. I would speak for about ten minutes, throwing light on the key facts. This would be followed with group discussions as described above, and then the lesson would end with a summary from me. I chose to start with a lecture sometimes when I though that the topic was particularly difficult. By introducing the topic I believed I would make the discussions easier for the students. My belief is that if the students don't understand what they are supposed to discuss the purpose of discussions is defeated. It is important to provide some entry point from which ideas can be generated.

Seminars

Apart from group discussions I also used the seminar method as a way of involving students and helping them understand the substance of the module. This method involved giving students topics covering a number of key areas in the subject and then asking them to consult different sources of information to discover what is available in those areas. In addition, the students would have to show their own understanding of the content of the module by giving their own interpretation of the text. I would give the students a handout of the topics, often ranging from five to eight in number. The students were free to choose a topic of their liking. The last topic was an open one, where I asked students to choose their own topic so long as it fell within the areas provided in the course outline at the beginning of the trimester. I included this open topic because some students always complained that they could not find any topic that they could tackle or that the topics given by the lecturers were too difficult for them to study. By opening an avenue for the students to find their own topic I hoped to meet everybody's interest as well as teaching students how to identify a research topic. There was also a requirement that students who decided to find their own topic must get their topic approved by me before they embarked on it. This was just to avoid a

situation where someone went ahead with some topic that was either too difficult to investigate or that may be outside the expected limits.

The seminar work was organized in such a way that it could be done alone, in pairs or in groups of three. This flexible approach allowed students to help each other if they wanted. I learnt through experience that there are students who are at their best when they work with others, and there are others who are loners and prefer to work alone. The preparation for the seminar presentation was allocated a period of two weeks. The students started working on their seminar papers after some teaching had been done so that there was a general understanding of the subject before a closer investigation was conducted by the students on their own.

On the appointed day(s) the students would make their presentations to the whole class. During the presentations the rest of the class were encouraged to ask questions and make other contributions that they felt necessary. Each presentation was limited to ten minutes, which meant that more than one class period was needed to accomplish the task of hearing everybody's presentation. During the presentations my role was that of chairperson, guiding the presentations and ensuring that each person or group kept to their allocated time. If there were more than two groups which chose the same topic all of them had to present on the same day so that the groups presenting later do not go and re-write their seminar paper in the light of the presentations that had been made already.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an alternative approach that I used to help students learn better. I used this approach in cases where I wanted to introduce a new topic. I would often write an idea in the centre of the blackboard and then throw the idea around the class. The students were to comment on the given topic in a free style manner. After the gathering of ideas I would ask the students to review ideas presented. Some ideas were knocked off because they didn't fit in with the topic. Others were re-modelled to make them read better or more concrete. There was also an effort to make connections between the different ideas suggested, so that several ideas were often

bundled together because they belonged together. With my guidance, the students would then make a summary of the main ideas on the topic.

Sometimes I asked one student to go to the blackboard to write up the ideas in a logical manner, after the class had agreed on the new plan of organising the ideas. This was also a strategy of giving students opportunity to use the English language in their discussions, which would, in turn, improve their oral skills. I made it a condition of discussions that all students would try to use English. It was common for students to use their mother tongues in class when they were talking to each other. I developed a contract with them that we would all avoid using any other language apart from English in our classes.

Second Cycle

After the first attempt at bringing about change in my own teaching and assessment I repeated the effort with another group of students. This time I started from first year. It had been a tradition within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences that the first year was a core year in which different departments shared courses that had similar expectations. For example, Psychology shared first year courses with Sociology and Geography while English shared courses with all the language departments. The courses were co-taught by lecturers from the respective departments.

For several years I was part of the teaching team for the core module **Introduction to Linguistics**. I thought of approaching teaching differently all these years, but it was difficult introducing the idea to the whole group, especially since the leader of the team was a professor. I didn't want to appear like I knew better than the others, especially the senior members of the team. So, I went along with what was going on except in my own group, which was allocated for tutorial purposes.

One year, however, the professor left the University of Namibia and the responsibility of leading the co-team fell on my shoulders. I took this opportunity to introduce the ideas that I had had for some time. The changes were basically along the same lines that I had followed in the Psycholinguistics group that I have described above, with

the difference that I had learnt some things from that experience which helped me improve on this second attempt.

There was, however, another difference in that whereas I was alone in the first attempt, this co-teaching brought about different dynamics in the whole approach to teaching and assessment. We had to negotiate everything from the hours allocated to each lecturer to the type of questions to be set for assessment. We tried to share the hours equally but there were difficulties which made it not quite as successful as it was intended to be. For example, the teaching was allocated according to the interests of the lecturers. One wanted Morphology and Syntax, another Phonetics and Phonology, and another Semantics and Pragmatics, and so on. Depending on the distribution of the different aspects, the time allocated had to be duly allocated.

Another difference was obvious: this was a first year class and the one I had "experimented on" was a third year class. This was definitely going to bring about a change of its own. First years are fresh from school and still have a secondary school mentality. They expect to be taught in the way they were taught in school. Bringing about change is a double challenge. I decided to try it anyway.

I discussed with my colleagues the idea of trying to help the students learn through changing the way we taught. This means reducing the amount of lecturing and giving students more opportunity to talk. The team members were rather sceptical about this approach because there were many hurdles to overcome. One was that many students are afraid of lecturers and won't open up just like that. Another was that the students come from backgrounds that do not allow young people to talk in the presence of adults. Then there was the problem of English. There was also the problem of the classroom layout which meant that students sat in long rows and the only discussion possible was with the immediate neighbour.

Despite all these problems the team agreed to try the approach. We had one lecture hour a week where everybody was expected to attend. The three lecturers who were co-teaching the course took turns to present the lecture during that hour. The course was divided into three parts according to each lecturer's particular area of interest. The division in terms of hours was not in terms of equal number of hours, but

something close to a fair distribution of the work load. This was arrived at through concensus. Of the remaining two hours one was used for group discussions and the other for tests. For the group discussions the class was divided into three random groups. The first twenty or so names on the list were assigned to the first lecturer, the second twenty to the second lecturer and the remaining number would be assigned to the third lecturer. The numbers varied according to intake. Sometimes some students changed courses during the course of the semester. That resulted in some reduction in numbers in some groups. On the whole, however, the division of students was fairly even.

During the hours for group discussions the lecturers took their students to smaller lecture rooms which were more conducive to informal discussions. These discussions were mainly based on the learning that took place or didn't take place during the previous week. The tests that were given each week were used, not just as a source of marks for continuous assessment, but also for measuring student learning. The students went back to the main lecture hall for this weekly test and all did the same test. The discussions were student-led, but, where necessary, the lecturers facilitated the discussions.

One of the biggest tasks for the lecturers was marking weekly tests. This was one of the reasons why my colleagues were not too enthusiastic about my approach. Each lecturer had to mark his/her group's tests ready for the discussion lesson. It literary meant that if the lecturer failed to complete his/her marking the discussions would be affected. Occasionally, this happened, but on the whole the lecturers cooperated with regard to this extra work. Where the lecturer failed to complete marking some other issues would be brought into the discussion and then the test would be discussed the following week, along with another test. Fortunately, this occurrence was rare.

It was not only the lecturers who had a tough time. The students, too, had to study for a test each week. Fortunately, the reading was based on the lecture for the week. The idea behind this intensive approach was to teach students to read, write and think critically. Many came from backgrounds that did not facilitate the development of these skills. A first year at university would be just the right place to "break-in" the students.

The lecturers met weekly to evaluate the progress. Changes were made when needed and marks were compared. If we thought it was necessary to carry over a topic to another week because the concepts involved were too difficult for the students to grasp in one lecture we allowed that adjustment to be made. One of the adjustments we made was for the test to be done on a Tuesday, a week before the discussion class the following Wednesday. This gave both the lecturers and students opportunity to be prepared for their tasks.

A preliminary report was made in the form of a presentation at a workshop on "Teaching Your Very Best", which was held at the University of Namibia in 2001. The proceedings were subsequently published (Otaala, 2002). The project, however, continued and some refinements were made. For example, we found that many students had a "culture" shock because their schools had a different culture from the one we were trying to develop in our classes. Consequently, many could not cope in the initial stages. In the second part of the semester we reduced the number of tests and spent more time discussing approaches to learning and how to put ideas together in tests and assignments. We made these discussions "whole-class" discussions with the lecturers taking turns in leading the discussions.

The lecturers also decided to break the lecture into small parts that allowed students participation. In other words, the lecture became more interactive so that students' concerns would be met immediately instead of waiting for the discussion period.

Third Cycle

After the experience with the first years I decided to follow the same approach with the same group in their second year of study. This time I had them all to myself. That means I taught those students who had decided to register for Linguistics courses. In the second year I taught this group of students the module **Language and Society**, which is a termed **Sociolinguistics** in some universities. In this year I again used the knowledge acquired in teaching the first year. Some things remain the same, but others change. It was in this year that I decided to get the students to give their own views about what we would do to improve teaching and learning. The students

registered many problems in their learning, but English was one of the most prominent. Since I was not teaching grammar I had to find ways of helping the students improve on their grammar within a content module.

Engaging students in discussions was one route that I took. I was of the opinion that if the students spent more time talking to themselves they would improve their English. Teaching grammar in isolation would simply be a case of learning rules and not applying them.

Before writing the assignments I also held discussions with the students to ensure that everyone understood the questions. It was from my experience with other students and also with the same students that I learnt that sometimes assignments had not been done well because the students didn't understand the questions. It was not just a matter of content, but it was also lack of competence in the English language.

After each assignment I would also spend time discussing problem areas with regard to English. First I would put students in groups of three for the purpose of getting them to discuss their own problems with one another. I told them that if there was a problem they couldn't handle they were to ask another group. If everybody else failed to help them then they would ask me. I did not, however, give the students a solution there and then. I would instead register the problem in my notebook, and then later have a plenary session in which we would all attempt to make sense of the difficulty.

Fourth Cycle

A year afterwards I moved with the same group of students to the third year. I used basically the same techniques in my teaching, but with modification that came about because both the students and I had learnt something from the previous years of our being together.

4.3 PHASE 2: INTERVIEWS

Phase 2 involved interviews with both students and lecturers in the Department of English. The interview method is part of the qualitative research paradigm. I chose the interview method because of its adaptability (Gall et al, 1996, Gonzo, 2001) and the fact that people usually prefer talking to writing (West and Kahn, 1993) and their fears about revealing themselves, can be allayed (Gall et al, 1996). I also wanted to get into the minds of my subjects in order to identify what is meaningful, especially through the subjects' own words (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). I took the assumption suggested by Patton (1990) that "the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (1990:278).

While there are several types of interviews such as ethnographic, elite, life-history, critical, and specialised interviews (Lecompte and Preissle, 1993), I chose the in-depth type interview for the lecturers and the focus group interview for the students.

The in-depth interview would allow me to draw out the knowledge held by each lecturer as well as their opinions and attitudes on the issues of my research. Using the general interview guide approach rather than the informal conversational interview or the standardised open-ended interview I was able to determine and standardise the questions before the interview (Patton, 1990).

The general interview guide approach, according to Patton (1990), "involves outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before interviewing begins" (1990:280), but the issues need not be taken in a particular order and the working of questions need not be determined in advance. The interview guide is prepared in order to make sure that basically the same information is obtained from a number of people covering the same material. The interview guide allows the interviewer to explore, probe, and ask questions that will provide information on particular subjects areas using a conversational style. This type of guide is sometimes known as a "loosely structured guide" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992), or semi-structured interview (Shaughnessy et al, 2000), in Gonzo (2001).

The advantage of an interview guide is that it forces the interviewer to carefully decide on the real issues that need to be explored beforehand and then use the available time fruitfully. The interview guide also ensures that interviewing different people elicits more or less the same kind of information. This makes the interview data more systematic and comprehensive. This type of interview is particularly useful when conducting group interviews because it keeps the interactions focused while allowing individuals to put forward their own perspectives and experiences (Patton, 1990).

With the focus group approach I was able to capture varied opinions on the same issue from a number of students of the same level of education and taking the same course.

For the purposes of this research, a semi-structured interview was used. The idea was to give the lecturers and students opportunity to express their views on language issues as related to their work and experiences, but with some sort of structure. The interview guide was developed based on the literature review, the theoretical framework and my personal experience as a lecturer at the University of Namibia as well as other institutions of higher education. Two guides were developed; one for the lecturer and one for the students. Both covered basically the same areas of concern.

In Phase 2 of the research process I interviewed three of the five members of the Department of English. At the time of the interview there were six lecturers in the department: three males and three females, including myself. Since I was the one doing the research that left five members open for interviews. I wanted to interview all of them, but they were not all available. I was able to get the two females remaining and one male. The other two males said they were either too busy doing other things or they were not too keen on the idea of being interviewed as well as having their classes observed, as will be seen later in the section dealing with observations of lessons. I do not want to read too much into the reasons why the two colleagues did not want to be involved in the research. I believe what they told me because I know that they were engaged in other activities outside the university. Perhaps there was also the male/female issue which may have made the two males

afraid of being observed and "exposed" by a female. All I know is that I got on well with those colleagues.

As observed above, the respondents in an interview situation have to reveal their identities to the interviewer. To camouflage the interviewees' identify from the readers of my research report, I gave the lecturers and the students false identities. I told the lecturers of the dangers of having their identities known in the thesis writing of the research process. I told them that I would camouflage their identities by giving them false names. They had the option to choose whatever names they wanted. The female lecturers chose as their names for research purposes, *Victoria Hamilton*, and *Margaret Macy*. The male member of the group chose *Anton Ultuwat* as his new name. For the students I did not give them the privilege of choosing their own new names, but instead gave myself that privilege. This was because I did not know how many would come and how many would stay through the whole interview. For the students I just gave them numbers. I, however, informed the students about what I was doing so as to protect their identities. They were happy with my arrangements.

The interviews I conducted revealed up with many factors that affect teaching and learning at the University of Namibia, but I decided to focus on the effect of language on teaching, learning and assessment. We will see the views of lecturers and students about the role of language on teaching, learning and assessment in Chapter six.

The interviews were conducted in circumstances that suited the interviewees. For the lecturers, there was a one-to-one interview between the lecturer and myself. For Ms Macy and Anton Ultuwat, I conducted the interview in one of the small lecture rooms at the campus of the University of Namibia. For Ms Hamilton, I conducted the interview in her house because she preferred to be in a "more relaxed atmosphere". In her view, her house was the most conducive environment for such an interview.

For the students I used focus group interviews. Patton (1990:335) defines a focus group interview as "an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic". Focus group interview arose out of the recognition that many decisions are made by people through discussion with others, especially in societies where communal decision-making is usual. Patton emphasizes that a focus group interview is not a

discussion, a problem-solving session or a decision-making group, but is indeed an interview. This means that it follows the same pattern and is guided by the same rules as other types of interview.

Focus groups are usually relatively homogeneous in nature and are asked to reflect on the questions asked by interviewer believing that they have shared experiences. The members of the group, which are usually between six and eight, may modify their own position as they hear others, but they refuse to change their positions despite hearing opposing views. Patton (1990) identifies several advantages of focus group interviews. The first is that it is a highly efficient method of collecting qualitative data in that the interviewer can get the views of several people at that focus group interviews "provide some quality controls on data collection in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other that weed out false or extreme views" (Patton 1990:335-6). The third advantage is that because of the group dynamics it is easier to focus on important topics and issues since one can judge when there is consistency in the views expressed. The fourth advantage of focus group interviews is that the participants usually enjoy the experience of sharing ideas.

My experience with the focus group I had proved to be useful in gathering different opinions within one session. There were some dominating students, but the group knew each other well enough to provide checks and balances. If one student tried to dominate, the others would tell him/her to give others a chance. There was also the advantage of having some students express their views better with the help of others. Someone might ask, "Do you mean that …?" And the person would accept or reject the suggestion. On the whole there were very few conflicts. One such conflict became clear: differences in backgrounds. This was particularly obvious in the use of language and competence in English language in general. Foreign students had differing views from local students whole felt their particular political background affected their competence. Some of the foreign students also felt that this was an excuse that was becoming a "horse that is flogged endlessly". My job involved keeping the peace.

One of the disadvantages of interviews which I experienced was the length of time the interviews took. The interview with Ms Hamilton took 3 hours and 15 minutes with a

break of half an hour, while that with Ms Macy took 3 hours and 45 minutes, with 2 short breaks of 15 minutes in which we talked about matters outside the research and also had some tea. The longest interview was with Anton Ultuwat. This took 6 hours and 15 minutes and was conducted over two days.

It would have been inadvisable to continue without a long break because it became clear to me that this particular subject had personal characteristics that needed a different approach. He took longer to make a point and used a lot of anecdotes and other diversions. Interrupting him often would have resulted in creating a negative interview situation. I had to learn to be particularly patient with this subject, and I learnt something about myself, too, in the process. I learnt that I could change my approach with different subjects. Because I knew the person and had worked with him for a number of years what I found in the interview was not altogether surprising. He used the same approach for his lectures as well. Another difficulty I faced when interviewing lecturers was that they had so many other things they wanted to express their opinions on and I had to bring them back to the special concerns I had several times in the course of the interview.

The focus group was made up of seventeen students out of a class of 48 students. The focus group interviews took two sessions conducted over two days. The first session took one hour and fifty minutes and the second took one hour and 25 minutes. Again, the students had a lot of diversions that took away some of the time from the particular concerns of my research. Perhaps some of the time was not altogether wasted because some diversions were in the form of anecdotes and detail that the students thought was necessary that took up some of the time. That, however, fits in with the nature of qualitative research. The researcher has to sort the data to determine which are more important for the particular research questions.

The students that I interviewed were those taught by the same lecturers that I interviewed. I used a focus group, which was made up of volunteer students. This was because I did not want to force anybody who did not want to be there to be part of the group. The focus group came from a second year class doing the module entitled **Practical Criticism and Poetry**. This class was taught, using a co-teaching approach, by all the three lecturers that were interviewed. Dr Ultuwat taught the

theoretical aspects of the course while the other two lecturers, Ms Hamilton and Ms Macy, taught the practical aspects.

The location for the student interviews was the same room that I used for the two lecturers who were interviewed on the university campus. As stated above, I used an interview guide that closely followed the structure of the guide for the lecturers.

The interviews for both lecturers and students were video recorded. I could have used an audio-tape as well, but to relieve myself of the burden of attending to the tape recorder as well as the interview itself, I decided to get the help of someone else who would worry about the video equipment. This allowed me to concentrate on the questions and the subjects of interview. The use of video-tape would also allow for the capture of other aspects of the interview such as body language, which I thought, may become useful at a later stage of the study. I trained the video camera assistant in the kind of things I wanted to capture so that he wouldn't just let the camera run in one spot.

4.4 PHASE 3: OBSERVATION OF TEACHING

In Phase three I observed the classroom interaction of the three lecturers chosen and their students. The focus was on the classes where the three lecturers co-taught so that all the subjects would be observed interacting in the classroom. This was in the course **Practical Criticism and Poetry.** The purpose of observation was to record the lecturers' and students' activities, behaviours, interactions and organisational processes that were relevant to the research questions. Since my research was on action research type of investigation the observation was conducted with a view to generate useful information for action.

Although there are many types of observation I chose the participant observation approach where I would be engaged with the observed. Since observation techniques can be either qualitative or quantitative I chose the qualitative technique. West and Kahn (1993) distinguish between qualitative and quantitative observation techniques when they say that when observation is used in qualitative research it "usually consists of *detailed notation* of behaviours, events, and the contexts surrounding the

events and behaviours" while in quantitative research "observation is usually employed to collect data regarding the number of occurrences in a specific period of time, or the duration, of very specific behaviours or events" (1993:18). The outcome, however, differs in that the detailed descriptions collected in qualitative research can be converted later to numerical data and analysed quantitatively, but the reverse is not possible. In my case the purpose was not to quantify any particular events, but rather to find any behaviours or events that had a bearing on my research questions.

To capture all the details during observation I used video-recording technology. This was because I didn't want to rely on my memory and also because I would get the help of an assistant so as to free myself to make other field notes during observations. Handling the equipment myself would have taken much of my attention and the camera can only record part of the activities at any one time. Another reason I chose video over audio recording was because the audio machine would not have captured much of the activity since it can only be put at one place. There is also the disadvantage that the further the activity from the audio recorder the less the machine will pick up.

To avoid having the participants "freeze" because of the presence of technology in the classroom I did trial runs of the process so as to familiarise the participants with the technology and also the observers. I had the advantage that I had taught the same group of students in their first year and so was fairly known to all the students. I also introduced my colleague who was a member of the university community. I explained the purpose of the observation and got the participant's consent to conduct the observation as well as move around in the classroom.

The lessons taught by the three lecturers in the module identified above, were observed and video-taped over a period of nine weeks, which constituted the whole trimester. Ms Hamilton and Ms Macy had more hours each than Dr Ultuwat, but all had a fair share of the teaching load. Each lecture period was fifty five minutes, which gave students opportunity to change classes and walk to other venues for the next classes.

As well as video-taping lessons, I also made observation notes during the lessons as well as afterwards. There were times when I followed the lecturer to her office to have brief informal discussions of the lesson that had just been taught. This was to get immediate feedback on something that may have risen during the lesson. Since Ms Macy was sharing an office with me we had several conversations about the research, and what she thought of the language issue of her teaching as well as other concerns related to teaching and learning at the university.

Data Analysis for phases 2 and 3

The interview data were consequently transcribed and evaluated using Qualitative Content Analysis as developed by Mayring (1989) and translated and explained by Plattner (2001). This method of analysis reduces the verbal material to systematic categories, which contain the essence of the original content (Gonzo and Plattner, 2003).

Within Plattner's Qualitative Content Analysis I chose to use the techniques of **Summarising Content Analysis**. This technique has got seven steps which are accompanied with S-rules which guide the researcher. The seven steps are:

1. Identifying units of analysis that are relevant to the research in questions.
2. Paraphrasing those text parts that have been identified.
3. Generalising the paraphrases, which involves transforming them to a more abstract level.
4. Reducing the generalisation in such a way that we can build categories which have the same or similar content.
5. Reducing the established categories further if they are still quite comprehensive.
6. Compiling a system of categories which reflect the results of our evaluation.
7. Checking whether the statements summarised in the system of established categories still represent the material at the starting point of analysis.

I started with re-reading the transcribed material, marking those areas that would not be included in the analysis. After determining the units to be analysed I paraphrased the chosen texts, one after the other and wrote down the paraphrases on a large sheet of paper (in this case, on computer printing paper) which I divided into three sections

each with a heading. The headings were: **Page** , one of which was **Paraphrasing** and **Case Number**. In the process of paraphrasing I extracted the essence of the text, leaving out those parts which do not carry content.

One feature of this process of paraphrasing is that we write each unique content item mentioned in the interview on a separate line and we note for each content item the case number and the page number of the interview transcript in which we can find the paraphrased content. This helps us later to look back on the original transcript to confirm what was said.

The process of paraphrasing was followed by **generalisation** where I transformed the paraphrases into a more general, abstract level. Since the technique allows the researchers to determine the level of abstraction I chose my own level. As with paraphrases I wrote down generalisation for all the identified paraphrases. According to Plattner, it is necessary for us to do so "even when the contents become repetitive" (2001:10).

After generalisation I embarked on the process of **first reduction**. Here again I had to choose my own level of abstraction. I followed this with a selection of contents which would build a category on their own. At this stage I deleted some of the material that was the same or similar to other material already identified. Material that seemed unimportant or meaningless was also deleted.

After the first reduction I did a second reduction where necessary. Where the material was still comprehensive I summarised further on a higher level of abstraction. The determination of the level of abstraction was my choice since the technique allows for this. The process involved putting together those categories that were related to each other, integrating some into existing ones, and constructing new categories.

At the next stage I compiled a system of categories which seemed to reflect the results of the evaluation that I had conducted. These categories were much fewer than the ones I had earlier identified. According to Plattner (2001) the categories established at this stage "will form the basis of our interpretation of results which will be accompanied by referring back to our theoretical framework" (2001:13).

The final step in this process of Summarising Content Analysis is, according to Plattner (2001), "to check whether the statements summarised in our system of categories still represent the material at our starting point" (2001:13). I examined the categories again in relation to what the interviewees had said. Since my interpretation was based on my interaction with the interviewees it is possible for someone else to see differently. This is the nature of qualitative research, as is seen elsewhere in this thesis. The researcher has to make a lot of decisions which he/she considers representative of what was observed in the field.

4.5 PHASE 4: THE SURVEY/QUESTIONNAIRE

In this phase, I chose to use the questionnaire to get as much information from both lecturers and students as possible. The information so gather would be used in the next cycle of the research, which is to develop a programme that will meet the needs of the majority of the students in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Perhaps in a later cycle still, another questionnaire, or the same questionnaire, may be administered to other faculties as well in order to get the language situation in the whole university.

The questionnaire was developed from the information that was obtained from the qualitative part of the research. Arising from the interview questions with both lecturers and students were a number of issues that were related to my research questions. Instead of confining myself to the one department that I had dealt with in the qualitative part of the research, I decided to extent the problem to the whole Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences by putting the identified questions into a questionnaire, which was given to the lecturers and students of other departments. This means that a questionnaire was developed which was based on the outcomes of the qualitative interviews. The various categories extracted from the interviews were used for the formulation of questions in the questionnaire. According to Gonzo and Plattner (2003:40), the use of qualitative results of interviews in the formulation of a questionnaire, serves the purpose of ensuring internal and construct validity of the questionnaire.

There were two questionnaires, one for the lecturers (Appendix 3) and one for the students (Appendix 4). The lecturers' questionnaire had 30 questions while the students' questionnaire had 28 questions. The last question on each questionnaire was an open one, asking the subjects to write any additional comments they may have on the effects of language on teaching, learning. and assessment. The other questions involved ticking the appropriate box.

The two questionnaires covered basically the same areas of concern. The lecturers' questionnaire asked questions with regard to their perceptions of students' competence in English, and how that competence affected the lecturers' teaching and the students' learning, as well as assessment. The students' questionnaire contained questions on students' perceptions on their own competence in English, and how this affected the lecturers' and students' interaction in class, as well as students studying and assessment skills.

Questionnaires are usually sent to respondents by mail, but this often results in low return rates of about 30% as well as response bias if only certain groups of people decide to complete the questionnaire (Shaugnessy et al, 2000), as reported by Gonzo (2001).

For the present study, I personally administered the questionnaire to the target group. I had the advantage that the target group was within reach and I did not have to struggle to get to the target group. I also had another advantage in that I knew most of the members of the target group since I work with them as colleagues or they are students within my own institution. In the case of lecturers a visit to their offices ensured that I had a personal conversation with the lecturer where I explained the purpose of the questionnaire. I had, of course, written a short letter on the questionnaire itself, in which I indicated the reason for the research. Talking to the lecturers face to face made it easier for them to remember my request. Some of them would meet me in the corridors and say, "I will attend to that questionnaire tomorrow or within the week". Many of them honoured their promise.

I did not use a random sampling method since my intention was to get all lecturers to fill in the questionnaire. There were lecturers that were purposely excluded from this

part of the research because they and their students did not use English as a medium of instruction. These lecturers were those teaching languages other than English. These were Afrikaans, German, French, Portuguese, Spanish and African languages. There were some courses taken by students registered for African Languages that were conducted in English, but this was in other disciplines such as Linguistics. It was for this reason that African Languages lecturers and their students were excluded from the study. Some lecturers in other departments were also on study leave, and this reduced the number of lecturers that received the questionnaire. Thirty-six questionnaires were sent out and 34 of them were returned (94%).

For the students I asked the lecturers individually if I could use some of their lecture time to administer the questionnaire. Many of them agreed since the questionnaire was short enough for the students to complete within ten or fifteen minutes. I personally visited the lecture halls to talk to the students, explaining what I had already written down on the first page of the questionnaire in the form of a short letter. I told the students if they felt strongly against completing the questionnaire, they were free to opt out. In many of the classes only one or two students exercised this option. Some students even asked me further questions on the effect of English on their studies. For example, in one class one student wanted to know how it is that such a study was not done before since the students experience many language problems in their learning. In another class where I had gone to administer other questionnaires a student who had already completed the same questionnaire in another class asked what I was going to do with the findings of that research. When I asked her why she wanted to know, her response was that the questionnaire was very good because it touched on the matters that are true. She added that something ought to be done about the language situation at UNAM.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that there was generally a very positive response to the request for both the lecturers and students to complete the questionnaire. I only had one negative experience where one class was supposed to take place but the lecturers didn't show up. The student's disappointment was carried over to me and it took long to calm down the students and get them to look at my questionnaire. I thought I would get less than half completed forms, but it turned out quite well in the end.

There were also quite a number of questions on the content of the questionnaire, particularly on the open-ended questions. The students wanted to know what exactly they should write in that section. I told them they could say anything they felt about the particular topics on the questionnaire but not other unrelated issues. This is the advantage of my presence during the administration of the questionnaire. I was able to avoid one of the disadvantages of administering questionnaires, which is that the respondents do not have an opportunity to ask questions of clarity, especially where questionnaires are posted (Shaugnessy et al, 2000), as reported by Gonzo, 2001). Since my questionnaires had only one open-ended question it was easy for the students to complete and it look any students a much shorter time than expected.

There were 300 questionnaires administered and 296 of them were received (99%), since I personally administered them. The four missing questionnaires can be accounted for by the fact that I gave students the option not to participate in the exercise of completing the questionnaire. I was, however, very happy with the outcome of the exercise of administering the questionnaire.

The next major step was putting the data onto an SPSS computer programme. This was a lengthy exercise and I made use of an assistant who was trained with the help of a colleague teaching research methods to masters degree students at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The evaluation of the questionnaire data was based on descriptive and inductive statistics, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Bryman and Cramer, 2001). No cross tabulations, correlational analysis or regression analysis was done. I simply looked at the percentages of responses that supported or did not support the findings in the qualitative part of the research. The results are indicated in chapter six.

4.6 **CONCLUSION**

This chapter describes the various steps in the action research process which was followed in the collection of the data for the study. The following three chapters

describe the various results of the study, followed by a final chapter dealing with the summary, discussion, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter data from the qualitative part of the research process will be presented. As can be seen from the methodology chapter, there were three qualitative methods used in this study: changing pedagogical approaches to teaching, interviews with both lecturers and students, observation of lessons. Appendix 1 and 2 (the interview guidelines for lecturers and students, respectively) show that there are many related to teaching and learning. Although all of them are relevant I focused only on those issues that are more closely related to the other aspects of the research, which are language and assessment. Each of the data collection methods yielded results pertaining to teaching and learning, the language aspect of teaching and learning, and assessment. It should be noted here that in accordance with qualitative methodology, there is emphasis on what the subjects themselves said. Some of the language used may have grammar errors and other hesitation features associated with spoken language. I did not make any effort to correct those errors or change those features. In this chapter I shall look at each of the identified areas above.

5.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

As indicated above and in Appendix 1 and 2, there are many facets to teaching and learning, but all of them are not discussed in this thesis. Based on the outcome of the interviews which were video-taped and transcribed as discussed in chapter 4, I considered the following areas to be related to language and assessment: teaching and learning objectives and teaching methods used by the lecturers. The views of lecturers and students with regard to the identified areas will be discussed side by side

Use of objectives in teaching and learning

The lecturers had a lot of things to say about teaching and learning objectives and how they impact the lecturers' teaching and students' learning. The main issues with regard to objectives that were raised concern the **types** of objectives, the **sharing** of

objectives between lecturers and students and between lecturers themselves, the **relevance** of objectives and **outcomes** of objectives.

Asked if **objectives and learning outcomes** are relevant to teaching and learning Ms. Macy answered that they are "the central point of planning, for teaching and for assessment". As far as she was concerned "you cannot teach effectively if you don't know what the learning outcomes are going to be, what your teaching objectives are, you can't assess effectively". Ms. Macy added that she used to have "a plan upon which my lesson would be structured, and it always had teaching objectives" and she "had specific objectives for each lesson or for each course unit".

Ms Hamilton had similar views about the role of objectives in teaching and learning. For her objectives "are very important because they give you a focus, eh mm on what you are aiming at, especially in relation to the amount of time, otherwise you go on waffling about nothing". Like Ms Macy, Ms Hamilton saw objectives as helping to structure a lesson. She said that "[Y]ou've got to have a structure and aims to focus your teaching", and again like Ms Macy, Ms Hamilton also thought that "each lesson, ideally, should have a teaching objective" … what you are "trying to put across in this session". Ms Hamilton concluded that "objectives and structure are important because otherwise it would be a wind of human waffle and without any rationale".

Dr Ultuwat was of the opinion that objectives "are always there to guide the lecturer and the lessons". In his view, you cannot teach without objectives.

Setting objectives

In setting objectives Ms Macy consults members of the department and the course outline and, together with other lecturers, objectives are determined "through discussions in the department". Objectives are also set, according to Ms Macy, "through the selection of the texts … and … the description in the course, ah mm booklet …" Through discussions in the department you agree on what you "expect students/learners to deal with".

To meet her objectives Ms Macy "broke down" her course into two parts. One part concerned "skills involved in understanding, analyzing and responding to poetry", which was her subject and the other was the "materials side", which "was largely the text side itself". Ms Macy's objectives were focused on these two "components".

When setting objectives Ms Hamilton has certain considerations in mind which relate to the teaching and learning situation. For example, she considers "the cultural background of the students, the academic background of the students" so that she can teach at an appropriate level and use materials that are "culturally relevant" to the students.

For Dr Ultuwat, objectives are "part and parcel of the whole teaching plan" and should be set early in the programme. The background of the students also contributes to this planning, according to Dr Ultuwat.

The lecturers observed, however, that having objectives was not enough. The objectives have to be relevant. They said that objectives should be relevant for planning, teaching, lesson and course structure as well as assessment.

Involving students

Asked if she involves students in the setting of objectives Ms Macy answered that the "students are not involved …" but it is something she "would like to do". However, Ms Macy "did involve them in selecting their texts or which parts of the course they wanted to be mainly involved in" and also she "did involve them in being more aware of what they were supposed to be mastering". This means that Ms Macy is aware of the importance of objectives in teaching and learning and why all the parties involved should participate in setting objectives.

As far as setting objectives is concerned Ms Hamilton thought that students should be involved because "we [the lecturers] have our own ideas but what do they [the students] want from having been taught a course, how do they feel?" Ms Hamilton seemed to link involving students in developing objectives with the evaluation of teaching. At the opening of her answer to the question of whether she would consider

involving students in the development of objectives, she said "[T]hat is why when we have our evaluation form I very much stress … I really welcome, not just ABCD and E, but when there is space at the end for general comments, both on the lecturer and on the course, I really stress getting comments on that". Later in the same answer she said, "I think we can learn a lot from them because we get their feedback … their perspective rather than your own" and they "might be very different from the way you feel it went". She confirmed this in the following statement.

> … I think you could involve them in objectives. I tried that in the way we conducted our evaluation. And I have had that discussion with my 4th years of the evaluation form, about ideas and books which they liked, how they would like it done differently. It has involved objectives really.

This means that students in any one year participate in setting objectives for the following year's group of students. Those students do not set objectives for their own benefit.

Dr Ultuwat said he did not involve students in setting objectives but it "would be the ideal". The difficulty, in his view, is that there is not much time to involve students and this takes a lot of effort.

Sharing objectives

Apart from setting **objectives** it is also important to **share** objectives. Ms Hamilton tries to share objectives with students "the very first week … in the form of outlines, course outlines which is now modular outlines …" and "at the end of every session…" where she tries "to tell them [the students] what we are going to do today".

As far as sharing of objectives is concerned Ms Macy said the course "was divided into sections with headings which explained which skills they [the students] were to master … what they need to know …" and the "activities related to that ...". As part of sharing objectives with students Ms Macy said that she "tend[s] to give an awareness type of presentation – what did you learn? What was this all about". This was a "type of assessment" which she, unfortunately, could not always conduct because "there was no time to do that" in all the courses. In one course, however, Ms

Macy "discussed a lot with students about … what was required of them, and they developed, for example … we had those oral presentations … they then had to develop their own presentations to cover those things".

Collectively, the lecturers considered that the sharing of objectives with students was important because it enables students to:

- say what they want in the course
- indicate how they feel
- give their perspective to lecturers which may be different from the lecturers' perspectives
- give lecturers feedback on whether or not they have been successful
- help lecturers learn from students.

Not only is it important to share objectives with students, but it is also important to share objectives with fellow lecturers in the department. According to Ms Hamilton "you should check with those you are going to teach the course with so that there is a kind of commonality so that you know that whatever you are doing there is a unity of purpose and there is a shared kind of ethos". Ms Hamilton thought that although each lecturer may have "personal objectives" it is important to have departmental objectives as well which she called "overall objectives".

Sharing objectives between lecturers has its advantages, according to the lecturers interviewed. This sharing:

- helps develop a commonality in purpose
- leads to a sharing of ethos and philosophy
- creates harmony
- harmonises personal objectives with departmental ones.

On the types of teaching and learning objectives there was so much similarity in opinions expressed by the lecturers that I can summarise these objectives as being:

1. To enable students to:
    - be more confident both verbally and in writing
    - develop critical thinking skills
    - enjoy the subject
    - talk confidently about the subject
    - understand the nature of the subject
    - identify what makes the subject
    - think critically about the subject
    - associate what they learn with the local situation
    - understand the key concepts in the subject
    - apply the concepts learned from the subject to real-life situations
    - write critically and understandably about the subject
    - acquire techniques used in learning the subject
    - link the nature of the subject to other aspects of knowledge
2. To remove the mystique and student fear of the subject
3. To remove the perception that some subjects are difficult
4. To inculcate questioning in students
5. To give students practice in articulating ideas between themselves and with the lecturer
6. To go deeper and make students familiar with analytic terms that are usually associated with the subject.

The above objectives certainly relate to language and assessment. Analysing a subject requires understanding and there can be no understanding without effective use of language. When assessing student learning one has also to take into consideration the type of knowledge that students are able to display in their oral and spoken forms of assessment.

While lecturers had a lot to say about teaching and learning objectives, students had difficulty with this topic. There was a lot of silence when I asked them what their learning objectives were. Even when I asked if they were aware of the lecturers' objectives for teaching and learning, the students still took long to understand what I was talking about. Finally, after pausing the question in different ways, the students

were able to say that the reason they came to university was to get a degree. Since this was the case, one of them said, "it is the lecturers' job to make sure they get the degree". When I asked about their part, one of the responses was that their job "was to study hard and pass". There was no point pursuing the idea since it seems the students' view of objectives was unlimited.

Teaching methods/styles

Teaching methods constitutes a factor in teaching and learning in the view of the lecturers interviewed. The lecturers were of the opinion that a variety of methods is preferable to using only one method because different methods may suit different groups of students. They were also of the opinion that "terrible" teaching methods "do not enable students to understand and "lead to no learning" at all.

The methods that were identified by the lecturers were:

- the lecture
- learner-centred methods such as group work, peer-editing, self-editing, seminars, and discussions
- discovery methods
- team teaching.

The lecturers also provided detail on some of the identified methods which show how they might affect teaching and learning.

The Lecture

According to the lecturers interviewed the lecture method is commonly used at institutions of higher learning for reasons of conveniences.

Ms Macy was of the opinion that "there are ulterior things … about the university being bound to lecturing and leaving them [the students]] to it". She suggested some of these "ulterior" things are being "partly laziness on the part of the lecturer, and

partly ignorance on the part of the lecturer about teaching at all". Other reasons are that "[M]any lecturers have not been teachers, and have no teacher training …"

On the **lecture method** both Ms Macy and Ms Hamilton did not like its use. Ms Hamilton suggested that using several methods "rather than being over-reliant on the lecture, dealing with 50 minutes of lecture", would be "too boring" for the students because it "can't retain the concentration for that long", and "it doesn't get much participation from the students".

For Ms Macy the lecture method is something she uses "once in every course to deliver some information in the way that I want them to have it …" and "[R]ather than relying on them [students] reaching X, Y, Z, … I then give them an overview of something …". Ms Macy, however, believes that the lecture should be accompanied by some other strategies. She would "normally expect them [students] to perform some tasks while I am giving the lecture". On the effectiveness of the lecture method Ms Macy thought that "it has a place, a minimal place, in setting the scene". Ms Macy felt so strongly against the lecture method that she "would resign" if she were asked to use only the lecture in her teaching. The reasons she hates the lecture include the fact that "the lecturer becomes much more knowledgeable and does all sorts of background research, and the student does less" while "the objective is for the student to do more …"

Ms Macy repeated her dislike of the lecture method when she said, "I don't believe in the lecturing method" because "I don't think it promotes discussion and learning in any way". She believes "it has its role which is kind of … fitting into the whole thing …"

Like Ms Macy, Ms Hamilton is also of the opinion that a lecture has a place in teaching at university. Ms Hamilton "occasionally put[s] in 10 minutes [myself] to explain something". This is while using other methods and strategies. In other words Ms Hamilton said, "[B]ut for me personally I do tend not to use just a straight lecture."

As a way of improving the lecture method Ms Hamilton suggested video-taping the lecturer's lessons. She believed the lecturers would discover, to their shock, that what they have been doing may be disastrous for student learning. Ms Hamilton believed that if the lecturers' lessons were video-taped the lecturers would "learn their mannerisms, their speed, their volume, their boringness, or their homour" and that would enable them to "improve their … presentation styles". In addition, the lecturers would also "see their content" which would enable them to see if "they make sense", if the content is "interesting" and "structured" or if it has "a… logic".

If the lecturers see videos of their lectures they will also see students' reaction to the lectures. According to Ms Hamilton a lecturer will be able to "see the student faces" and that will tell the lecturer if the students are "laughing", "enjoying", "looking blank", "responding", "asleep", "drunk", and "what" they are "doing".

Ms Hamilton thinks a lecturer can make a lecture interesting but that would depend on the lecturer's "personality", the "content" they are presenting, and "how they put it across".

Even with these possibilities to improve the lecture method Ms Hamilton was still of the opinion that the method is not a good method because "basically many people … their concentration span is barely more than 4 minutes" and if the lecturers "are exceptional persons they could hold an audience's attention for 15 minutes non-stop".

Dr Ultuwat view agreed with the views expressed by the other lecturers interviewed. He said that the lecture method "makes people lazy because they just sit there and think about other things" and the whole content is lost.

In summary the lecture method has the following advantages, according to the lecturers interviewed, in that it is:

- useful as a way of explaining ideas/concepts
- useful when teaching large classes
- successful if accompanied by other methods/strategies.

Despite these advantages the lecture method also has some disadvantages which are:

- only the lecturer becomes more knowledgeable
- only the lecturer does all sorts of background research
- it does not promote discussion, participation or learning
- it can be boring.

Collaborative learning/Group Work

One way in which student learning can be improved is through collaborative learning which involves students working in groups, teaching and learning from each other. Collaborative learning is learner-centred and has many advantages. Collectively, the lecturers were of the opinion that collaborative learning/group work

- gets students to do something
- makes students participate
- enables students to bounce ideas off each other
- makes things stick in students' minds
- enables students to know each other
- gives students practice in articulating ideas
- creates a more vibrant atmosphere
- is enjoyable.

On the use of **group work** in teaching, which she put under the learner-centred methods, Ms Macy explained how and why she organizes her students into groups. "Sometimes", she said, "I let them choose their groups and sometimes I choose groups for them and a lot of the time I use some sort of mixing of activity". With small classes they form a small group on their own so everything is "… almost like plenary work" but with bigger groups most of the time they choose their own groups. She has good reasons for this. One is the "… pressure of time …" and she doesn't "want to waste time in mixing activities, or re-arranging groups". The other more fundamental reason is, according to Ms Macy "… they are not very familiar with me,

and they are as familiar with each other as they might be" and she "want[s] them to be in groups that they are comfortable with".

The second reason which Ms Macy mentions above is important as far as teaching and learning is concerned. Ms Macy believes that when students choose their own groups and group members they often end up in mixed ability groups which she believes have an advantage for learning in that they help each other better when they are friends than when they are strangers.

Ms Hamilton also prefers using group work. She said that the use of such methods "… is much more interesting if they [the students] can bounce ideas off each other". What the lecturer does is "chair or put an input into what questions they are going to discuss, but they are going to have a feedback into the plenary session". This seems to involve students in their learning, as is confirmed below.

One advantage of using group work, according to Ms Hamilton, is that "… it gives variety to the … the whole session". The other advantage, which is the "main advantage", is that "it actually gets them to do something". She added that "if they are involved in actually articulating something, thought about things, it will stick in their mind what they have discussed in that session".

Dr Ultuwat cited one advantage of group work as being that of allowing students to "work with each other" and "actively participate in their learning". He did not talk about how he does this, but was articulate in the advantages that method brings to the students.

Although group work has advantages in that students are engaged in their own learning, these advantages may not always be realized. There are reasons for this. One them is the non-participation of students in all the activities. The lecturers are aware of this non-participation.

Asked how she ensures that all students participate during group work Ms Macy said, "I don't know that I have done". She, however, offered some suggestions when she said that in small classes where she uses the seminar-type methods each student "had

to present on each book … to take a class on each book". In the larger classes where the classes were divided into small groups, Ms Macy encouraged participation, in her own words, in the following ways:

> … If I am going around and I notice that someone is not being included, I stop by that group saying, "are you working together?' Or I will come around and interject questions and direct them at the quiet ones. Or I will say … or I notice that one person is kind of being by herself, or someone looks like she needs help, I usually go in that direction.

On ensuring participation Ms Hamilton said: "[Y]ou can't ensure participation". All you can do is "give them interesting questions to discuss and hope that they are discussing those questions", but "[Y]ou never know whether they are discussing last night's party".

There are also other strategies that the lecturer can employ to try to ensure student participation during group work. These, according to Ms Hamilton, include "giving them interesting questions", and "by saying that we get feedback from each group … and that you will be going round to see each group, and you actually go around…"

Dr Ultuwat also suggested "asking students to give feedback" as a way of ensuring participation. He, too, observed that "one can never be sure what those folks out there are doing behind your back".

From the above we learn that in order for group work to be an effective teaching method both the lecturer and the students have to be actively involved. Neither party can sit back and relax.

On whether the students actually like group work Ms Hamilton was positive. She based her judgement on past student evaluations as well on what she sees in the classroom during lessons. We see this in the following statement:

> Actually I do. But that's probably because, in the past evaluations, they have said they enjoyed that part of it. And I can see it in their faces. They are more … There is a much more vibrant atmosphere in the class when they are … you could hear the conversation buzz… the

> lowest level is louder, they are actually interacting they are getting to know each other better than they had done before. I think they do enjoy it.

This statement seems to suggest that there are advantages for students' learning. Enjoyment seems to come through in Ms Hamilton's statement as a means of encouraging student learning. We see this also when she is discussing the advantages of video-taping lectures. Again when she discusses the choice of material for learning she says they should include themes that students will enjoy such as love.

Group work was seen by the lecturers interviewed as being part of learner-centred methods. The lecturers were aware of some people's objections to the use of such methods in higher education because lecturers often believe that the lecture is the most appropriate method, if not, the only method for higher education. The lecturers interviewed were of the opinion that learner-centred methods can be used at all levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary) because they involve:

- giving students control of their learning
- treating students like adults
- enabling students to understand in their own way
- enabling students to find things on their own
- enabling students to do appropriate research at appropriate levels
- doing whatever is necessary and suitable in a particular situation
- using student ideas
- avoiding talking at students
- doing things that are fun and lively.

It is not, however, the case that all lecturers can and do use learner-centred methods. The lecturers interviewed were of the opinion that the use of learner-centred methods is determined by the lecturers' training, personal prejudices and willingness to accept students' suggestions. It is often the case that students' needs are ignored because of the lecturers' focus on themselves or the content of their courses.

Ms Macy identified a separate class of learner-centred methods which she called discovery methods. They could involve group work but they could also be used for individual students.

Ms Macy believes in "discovery methods" which help students to find things for themselves. She said that even when students ask her specific questions she doesn't always give a direct answer, but instead helps them find the answer on their own. For example, if students ask her "to explain the meaning of a poem to them" she "will then give them an exercise to help them discover the meaning for themselves" and so "sort of meet them half-way". Ms Macy said she "… very much like[s] the discovery approach when you give guiding questions or, even better, the learner-generated questions where they [the students] generate the questions themselves and then they answer them".

On the **seminar method** (discussion) Ms Macy chose this method partly because "students found the reading "very heavy" for some texts. So she "broke it [the text] into sections" and "had them [the students] working on … questions on each section". In Ms Macy's view this "was a private study with guiding questions from me … followed by a class discussion on selected questions by them [the students]". Before this, however, Ms Macy said, she gives her students a "familiarization introduction at the beginning" which will provide a "background" to the text and also helps the lecturer find out "what they [the students] know …". It is only after this that Ms Macy gives students a "theme to explore in relation to the text".

As a teaching strategy rather than a method Ms Hamilton said that she shows videos to students if those videos have relevance to the topic of the lessons. For example, Ms Hamilton said she showed one of her classes an Italian movie IL POSTINO which was beautiful, in her opinion. Her belief in the use of such aids, where they are relevant, is reflected in her evaluation of the effects of the movie IL POSTINO on students' learning. This was her evaluation:

> They [the students] loved it. And it was about the nature of poetry. It showed the story of eh mm, eh mm a Cuban … a Chilean poet, Pablo … who came to Italy. And it showed his relationship with the postman. It was a delightful movie. And … as they enjoyed there

> were also strong elements about what makes poetry and discussion about the nature of metaphor but in the context of the film. And they really enjoyed it.

In the view of the lecturers interviewed, the lecturers' qualifications relate directly to teaching methods. Ms Hamilton showed how her diploma in education feeds her "teaching methodology", "ethos" and "philosophy", and also makes her a "reflective practitioner". Even students' "comments" are incorporated into the methodology".

Ms Macy, commenting on how she comes to use certain teaching methods said that "… some of them come from training and some from personal prejudice", which suggests also that training is a necessary aspect of equipping a lecturer for effective teaching. Ms Macy also suggested that a lecturer should respond to students' needs by adopting and adapting students' suggestions in her methods. We see this when she said, "… I have adopted certain methods that have to deal with certain situations or certain requests that I think are valid from students".

Asked why she uses different methods in her teaching Ms Macy answered that she does so "… to achieve the learning objectives". Asked if she had other methods she would like to try Ms Macy replied that she would like to try "… a more learner involvement in planning and assessment" and "… other kinds of methods that put more … more responsibility on the learner". This seems to confirm Ms Macy's view elsewhere in this thesis that "… the objective is for student to do more" in the teaching/learning process.

Asked why she hasn't tried some new methods Ms Macy's answer was that new methods may be "unknown or because … timing seems to be against me all the time, and it takes more time to … think of a new method and incorporate it into your teaching".

Another strategy used by Ms Hamilton is to "organize an outside speaker" to talk to the students about a topic related to what the students are learning. Other strategies she uses include the use of a "Koala bear puppet", "playing a tape", and "juggling". Ms Hamilton looked at these strategies as "methods" and she believed "[T]here isn't a particular method I haven't tried …".

From the above we learn that the lecturers involved in this research used a variety of teaching methods in order to provide students with as many opportunities to learn as possible. With each having advantages, and disadvantages, the benefits and drawbacks can be distributed so that all students can improve their chances of succeeding.

Team teaching

The previous teaching methods actually involved each learner and his/her students. Team teaching, on the other hand focuses on lecturers working together. This type of collaboration can have advantages and disadvantages for both lecturers and students.

Collaborative or team teaching involves lecturers in sharing aspects of the course in which they are team teaching. This type of collaborative work requires careful planning and execution.

The lecturers interviewed identified the advantages of team teaching for lecturers as being:

- each lecturer teaches to his/her strengths
- each lecturer teaches what interests her/him
- different lecturers can combine efforts
- Ddfferent lectures can set comparative questions

The advantages for students were identified by the lecturers interviewed as being that the student can

- experience different types of teaching
- tap into different lecturers' expertise
- make connections between texts.

In Ms Macy's words, one advantage of team teaching is that students "get 3 types of teaching" and "if they don't enjoy one they can have a change with the other ... or to be more positive, if they can get the benefit of 2 sides it has the advantage of taking … of tapping into each individual tutor's expertise in specific text". Another advantage is that "we could teach to our strengths" meaning that each lecturer chooses what he/she is best at or is particularly interested in.

Again, this arrangement focuses on student learning even though it is the lecturers who are involved in the actual organization of the method.

There are, however, disadvantages of using this method which were identified by the lecturers. They are:

- lack of continuity
- lack of consistency
- lack of coordination
- apparent fragmentation of courses/modules
- lecturers may not cover what they set out to do.

These disadvantages were said to be for both lecturers and students.

According to Ms Macy, team teaching has one obvious disadvantage of "lacking continuity and coordination" in that the lecturers may teach similar topics and yet be unaware of it. Ms Macy gives an example of two texts which she and Ms Hamilton taught separately and in ignorance of what the other was teaching. Her suggestion was that "those two could have been much better combined" and they "tried to do that when … the students sort of naturally made connections". Although Ms Mason "set some comparative essay questions" as a result of this effort she is of the opinion that "… If you were teaching all those courses you could have done a lot of comparative work and made a lot more connections, giving them [the students] a lot more consistency and continuity". So, Ms Macy, although recognizing the advantages of team teaching, has praise for individual handling of courses by the lecturers.

For the lecturers interviewed team teaching seemed to have both advantages and disadvantages.

Asked whether there are special methods for teaching at tertiary level Ms Macy was of the opinion that the same methods can and should be used at different levels of education. What is different is the way those methods are used to fit the level of students. In her view "at school I think kids need to be given control" and "treated much more like adults than the old-fashioned school used to do" and "university people need to be given a chance to have control in the same way". For Ms Macy "it is all about learner-centredness", "… enabling people, in their own way, to understand … to … and to find their own … and to … take control of learning". What is different between, say, primary school and university is "what you do with it". Ms Macy gives an example of similarities between primary school and university. At both levels of education research should be encouraged. The difference would come in that "whereas a Grade 6 learner would not be expected to go and do a big research" a university student would be expected to do more to suit his/her level.

Ms Hamilton, too thought that there are some similarities between teaching at school level and teaching at university. Basically, it is about recognizing similar things at both levels of education such as student reactions to different situations.

Ms Macy and Ms Hamilton observed that many lecturers may not adopt new teaching methods even if they are aware of them because

1. of a lecturer's lack of training in teaching methods
2. the term is too short to incorporate new methods
3. there is no time to learn new methods.

Dr Ultuwat's opinion was slightly different from the opinions of his two colleagues in that he expected "more lecturing at university than in the lower levels". He said that other methods of teaching are "useful at tertiary level" as well.

The lecturers interviewed, however, noted that some reasons why lecturers do not adopt new methods have to do with the lecturer's personality. For example, it was

observed that some lecturers are "lazy" or too "tired" and "unwilling" to try new methods.

We learn from the above that adoption of new methods by a lecturer is influenced by factors **internal** to the lecturer as well as **external** ones.

Both Ms Macy and Ms Hamilton gave suggestions as to what could be done to improve the teaching/learning situation at the university. Much of this had to do with the administration of the university, which is not discussed here. Those suggestions are 'external' to the lecturer.

There are however suggestions that were made by both Ms Macy and Ms Hamilton, that are 'internal' to the lecturer. Ms Macy suggested that lecturers should be 'self-critical' and avoid looking for reasons outside of themselves for why they were not successful.

Ms Hamilton gave several solutions. One of the solutions is what Ms Hamilton called "time management". A second solution is "planning your workload". A third is "anticipating what is to come …". A fourth solution is "having good rapport and relationship with colleagues" which means "organizing your support structure in terms of what you need". Ms Hamilton believed doing all these things is important because whatever you do "will show in your teaching", and "students can tell" if there are other things interfering with your teaching.

On teaching methods generally the lecturers interviewed were of the opinion that having lecturers' teaching video-taped would help them improve their teaching. A video of a lesson may show the lecturer aspects of teaching that concern the **lecturer**, the **students**, and the **content**. Lecturers can discover about their own mannerisms, speed of teaching, and volume of voice, which may affect their teaching and students' learning. They can also find out whether the students are having fun, responding to what is being taught, looking blank, or simply doing something else instead of participating in the lecture. As far as content is concerned a video-taped lesson can reveal to the lecturer whether or not it is interesting, structured or logical. It is,

however, recommended that lecturers find out how they teach and their effect on students' learning.

The fact that I used the very method suggested by the lecturers constituted part of the action necessary to improve teaching and learning. The lecturers already learnt something about their teaching and learning from the video-taping of their classes. I discussed the lessons with them and I gave each one a copy of part of the recorded material. Ms Hamilton asked and received a transcript of part of the interview sessions as well. She said that the questions I asked in the interview helped her "think more about [my] own philosophy of teaching".

Students' views on teaching methods were generally in agreement with the lecturers' views. For example, with the exception of one student, the students interviewed said they liked the methods used by their lecturers. The one student was of the opinion that "constant group work is boring" and that "it is okay to have it sometimes".

5.3 LECTURERS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS ON LANGUAGE

Interviews with individual lecturers

There were many factors affecting teaching and learning that were identified by the lecturers, but only those that directly affect teaching and learning will be presented here. We will now look at these factors.

Lecturers' Language Background

One of the factors that the lecturers identified as affecting teaching and learning was the lecturer's language background. This was considered important because the lecturer may come from a background where English is either a first language or a language that is highly developed and used in everyday communication in all spheres of life. Since Namibia is a country where English has only been the official language, and the language of instruction, for about thirteen years, many speakers are not yet fluent. A lecturer coming from a different background may not appreciate the difficulties that students may experience because their background is completely

different from that of the lecturer's. For example, Ms Hamilton, admitted that she speaks too fast and expects students to follow. She also observed that she finds the students' reading speed to be "far too slow" for her liking. She was British and has worked in two African countries, Swaziland and Namibia, and yet she has found it difficult to slow down her speed and perhaps lower her expectations of students who come from a background that is different from hers.

Students' language background

The lecturers interviewed felt that the students they were teaching had language difficulties which resulted in them having difficulty in expressing themselves, understanding the texts they read, analyzing texts and studying on their own. In Ms Macy's words "different language levels" affect teaching and learning. She explained how language can affect a student's learning when she said, "…it just breaks my heart to see a man or woman who is clearly intelligent or might be intelligent enough , who might have enough spirit, enough imagination and enough everything to do his course, but can't because they haven't got enough English". This clearly shows how language competency affects a student's ability to complete a course or do well in it.

Ms Macy cast doubt on the role of the Language Centre in improving students' language skills when she said, "… you wonder what's happening now, whether he [the student] is working at the Language Centre; whether he is getting more competency there". This view was supported by the students. One of them said that what they learn at the Language Centre "really doesn't help much". The other students echoed this view. This suggests to me that there is need for the lecturers, not only in the Department of English, but also in the whole university, to work with the Language Centre to develop more appropriate courses to suit different students.

There seems to be a close relationship between essay writing skills and language skills, according to the lecturers interviewed. Ms Macy, for example, said, "…the language skills of most of those students aren't good enough to cope with writing an academic assignment". She was talking about English language skills because that is the medium of instruction at the University of Namibia as well as in the whole country of Namibia, with the exception of some private schools.

The role of English in teaching and learning was further highlighted by Ms Macy when she said, "…the students' low level of English in many cases… is a barrier to their ability to study on their own because they can't deal with it for academic purposes or even the texts themselves". The students' low level of English affects teaching and learning, in Ms Macy's opinion, because the students "don't understand the text" and "they've got to be able to analyse it"; yet they may not be able to analyse it.

English again affects teaching and learning in that the way it is being used in the teaching of literature has some negative effects. Ms Macy said that in the Department of English at the University of Namibia, "…we seem to be teaching English Literature in a first language environment, not as a foreign language, but, in fact, it is a foreign language for many people". Ms Macy explained what she meant in the following statement:

> That means we see how the other departments deal with their language; for example, German, French, Portuguese, because one of the first steps to studying a text in a foreign language is to study the vocabulary – the literal meaning. That's how you assume you are teaching in a first language environment. Secondly, it is the concepts – the cultural concepts. You would study those, too. So, you would look at the language – what it means – and the concepts in their contexts within the setting of that language culture. Those are the things we don't really do in the English Department.

From the above, we see the need to study the language and cultural aspects of the texts that are being studied for Literature. This will help the students to analyse the texts. Ms Macy concluded that "[W]e are teaching English Literature as if this is a second language". She was of the opinion that it is necessary to teach English Literature as if it is a foreign language situation because "… for many of these students, they are learning English within an English environment, but they may actually not be reading English newspapers, and they may actually not be listening to the English programmes, and it is possible to live in Namibia without using English".

Language skills again came up in relation to assessment. Ms Macy was of the opinion that "holistic assessment where everything is open to students to discuss" is not

suitable in Literature. This is because "when you have such poor language skills they [the students] are getting away with a good essay" and "you are not testing the understanding of Literature, because the writing skills do not match with the reading skills". What Ms Macy described is a situation where students were able to get good marks if they had good English in which to express themselves, yet they did not understand the texts of Literature that were being studied. What she wanted done was to test English language skills separately from those skills that relate the subject Literature and involve being able to analyse the given texts. Those are the things we don't really do in the English Department.

Asked specifically about the role of English in teaching and learning Ms Macy said that "English is the medium of instruction and the official language" and so "there is a great need to have …higher proficiency in English as possible". There is also the fact that "… the majority of the Literature studies are purely in English", that is, in the Department of English at the University of Namibia. This means that students need a high proficiency in English in order to understand the texts since other languages such as mother tongues are not used in the process of teaching and learning, at least officially.

Asked if Afrikaans and other African and Namibian languages have a role in teaching and learning, Ms Macy was of the opinion that these languages have a role since "…some texts have bits and pieces from other languages". This calls for an understanding of those languages by both the lecturer and the students.

Improving students' understanding through the use of texts with a language and cultural background familiar with students is one way in which English will become accessible to students, according to Ms Macy. She was pleased that the Department of English at the University of Namibia "is bringing more literature texts from Namibia, written by black Namibians …as and when they appear, and of the quality level we can use". She was of the opinion that this is important "partly because of the identification aspect and partly because of the values of those languages…". She also added that "…there seems to be this kind of idea that English is the first language and the others are inferior languages". This means that students do not identify with their languages; yet there is value in all these languages. Ms Macy suggested that "we

need to make sure that doesn' t happen", meaning that English will grow in importance while the indigenous languages grow less and less in importance.

There is another reason why Ms Macy stressed the importance of mother tongues. Her reason was that there is a transfer of skills from one language to another. If students master their mother tongues there is a big chance that they will transfer those skills to English. Ms Macy gave an example of such transference when she said that some of her students "used their knowledge …from African languages to answer some questions in the English short story" and, in her opinion, "they were proud for doing that".

There were several explanations that Ms Macy gave for the students' poor English. One of them was the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction during the Apartheid era. She was of the opinion that during that time many students "didn't speak English" even though they learnt it as a subject. After Independence, English became the language of instruction and this has caused a problem because "there are students who have been caught in the transition" from Afrikaans to English and "they were caught in the middle" where they are not fluent and competent in either language. These students changed from one system to another before completing their school education. Apart from the change of medium of instruction they also "changed from Matric to IGCSE or Grade 10". Ms Macy suggested that the students' situation may have been made worse by the fact that they didn't have books to be used in the new system of education. Since, in Ms Macy's opinion, transition "takes about five years", the university will continue to receive students who are not significantly different from the ones in the old system.

A second reason Ms Macy gave why the students' at the University of Namibia are not competent in English is the fact that many of them are not grounded in their mother tongues. She compared the students of UNAM with those of the International School, which is in the neighbourhood and which takes in students from all sorts of backgrounds. She was of the opinion that those young learners can write better essays with just two years of learning English. One of the reasons she cites for this concerns the issue of mother tongues. She said of UNAM's students "…you have students who have never learnt their mother tongue as a language, who had been made to learn

Afrikaans or Otjiherero because that was the homeland or Bantustan that they were in, who were forced to learn a language like Otjiherero, who were not taught another language". She was convinced that UNAM students have no grounding in their mother tongues.

When asked "What is the advantage of having good grounding in your mother tongues?" Ms Macy gave the following answer:

> If you don't get a grounding in your mother tongue - you know this - you are not going to have a grounding in your second language because you have no foundation. You cannot make comparisons. If you can't discuss or use your language to its fullest competence how are you going to function in English? I think all these - there are so many things that inhibit the students.

Mother tongues have other roles to play in teaching and learning. Ms Macy was of the opinion that mother tongues contribute to the understanding of the content of teaching in that students can use their mother tongues to explain issues to each other when things get tough. She said that she did not have a problem with students using their mother tongues in the classroom because "[I]f you are teaching a conceptual subject like Literature, it helps them to conceptualise it". She added, "If there is an idea they don't understand or a word they don't understand they explain to each other in their mother tongues" and that "aids understanding as far as I am concerned". Ms Macy identified the several advantages of having students use mother tongues in the teaching and learning process. She said the mother tongues help students to:

- explain difficult concepts to each other
- conceptualise difficult aspects of a subject
- understand what is being taught
- preserve their identity
- realise that their mother tongues are not inferior to English
- feel proud of their languages
- appreciate the value of local languages in general
- transfer learning to other languages, including foreign ones

Ms Macy identified a third reason why students at UNAM are struggling with English. It is the fact that they were taught English in isolation without the cultural aspects of language teaching being taken into account. She said that there are "cultural assumptions in language" and lecturers need to be aware of these. In the schools of the past students did not even come into contact with native speakers of English and often learnt English in a foreign culture with no reference to English culture.

As far as teaching is concerned Ms Macy said that the lecturers have spent time trying to help students understand what is being taught because the students are not fluent in English. The same applies to writing essays. Ms Macy was of the opinion that competency in English affects essay writing skills. She complained that it was not the role of Literature lecturers to teach language skills. She said, "If it was my responsibility to teach it, then that is one thing, but we are supposed to be teaching Literature!"

Ms Hamilton also identified several reasons for the poor English of UNAM students. Lack of a reading culture was one of those reasons. This is important because the students can improve their language skills by reading literature that is not serious. This kind of literature includes magazines, newspapers, storybooks, and so on. Developing a reading culture starts early, and includes the early experiences in homes and schools. In Ms Hamilton' view, the type of school from which a student comes affects the development of this reading culture as well as other skills. She said, "Obviously if they come from a privileged school with good facilities and good teaching they are going to be advantaged over those who are coming from rural schools which haven't got such good facilities and good teaching". Ms Hamilton expressed a dream situation when she said, "And I think if there were more of a culture of reading and just general fluency in English, if they were more fluent in reading and writing, it would prepare them [the students] better for university level fluency."

A second cause of poor English among UNAM students, according to Ms Hamilton, is lack of experience in expressing themselves. They may have relied on the teachers to tell them things they needed to know without really having to express their

opinions on what was being taught. Ms Hamilton's evaluation of the students at UNAM was: "…there are some people for whom the university is really not appropriate…when you see their written and spoken English skills".

Ms Hamilton suggested a third reason for the poor state of English among UNAM students. That reason is the fact that for a majority of the students, English is not their first language. She said, "…the whole problem is not having English as their first language". For most of the students, she added, "English is their second, third, or fourth language" and, therefore, "most of them are not fluent, understandably." Ms Hamilton was also of the opinion that the students' written English is worse than their spoken English. She summed up the situation as follows: "…orally they might be students of 55-60, but when they write they might be 48-50." Here Ms Hamilton was talking in terms of percentages. Ms Hamilton seemed to think that students are actually better at the content of the courses, but "…they let themselves down through their language."

Asked about the importance of English in teaching and learning, Ms Hamilton answered, "English is absolutely vital" because"[I]t is your means of communication between you and your students, verbally in class, and it is also their means of getting their assessment back, writing their assignments, because a majority of their mark is going to be on written work, in English."
Putting the ideas expressed by both Ms Macy and Ms Hamilton together, one could say that because of poor English students find it difficult to:

- express themselves in English
- articulate ideas in English
- understand the textbooks
- analyse texts
- follow lectures
- study on their own

The causes of this poor state of English among UNAM students can be attributed to the fact that many students:

- learnt English in a non-English speaking environment
- were taught English without awareness of English culture
- lack grounding in their mother tongues
- came from poor schools with poorly qualified teachers

Considering that there seems to be a big problem of English among UNAM students there is need to do something about it. For Ms Hamilton a solution would be to give students "more support in developing their language skills".

Asked whether African languages might play a role in teaching and learning, Ms Hamilton was of the opinion that these languages may have a role to play at Primary School level, but at university only English has a place because "…one of the decisions that has been made by the Government is to have English as the official language". Ms Hamilton, however, recognised the importance of giving students at UNAM more support in English because "they can't express themselves in English… and it is a major constraint and it hampers their ability … to pass".

For Dr Ultuwat, language affects teaching and learning to the extent that "…essentially you find that your students are maybe er in need of ah some extra work". Dr Ultuwat has found ways of helping his students. One of them is drawing the attention of the students to communication problems in their assignments.

Dr Ultuwat seems to discuss the students language problems with the students with a view to helping them improve. He also said that he sends students who need further help to the Language Centre. He said, "…I normally channel them [the students] to … the Language Centre … because they're experts … people with time and more to deal with exactly that type of problem ". When asked if students take advantage of such an offer, Dr Ultuwat didn't think the students made use of the offer. He identified other drawbacks to making use of this offer. One of those drawbacks was "…a shortage of manpower there…" Besides that problem Dr Ultuwat also observed that "…when you

send them [the students] there there is no follow up whether she or he is playing…"

Dr Ultuwat also noted that the language problems experienced in the Department of English are also experienced by other departments in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. In his words, "I can see coming from the workshop that even other subjects are accompanied by lack of language". This situation creates problems in that "…a student is told to discuss but he is listening … he gets it wrong … either he is careless, he doesn't really know how to communicate or comprehend properly".

Dr Ultuwat also said that the kind of English that is taught in Africa should not be the "the Queen's English". The aim should not be to make the other speakers of English "simulate British accent or English accent…" Instead he advocates teaching people English as "the vehicle of communication…" and, in the case of students, English should be used "…to enhance knowledge… they get from books and make it applicable … relevant to their everyday life situation". What is important, in his view, is "…grammatically correct, sound English, just like people teaching Otjiherero, Afrikaans and so forth would also strive for correct you know teaching of that language".

When asked if Afrikaans has a role to play in teaching and learning at UNAM Dr Ultuwat answered that there may be some useful material in Afrikaans in education but English has been chosen as the language of education in Namibia and thus takes a leading role in education. He said for those who find useful material in Afrikaans "…they could translate them back into English…" He concluded that "…English is here to stay".

Dr Ultuwat also identified an advantage in using English as an official language. He said, "It combines all languages". One of the problems for the poor English among students at UNAM was identified by an official in the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture whom Dr Ultuwat reported as saying very clearly "that all the languages have equal status but English is the official language and he was castigating those teachers in high school because there

were complaints that they teach in Afrikaans in class and students come to face National Exams in English and he said that is er contributing to failure…" What this means is that using the translation method in teaching has more disadvantages than advantages.

With regard to the use of African languages in teaching and learning Dr Ultuwat thought that it would bring disharmony among the people. In his words, "…any one language is going to cause a problem", that is, one local language dominating the others".

Student Focus Group Interviews

Students' views on lecturers and language

One of the problems which students found with regard to the lecturers' use of language was their accents. With regard to one particular lecturer some students said that they could not understand her because "she's maybe too fast" while others said, "It's the accent". This suggests that in a group one never get the same people seeing the same thing in the same way.

Students' language competency

While the lecturers' language background was said by students to contribute to students' inability to follow lectures, the problem lay with the students. In one student's words we see the following:

> "I agree that these two lecturers are too fast, but when it comes to the er learners' backgrounds in Namibia, you'd find that it's er something that's not er giving room to the students to cover… so I think the the lecturers must er must think about that. Those two are coming from a good background… it's right".

One student suggested a solution for those who can't follow these fast lecturers. She said to the others: "And if that is so why didn't you ask the lecturer that she's she's er hurry er or she's too fast?" The same student, however, hastened to correct herself by saying, "…or in the case of Ms Hamilton we usually tell her, 'Oh Ms Hamilton, can I

slow you down, please Mum er you are so fast. She simply er can't slow down for er five minutes (laughter by all students) she's blah blah blah". It seems the students have even told the lecturer concerned to slow down but she complies for a short while and then goes back to her normal speed.

For students who were studying English as a subject, it was interesting to note that despite the fact that they came from good schools they did not study the type of English that was being studied at university level. Here is how one student put it:

> In my case I don't think, as for myself we can, we had a good background because in my case I would rather think the level of English in Secondary School I did not study… it was my first time here to study it at university. And it was totally difficult. It is up to me to end this situation of learning.

This comment was made in the light of the fact that in secondary schools in Namibia there is no learning of word classes or what is traditionally known as Parts of Speech. One student expressed this situation when she said "…I find it interesting because I heard that this is an adjective and this is an adverb". Another student added to this by saying "At our school we didn't do it and it was like I was busy forgetting what a noun , an adjective and things is, and now it's just a good thing to get back into the er…same things."

Some students also thought that the reason they are not so good in English at university is because their teachers did not know how to pass knowledge to the learners in secondary school. In one student's words, "…what we have in high school … the the teachers are so good in the subject that they are teaching but they cannot, you know, pass on the information to the students, because they are too smart…"

In cases where understanding of the content was hampered by poor English the students suggested that lecturers make the classes more practical. They gave examples of lecturers who encouraged students to participate in drama during classes. One student said, "Some of us performed in class and it really made a difference from er reading it and observing it".

Copying seemed to have gripped the attention of the focus group that I interviewed. They spent a lot of time discussing this matter. One student said, "The tests we write, you know, because students copy, copy, copy … most students copy … ". The outcome of this situation is provided by several students who constructed one complete sentence by giving parts of it as follows:

S5 "Throughout the time, throughout the whole term, they'll pass, pass, pass, but in the exam…"

S2 "they'll only get a few marks…"

S5 "but they only need a few marks from the exam. They already qualified and that's so unfair. It's really, really, totally unfair".

This echoing of the same idea seems to suggest that copying is a serious problem among students. Some students have made efforts to inform their lecturers about the enormity of the problem, but these lecturers took no action at all. This is what one student said:

> I found a girl one day. She copies like she was having her file with her and she … her paper she was looking and then she … it was going on for thirty minutes and it was very irritating for me knowing that I'm trying me best here and she's copying just right next to me. And I told her, the lecturer, but she didn't do anything about it. She just took the… a… she just ask the lady to put her file on the floor. And she didn't do anything. And then it was like, at the end of the test… and she got good marks for it.

Several suggestions were made by the focus group that would help eliminate the problem. One of these is to punish those who are caught cheating. In one student's words " the first one they should just have this rule that say whoever is found cheating should er get er just… there and then take the paper and tear, you get a zero for it; you are not suppose to cheat".

Another solution for cheating, in the view of students, is have more strict supervision during tests. The students were of the opinion that since there is more weight put on course work (that is, 60% as opposed to 40% exams), there should be more supervision of tests than in the examination where there

are several invigilators for every paper. As one student put it "…when we write exams, in examination, that's when things are more serious. I don't understand. In the exams you get 40%. Then you get 10 people walking … I don't know… but in a test where it's continuous assessment where you get 60%, you'll find nobody looking after anybody. So they should get…either at least two tutors who help the lecturers.

What this student is trying to say is that there should be more supervision given to tests than that given to examinations because the weight given to continuous assessment is 60% while the examination gets only 40%, yet the examinations get more supervision.

Another suggestion to solve the problem of cheating is to change the ratio of continuous assessment to examinations so that we have either 50:50 or 40:60. The student who suggested this said, "And it should be fifty-fifty the er the continuous assessment and the examinations. If they can't make it, can't turn it the other way around, the examination 60 and the continuous assessment 40 then they should at least make it 40:40, I mean 50:50".

The students that were interviewed felt strongly about cheating because they felt it was "unfair to most" of those who study hard, but end up getting lower marks than those who cheated. One student probably summarized the feelings of the others who don't cheat in the following statement:

> …Really it bothers me because if I'm trying that hard you know reading at night and the person does not read may be go the club and everything and the next day they come in the test and the person cheats and I really know that I tried hard for it and I get lower marks then that person (.) I really get very angry for it.

While cheating may be brought about by difficulties in following lectures and understanding texts some students, however, cheated because of what the focus group called lack of morals. Here is a report of an exchange between a student who cheated and one who didn't and was part of the focus group:

S4 The other day we were writing a test and I saw a lot of people copying and after that we went to the Grub and I actually confronted them with this and I said 'how how is it that you cheat and you're not actually not even ashamed about it. They were, they were… is it bragging?"

S2 Bragging

S4 Yeah they were like saying 'Ah I'm going to get 80% and I cheated and I said, 'Aren't you ashamed?'. Then he said, 'No, we are not ashamed for this because if we get 80 for our assessment mark we only need 40 in the exams'. So, we only study to get 40'.

This exchange illustrates the fact that some students simply cheat because of what they are, and not like other students who cheat because they don't understand the texts and the only way to get some good marks is to copy the textbooks or get someone else to help you out.

The student interviewees also felt that some students were leaving the university with false papers in the sense that they had cheated their way into getting a certificate with a degree on it, yet they cheated. This cheating, in the students' view leads to the development of a poor workforce "since they [the cheats] are going to sit in an office not knowing what to do". These honest students felt that part of the reason "there is chaos in all our schools" is "because the teachers cheated their way through the university".

The need for papers to qualify for work, in the student interviewees' opinion, is also another reason why students cheat at the university. This is because "they think 'I just need my paper for four years, I just need my paper and I have a degree'". This seems to suggest that perhaps they system of recruitment leaves much to be desired.

Other suggestions the students made for solving the problem include changing the ratio of examination to coursework from 40:60 to 50:50 or 60:40. That would reduce the chances of cheating students getting the degrees they don't deserve.

Asked whether Afrikaans has a place in the teaching and learning process some students felt that English should be encouraged instead of other languages because it

opens doors for students to other countries to study or do other types of business. As one student put it, "You won't be able to work in another country with your degree because … say I want to go to England with my, with my er studies in Afrikaans at university, it will never be the same if you study in a university with English as the medium of instruction".

Some students also felt that Afrikaans was the "language of oppression" because "of the cultures that was forced on the people". African languages also got a negative reaction from some of the students interviewed. This is the case because, as one student put it, "most of us are young people now. We are starting to break away from our mother tongues. Even I when I speak with my sister I mix English and and Oshiwambo. I'm creating my own language".

The foreign students among the group interviewed voiced their opinion that if African languages are used as media of instruction at the University it would disadvantage them. One student asked, "What about us coming from outside? We are going to feel left out and I think universities are suppose to be universal, bringing students all over the world … come and er you know mix and things like that".

Other students felt that African languages may be used to help understanding but they must be used judiciously. One said, "I don't think it would make sense because sometimes you find … but that happen mostly in high schools, because if you don't understand something they would translate it in your mother tongue, just to make you clear on something", Another student added, "But they mustn't do it in a thingy… local languages in high school, in universities. It won't be fair".

Another student explained that translating difficult things into the mother tongues is not always an advantage because the examinations are in English in Namibia and if the students get used to getting translations they may not cope well in examinations. Here are her words:

> And that's why schools in Windhoek have a problem with the English language because the teachers there, when they don't understand something, they'll go to the textbook and translate it in Oshiwambo and they teach the children, and when a child goes back at the end of

> the year, say, for example, Grade Tens and Grade Twelves, they were taught in Oshiwambo. So, when they want to start reading it in English they won't know because they'll say 'Teacher give it to us in another way', and then the thing, the question will come in the examination. Obviously … and they'll say, 'I don't understand a thing', even if they … maybe they know the answer, because they couldn't… they didn't know how to…express it.

I would like to explain that Oshiwambo is a language in Namibia which is spoken by the largest part of the population. Many people, including those from other cultural backgrounds speak it and that is why it used in many Primary and Secondary Schools.

Another student suggested that to discourage the use of this translation method in teaching in schools "…maybe they [the educational authorities] should just bring the people who do not speak at all Oshiwambo. They will teach in Oshiwamboland. They will take people who do not speak Damara to teach in Damaraland". I should also point out here that Damara is another indigenous language spoken in Namibia. The use of "Oshiwamboland" is also an interesting creation because there is no such a place. It is a mixture between a language and a place, which confirms the view of the student who said earlier that young people today create their own languages by mixing English and other languages. This mixing could be from African languages but it could also involve other European languages.

An addition to the problem of translating from one language to another during the teaching and learning process came from another student who said, "Just to add to the local languages you'll find that a students really know the content but the problem is when they translate from, say, Oshiwambo to English some of the … I mean … how should I say? The content from the subject is left out in the translation process". This means that a student who gets used to getting translations may be lacking in the comprehension of the content of the subject. That can lead to failure in examinations. This is the case because as another student explained, "…the concepts they are never equivalent. Until you are competent in both languages it is very difficult for you to move from one to the other and give the same message…"

When I asked them about the feeling in many circles that the Cape System of Matric Education was better than the Cambridge System some students were of the opinion

that many people passed in the Cape Education system because "they studied like parrots". In the Cambridge Education System, however, "…there is no way you can study your English and going to pass it. They will ask you to write an essay about … something like your childhood, where they will judge your knowledge of grammar".

The focus group interviewed also felt that at UNAM there are students whose essays are still "terrible" even at fourth year level. The main cause is English, although there may be other reasons. Some students seem to write what they don't understand. For the same reason some students are actually repeating first year modules when they are in their fourth year of study. The students were of the opinion that those who repeat junior classes do so for two reasons: (1) "they are still with that high school spirit" and (2) "…language, English language, is a big problem".

Some students also felt that the entry admission requirement for UNAM is too low. One student expressed the following sentiment:

> You know to get a C in the Cambridge System is a very low, low level. Will you agree with me if I say that if you get a C on IGCSE [International General Certificate of Secondary Education] in English it's very low? They should, the university … to get into the University you must have a C in English on IGCSE level. They should really uplift that symbol because … to a B". Not everybody agreed with that view. Some felt that making the English requirement higher than a C Grade would make it difficult for many students to enter the University because as one other student put it, "then you'll fail English and pass every… the other subjects just fine…".

The students also recognized the fact that writing English is different from speaking English. That accounts for the fact that many students who have a C Grade in their certificates may not necessarily speak English well. One student gave her own experience with Afrikaans. She said, "…if I had to speak Afrikaans you'll think what the hell is she speaking, but when I have to write Afrikaans you'll understand". This is because when she writes in Afrikaans she has to really "sit down and think and write everything in order" but, she adds, "…when I speak I just speak".

Another student emphasized the importance of practice in the development of language skills. This practice may come from using the target language in everyday activities. This is what she said:

> "I can say I've got experience. I'm… I'm coming … my home language is Afrikaans and I had an A in English IGCSE and I couldn't speak English then I came here in my first year. Why I can now is just because I had friends who couldn't speak Afrikaans and I, I was forced to speak English".

I asked her how she got an A and the answer was only laughter from the whole class. I didn't want to pursue the matter further.

5.4 **ASSESSMENT**

The lecturers interviewed identified assessment of students as a factor affecting teaching and learning. Ms Macy said that assessment, particularly continuous assessment, should be conducted using a variety of methods such as essay writing, class quizzes, context questions, worksheets and informal observation. These assessments should be based on objectives, not just to fulfil university requirements. She believed strongly on the criteria for assessment. On this she said, "[Y]ou are assessing according to the … learning objectives … ideally", although she was quick to add that she is "not sure that is always the case".

On the assessment of literature Ms Macy was of the opinion that there should be a separation between assessment of literature as a "content" course and assessment of "language", which should be done separately. This is what she said:

> You are assessing according to the … learning objectives – ideally – I am not sure if that is always the case. I have strong feelings about language in literature. Literature is a content course, not a language course. So, I am testing the literature objectives, not language objectives. So, a student can make language mistakes everywhere, as long as they've got … you know… the substance is there. That's what I am marking. I am not marking for their ability in English. So, that is not something all the departments agree on.

From the above we see that there is a need to have clear objectives when assessing students learning.

Asked if her methods of assessment were successful, Ms Macy answered that "the worksheets were not very successful because they [the students] end up with very, very good marks for students who wouldn't wouldn't get the same sort of marks in exams because exams rely on essays". This seems to suggest that assessment methods for course work should be consonant with assessment methods for final examinations.

Ms Macy also related assessment methods and teaching methods. She said, "[S]ince we [the lecturers] had discrepancy between methods and assessment, if everything rests, in the end, on the ability to write an essay, then it limits what we are doing in terms of teaching methods".

Assessment and language also seem to have a relationship, according to Ms Macy. She said that "the tendency is to do holistic assessment where everything is open to students to discuss" but for her "when they have got such poor language skills, they [the students] are getting away with a good essay" and "you are not really testing the understanding of literature, because the writing skills do not match with the reading skills". This seems to confirm Ms Macy's earlier objection to assessing language when assessing literature. She believed the two should be separate.

Ms Hamilton seemed to use similar methods of assessment as those used by Ms Macy. She said that she uses "quizzes, exercises, oral presentations, group work, and assignments". Additional methods which Ms Hamilton uses but which most people don't use include "class attendance, participation in class". These are used in such a way that "if they [the students] are borderline cases but they participated in class and did all the assignments and tests I would push them through because of that, but "where someone is kind of … like lackadaisical and can hardly come, then that really alienates me from the students". To avoid punishing students using these rather subjective methods Ms Hamilton tries "not to react to personalities and not to a student" because "that would not be fair". This also seems to show Ms Hamilton's concern for student participation in their learning.

Asked why she uses those methods of assessment Ms Hamilton said the students "can get a lot of marks from these" and "it is quite nice for them to do a series of different things". This means that a variety of assessments gives advantage to different students and their preferences.

On the criteria for assessment Ms Hamilton said that she divides the work into parts such as "content" … expression, grammar, style" and allocates marks for each with content taking 60% and the other parts sharing the remaining marks.

To prepare students for assessment Ms Hamilton "give[s] them one month's notice" which she sticks up "on my notice board by my office so they have a copy". In addition she "give[s] individuals a handout" with "the due date which she gives out "in class in advance", but also "remind[s] them" again and again. This suggests that the students cannot be relied upon to remember due dates. The handout has the advantage of showing students exactly what is required.

Ms Hamilton also tells students what she is "looking for in an essay" such as a "bibliography", "arguments", "paragraphs". She also "give[s]] them advice about planning and structuring and how to answer the question, and sighting plot". These are all part of helping students in their learning.

On whether her methods have been successful Ms Hamilton had a straight "No". She explained that "the essays are still lousy". She wasn't certain why the situation was like that. "Either I haven't been clear enough or they haven't followed" was her possible explanation. She, however, gave a very likely reason for lack of success when she said. "[Y]ou often give them handouts but they don't read them". She thought that was "really depressing, for all the time you spend photocopying". Ms Hamilton seemed to be suggesting that successful learning takes place when students do their part and one way we can see this is through assessment results.

5.5 RESULTS FROM CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

While there were many aspects of observation that yielded interesting results, only those closely related to the areas of teaching, learning, language and assessment are reported here.

On objectives I saw that the lecturers gave students several handouts in which they explained in detail what was expected of the students. There was a week by week breakdown of the course content along with an assessment schedule. There was also an assessment handout giving the students options , followed by an in-class discussion of the handout.

Both Ms Macy and Ms Hamilton used varied methods of teaching and assessment. There was the lecture, group work and seminars. They used quizzes and essays for assessment. Although Dr Ultuwat had said that group work and other student involvement activities were desirable, I did not witness much of that in practice. I only observed students doing group work once but the rest of the time Dr Ultuwat taught using the lecture method. It may be the case that he was aware of the different methods of teaching since he was also a trained teacher, but he did not find it easy to apply what he had learnt. I can understand that since using student-centred methods actually involves a lot of work on the part of both the lecturer and the students. One has to be really determined to change one's approach to make it work.

Tests dates were advertised well ahead of time and there were constant reminders. I also observed all the tests as they were being conducted and was in class during the return of the test results. During the tests there was only one supervisor, and that was the lecturer. In one test the lecturer, Dr Ultuwat, went out of the class for half of the test period because he said he had a meeting. One could understand that since he was Head of Department then. However, alternative arrangements could have been made in such a case. Students' fears about cheating were confirmed since it was possible for a determined "cheat" to take liberties during such a time.

After each test and assignment the lecturers always discussed the students' performance and, in my opinion, the views expressed in the interviews about students' language and assessment skills were confirmed. I asked some of the students if I could have a look at their work and they accepted. There were many language problems indicated by the lecturers. Plagiarism was also discussed before and after tests and assignments. Some students were reported to have indulged in this practice. Although no names were mentioned, specific cases of plagiarism were discussed. In one test two students got zero because of plagiarism.

During class discussions it became obvious that a good number of students were having difficulties expressing themselves. This could have been as a result of inability to express themselves in English or simply a cultural problem, particularly with regard to females, who were not expected to be vocal in public places. For those who expressed themselves in class I also observed that they had a lot of grammatical errors some of which the lecturers attempted to correct. This was particularly the case with Ms Hamilton and Ms Macy. Ms Macy found herself teaching vocabulary during literature time, something she had told the students that she would not do. She simply couldn't move on with whatever she was teaching because many students did not have the basic vocabulary. She ran a quick check on students' understanding of some words in the poems she was teaching and found, in many cases, that many students did not know the meaning of basic terms. After asking students to find the meanings on their own and failing to get good results she abandoned her original plan.

5.6 ACTION RESEARCH COMPONENT

Although the interviews might be said to have no action in the action research model, I would like to consider it part of action research because action usually follows on an understanding of the context of operation. Before the interviews I had to read appropriate literature in order to develop interview guidelines. During the interviews the lecturers and students involved had to search their minds and hearts in order to answer the questions. They didn't have ready answers for my questions.

The interviews also indicated that the participants were already doing something about their situation. For example, during the interview time the students approached

the Head of Departments of English about a lecturer about whom they had problems. They wrote a letter of complaint which was sent to the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences who then called the parties concerned in order to solve the problem. That to me, is action arising out of the developing awareness of students that there are things that may not be acceptable which can be solved together through consultation.

The lecturers, too, told me that having their lessons observed and video-taped helped them prepare and teach harder and better. They also took into account some of the views expressed by students in the interviews. Some lecturers ended up giving 46 assignments in a semester and also several options.

5.7 CONCLUSION

What we have seen above suggests that issues of teaching methods, language and assessment are very important in teaching and learning. They are also interrelated in many different ways as illustrated from the examples cited above. Both lecturers and students agree that improved and varied teaching and assessment methods as well as English language skills will improve the quality of the students at UNAM. Students, too, need to be trained to participate more actively in their learning. In the next chapter I present the results from the lecturers' and students' survey.

CHAPTER SIX: LECTURERS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS FROM THE SURVEY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As described in the research methodology section (chapter 4) a survey was undertaken to determine the lecturers' and students' views on teaching, learning and assessment. (A facsimile of the questionnaires for lecturers and students is provided in the appendices three and four). This chapter provides the results of that survey; first of the lecturers, and then of students.

6.2 RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY ON LECTURERS

Demographic characteristics of lecturers

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 34 lecturers who participated in the survey.

In terms of age, most of the lecturers (73.6%) were in the age bracket from 40 to over 50 years - - people at a fairly senior level of their profession and with substantial experience.

In terms of university experience most (65%) of the lecturers had been teaching in the university for more than five years; with a sizeable number (16%) having taught at the university for over ten years. On both of these counts one would expect them to have come across a number of students with varied and varying backgrounds, thus making them able to compare and contrast students with different skills and abilities.

Of the 34 lecturers, in terms of whether or not English was their mother tongue, only 21% confirmed that this was the case; the majority claimed that English was their second language. In terms of proficiency, however, 74% of the respondents claimed that they were proficient in English; with nearly 30% claiming that they were "excellent" English speakers. Again, because the lecturers were fairly mature in age, and with university experience, and because of their claimed proficiency in the English language, one would expect them to be able to assess the skills of their

undergraduate students in terms of their command of the English language and their learning ability through assessment.

Table 1 **Demographic characteristics of lecturers**

Characteristic	Number	Percent
Duration of teaching at University (years)		
< 2	5	14.7
2 – 5	7	20.6
6 – 10	6	17.6
> 10	16	47.1
Duration of teaching at UNAM		
< 2	5	14.7
2 – 5	8	23.5
6 – 10	9	26.5
> 10	12	35.3
English is mother tongue		
Yes	7	20.6
No	27	79.4
Personal rating of language skills		
Excellent	10	29.4
Very good	15	44.1
Good	9	26.5
Gender		
Female	15	44.1
Male	19	55.9
Age group (years)		
20 – 30	4	11.8
31 – 40	5	14.7
41 – 50	14	41.2
51+	11	32.4

Language and teaching

Responses to aspects on language and teaching are shown in Table 2 The perception among lecturers was that insufficient command of English language among some students negatively impacts on delivery of material. In particular, the table shows that students cannot follow lectures (62.6%), do not make good notes (70.6%), do not participate in class discussion (60.6%). The perception was that as a result, lecturers have to: speak very slowly (60.6%); lower their standards of teaching (48.5%); have to say the same thing in several ways for students to understand (87.8%); have to give more support than usual (84.8%). Despite these shortcomings, however, only 36.4% admitted they omitted some materials from the syllabus and 21.2% could not cover the entire course content. But both of these aspects impact negatively on the curriculum designed for a particular programme, and hence on what is taught over all at the end of that course.

Table 2 **Responses to aspects on language and teaching**

Statement*	Response					
	Strongly agree	Agree	I do not know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1. they do not follow the lectures	2	18	2	10	-	32
(%)	6.3	56.3	6.3	31.3	-	100
2. they ask a lot of questions after class	1	8	2	20	2	33
(%)	2.9	23.5	5.9	58.8	5.9	100
3.they do not make good notes from lectures	8	16	7	3	-	34
(%)	23.5	47.1	20.6	8.8	-	100
4. they do not participate in class discussions	6	14	1	11	1	33
(%)	18.2	41.2	3	33.3	3	100
5. I have to lower my standards of teaching	3	13	16	1	-	33
(%)	9.1	39.4	47.1	3	-	100
6. I have to speak very slowly	-	20	2	10	1	33
(%)	-	60.6	6.1	30.3	3	100
7. I have to leave out some of the materials in syllabus	1	11	-	18	3	33
(%)	3	33.3	-	54.5	9.1	100
8. I have to say the same thing in several ways for students to understand	8	21	-	3	1	33
(%)	24.2	63.6	-	9.1	3	100
9. I have to give students more support than I would normally do	7	21	1	4	-	33
(%)	21.2	63.6	3	12.1	-	100
10. I cannot cover the course content	1	6	-	26	-	33
(%)	3	18.2	-	78.8	-	100

* The phrase that comes before each of the statements in the table is “Because some students I am teaching are not competent in English…”

Language and learning

Table 3 **Lecturers' perceptions on language and assessment skills**

Statement	Response					
	Strongly agree	Agree	I do not know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1. Many students lack essay writing skills	20	12	-	2	-	34
(%)	58.8	35.3		5.9		100
2. Many students I am teaching cannot write coherent essays	15	16	-	2	1	34
(%)	44.1	47.1	-	5.9	2.9	100
3. Many students I am teaching cannot write logically	10	16	-	8	-	34
(%)	29.4	47.1	-	23.5	-	100
4. The first year communication skills course is of little help to many students in writing good essays	15	15	3	1	-	34
(%)	44.1	44.1	8.8	2.9	-	100
5. Even many of the students in 3rd and 4th years of study cannot write good essays	9	16	1	8	-	34
(%)	26.5	47.1	2.9	23.5	-	100
6. Many students I am teaching copy from each other's work	2	14	9	8	1	34
(%)	5.9	41.2	26.5	23.5	2.9	100
7. Many students I am teaching copy from textbooks	7	22	1	4	-	34
(%)	20.6	64.7	2.9	11.8	-	100

Command of English language also negatively impinges on students' learning abilities. Various issues with regard to lecturers' perception of students' learning were investigated, with the following results for those agreeing or strongly doing so: language competence inhibited learning even for intelligent students (100%); students do not have good language skills (85.3%); students find it difficult to express

themselves in English (72.7%); students have difficulty understanding academic texts (79.4%); students have difficulty analyzing texts (94.1%); and students have difficulty studying on their own (67.6%). These results suggest that two-way communication between student and lecturer is hampered and that difficulties arise when assignments are given to students, since they would have difficulties following what was expected of them in articulating what they knew.

Language and assessment skills

Table 3 shows lecturers' perceptions on language and assessment skills, more specifically on writing and copying. Most of the lecturers perceive their students as being inept at writing: they cannot write coherently and logically. The first year communication skills course that students take is also perceived as being of little help and even as they advance in their years of study, the writing skills of most still do not improve appreciably. Copying is also perceived to be common among students. Forty seven percent (47.1%) of the lecturers felt students copy from each other; while 85.3% felt students copy from textbooks.

Conclusion

From their demographic characteristics including their age, experience and command of English language, we conclude that the lecturers are able to assess how Language affects teaching; as well as learning; and are able to assess the students' skills in language. The poor command of the English language by students makes it difficult for lecturers to teach effectively, and to cover the curriculum for a particular course of year. Similarly, the poor command of the English language makes it difficult for students to follow their courses and to obtain optimal benefits which would normally accrue from classes if they were conducted in an interactive way. Finally lecturers have the perception that students are inept at writing, particularly at writing essays, and since this is the case they rely on copying, from other students or from textbooks.

All in all, these results are generally consistent and show that the language competence of students, in the lecturers' views, hampers teaching and learning and complicates assessment.

6.3 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE EFFECT OF LANGUAGE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

In addition to views obtained from the items on lecturers' views on language and teaching; language and learning; and language and assessment skills, lecturers were invited to provide any other information they wished regarding the effect of language on teaching and learning.

Of the 34 lecturers invited to do so only 17 (50%) took advantage of the offer to provide any additional information.

A number of respondents indicated that the secondary schools from which the students come do not provide sufficient background for the students:

One said: "Many of our UNAM students come from secondary schools where their English teachers were not adequately equipped to teach them proper English".

Another said: "Language skills are basic to teaching and learning - - whether English, Swahili, Russian, etc. The point is, as long as it is the medium of instruction, students require a good command of that language".

And another said: "Language impacts on a number of issues that relate to the academic culture ... In this case English as a medium of instruction requires a great deal of academic English language competence. This, however, is not adequately fostered in secondary schools prior to university entrance.

Another set of respondents, indicated that, because of lack of communication skills, students are not able to reveal their strengths fully:

- - Lack of language skills (English) prevents the creative and critical interaction with academic texts; it also hampers expression.

-- The majority of students are managing quite competently at third and fourth year level. For me, therefore, the issue is rather "study skills" than "English".

A third group of respondents, while emphasising the lack of academic English criticize the role of the Language Centre in not providing proper remedial courses during the compulsory programme offered in first year, designed for that purpose:

-- I think UNAM would benefit from a system where students could be referred to language tutorials by lecturers. The range and language skills amongst our students is very broad. Analysis of essays at an early stage can reveal weaknesses. One major problem is that first year class sizes mean that colleagues tend to set too simple assignments in the first year -- so students progress without having had to write an academic essay;

-- Academic English is our major problem, and the Language Centre is extremely poor in addressing this. Our students do not seem to raise their standard over their four years in terms of abstract thinking and theoretical/analytical skills. Many enter UNAM ill-equipped for academic study in relation to the latter.

All in all, the additional statements by lecturers who responded point to the poor preparation students have in the schools before they enter university. They also indicate that the Language Centre does not play an adequate role in providing remedial courses necessary to fill this gap. Consequently students are not working at their optimal level because of language deficits.

6.4 RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY ON STUDENTS

Demographic characteristics of student respondents

Table 4 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents to the survey. In terms of language most of the students surveyed were non-native speakers of English. In terms of year of study, there was fair representation across all years of study, except for the fourth years who constituted only 14%. In terms of sex female students were the majority (61.1%). In terms of age most of the students were 25 years or younger; and the predominant degree programmes they were pursuing were Bachelor of Arts (65.2%) and Bachelor of Education (30.7%), that is, the students were mainly from the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Education.

Table 4 **Demographic characteristics of students**

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
English is mother tongue		
Yes	7	2.4
No	288	97.6
Year of study		
First	100	34
Second	76	25.9
Third	76	25.9
Fourth	42	14.3
Gender		
Female	179	61.1
Male	114	38.9
Age group (years)		
≤ 20	150	51.2
21 – 25	110	37.5
26 – 30	16	5.5
31+	17	5.8
Major subject		
Economics	29	9.8
English	55	18.6
Geography	70	23.6
Psychology	36	12.2
Others	106	35.8
Degree programme		
B.A	193	65.2
B. Ed	91	30.7
Others	12	4.1

Students' perception of their Language competency

Proficiency in English language was hypothesized to influence students' class interaction, personal study and ability to do assignments. Table 5 presents the students' perception of their English competency based on their views about the value of the first year communication skill course and their views about their language proficiency. A significant proportion (27.6%) of students felt the first year communication skills course did not enhance their English Language skills; and they still found it difficult to express themselves in English. The results suggest that while there is some perceived benefit from taking the first year communication skills course, there is still room for improvement in the course content and delivery. (These results are surprising, given students' perception of their language competency, and is in stark contrast to that of their lecturers).

Table 5 **Students' perception of their English language competency**

Statement	Response					
	Strongly agree	Agree	I do not know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1. The first year communication skills did not improve my English competency	46	35	28	104	80	293
(%)	15.7	11.9	9.6	35.5	27.3	100
2. The first year communication skills did not improve my essay writing skills	33	46	22	124	68	293
(%)	11.3	15.7	7.5	42.3	23.2	100
3. I find it difficult to express myself in English	21	44	23	101	107	296
(%)	7.1	14.9	7.8	34.1	36.1	100

Effect of language on studying and assessment

Poor language competency impairs comprehension, analytical skills development and studying. Impact of English language competency on studying and assessment is given in Table 6. About 25% of the students found it difficult to understand academic texts and to analyse texts. Additionally, 14.5% said poor command of English prevented them from writing coherent essays, while 17.7% said it prevented them from writing logically. As a consequence, sometimes students fell to various

temptations: copying other students' work (15.2%); copying from textbooks (34.9%); memorizing from books when studying (29.8%); and having a tendency to rewrite texts from books in tests and exams (16.9%). These results all point to difficulties learning because of English language incompetency.

Table 6 **Impact of English language competency on studying and assessment**

Statement*	Response					
	Strongly agree	Agree	I do not know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1. find it difficult to understand academic texts	15	68	17	127	66	293
(%)	5.1	23.2	5.8	43.3	22.5	100
2. find it difficult to analyse texts	13	70	22	132	56	293
(%)	4.4	23.9	7.5	45.1	19.1	100
3. find it difficult to study on my own	6	37	9	136	108	296
	2	12.5	3	45.9	36.5	100
4. cannot write coherent essays	6	37	9	136	108	296
(%)	2	12.5	3	45.9	36.5	100
5. cannot write logically	9	43	34	118	91	295
(%)	3.1	14.6	11.5	40	30.8	100
6. sometimes copy from other student's work	8	37	11	98	142	296
(%)	2.7	12.5	3.7	33.1	48	100
7. sometimes copy from textbooks	13	90	14	99	79	295
(%)	4.4	30.5	4.7	33.6	26.8	100
8. tend to memorize from books when studying	24	64	17	114	76	295
(%)	8.1	21.7	5.8	38.6	25.8	100
9. tend to rewrite text from books when writing tests and exams	10	40	14	129	103	296
(%)	3.4	13.5	4.7	43.6	34.8	100
10. am inhibited from learning even though I am intelligent	24	60	54	96	61	295
(%)	8.1	20.3	18.3	32.7	20.7	100

* The phrase that comes before each of the statements in the table is "Owing to my English competency I …"

Effect of English language competency on class interaction

English language deficiencies also affect students' interaction with the lecturers and with each other, and their ability to effectively participate in class discussions. Table 4 (page 137) presents aspects that relate to English language ability and how it influences interaction in class and suggestions on how lecturers should modify teaching. Although most students (74%) felt English language competency does not hinder their ability to follow lectures, it cannot be dismissed outright. Other manifestations of poor command of English language are: asking a lot of questions after class (35%); inability to make good notes from lectures (19.6%); and lack of participation in class activities (13.9%) This can be seen in Table 7 below. As a consequence, students felt a need for lecturers to adjust their teaching methods and the amount they cover. They indicated that lecturers should speak slowly (32.7%); they also expressed the desire for lecturers to articulate material in different ways (44.3%); they also indicated that lecturers should give more support to students (53.7%); and should cover less course content (25.4%).

Table 7 **Impact of English language competency on class participation**

Statement*	Response					
	Strongly agree	Agree	I do not know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1. do not follow the lectures	9	27	41	140	79	296
(%)	3	9.1	13.9	47.3	26.7	100
2. ask a lot of questions after class	17	86	28	117	47	295
(%)	5.8	29.2	9.5	39.7	15.9	100
3. do not make good notes from lectures	13	45	15	129	94	296
	4.4	15.2	5.1	43.6	31.8	100
4. do not participate in class discussions	17	34	11	136	97	295
(%)	5.8	11.5	3.7	46.1	32.9	100
5. want lecturers to speak very slowly	20	77	19	118	61	295
(%)	6.8	26.1	6.4	40	20.7	100
6. want the lecturers to say the same thing in different ways in order for me to understand	44	86	19	85	60	294
(%)	15	29.3	6.4	28.9	20.4	100
7. want the lecturers to give me more support than they are	48	110	14	76	46	294

giving presently						
(%)	16.3	37.4	4.8	25.9	15.6	100
8. want my lecturers to cover less course content	20	55	29	118	73	295
(%)	6.8	18.6	9.8	40	24.7	100

* The phrase that comes before each of the statements in the table is "Owing to my English competency I …"

6.5 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE EFFECT OF LANGUAGE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Students were invited to provide additional information regarding the effect of language on teaching and learning.

Out of the 296 who originally completed the questionnaire 115 only responded to this invitation (just under 40%).

Only two students indicated that there was no problem; for them everything was just fine:

- I think everything is going on smoothly
- I went to English schools all my life.
- From their point of view the two students who expressed this feeling seemed to imply that because of their competence in English they were able to learn well as well as follow lectures.

Many students agreed on the importance of the English language and how it impacts on teaching and learning. Several comments confirm this:

- If the language of instruction is not understood by learners, this is going to be a problem for children to understand what is learnt in such a class and will perform poorly.
- I think for one to know what is being taught, one needs to communicate to be efficient - - that is, through language.

- One may be intelligent but due to poor capacity of language in which the content is presented, that may hamper learning and teaching in the classroom.
- For effective teaching and learning to take place learners or students should be both accurate and fluent in the language used; understanding is very important before they can start to speak or write.
- Language competence definitely impact on the way a student is able to express thoughts, ideas, and comprehension etc, verbally and in writing. This is done best in mother tongue.
- If one is good in language you are able to understand more work; texts; etc. than someone who has a poor language skill.
- The effect of language on teaching and learning is crucial because it determines the rate or degree at which a person comprehends meaning in the academic areana (sic) owing to the language competence one has attained and based on what language is used as medium of instruction.
- Language is used to express what one knows, whether teaching or learning is done in a language. So it is of importance that one knows or is competent in the language or instruction.
- I think English is very vital and should be paid serious attention to, in order to improve those who are struggling. This is to benefit us all as we sometimes find it very difficult to understand our fellow peer mates.
- Even though I am good at English I find that I do agree that English or language has an effect on teaching because it can or does play a role in terms of understanding a subject and can thus lead to failure.

In addition to acknowledging the importance of language on teaching, and learning, the respondents went on to indicate that many of them realize their deficiencies in the command of the English language which have caused problems in their learning and interacting with lecturers. A few examples will illustrate this point.

- I would like to improve my writing speed - - I find it difficult to finish writing my exams in time.

- Essay writing being consistent, coherent, and systematic is a problem. Expressing ourself (sic) you think of something but when it comes to verbalize you thought on what you have read, it is a problem.
- I think in order to be intelligent or competence, it takes commitment and hard work. It is not only from English lecturers alone to bring about our language improvement, but we also need to put in more efforts.
- I find that language (English) is a barrier to a better academic performance.
- It is difficult for students beyond first year to grasp new grammatical concepts -- it takes a while.

Some students attributed their present difficulties to poor background, including what they claimed to be the poor secondary schools from which they came. Statements such as the following were frequent:

- Some of us are having bad background (sic).
- The main problem convincing the bw student of English lays (sic) at the secondary level of school. People are not properly trained to express themselves in English at school levels. Therefore the problem is carried.
- I have lack of communication in writing an assignment in logic ways and also lack of understanding to express myself whenever we have a group discussion in class.

Many students, in addition to acknowledging their own shortcomings in language which limited their ability to follow lectures and write essays and other assignments well, attributed some of these problems to the inability of lecturers themselves to speak English competently, and/or to teach well:-

- The lecturers in some cases do not seem to know the language, so I suggest that more competent people should be involved in the teaching of language
- There are some lecturers that make it difficult, especially with their jargon.

- A lot more attention should be given to the manner in which lecturers give information and make it their priority to give countable (sic!) notes, and if necessary repeat themselves.
- If you lecturers see that a learner has no interest in learning please encourage us.
- It would be good if people especially lecturers could communicate with everyday language; not big words.
- Lecturers must pronounce their language better.
- Sometimes a lecturer's English background or competence makes it difficult for me to get what is said. Different people say words differently (accent!).
- Good command of language on the part of the teacher/lecturer will lead to successful learning on the part of learners/students. A learner/student who is conversant in the language would study and understand material easily.
- The use of simple language during lecturing can enhance quick understanding. In addition it helps learners with the language problem.
- Language is not as much the problem as the way that the lecturers convey the lecture (sometimes their English is not up to date!).
- I think lecturers should be a little clearer when using the English language because not all of us are that good in foreign language.
- The only time I have to try and understand what is being said is when the lecture is offered in "Namlish". In short some lecturers struggle to pronounce English words and end up pronouncing the way they do in their mother tongue!
- There is need for lecturers to improve/work on their English skills. This is often irritating having to listen to a lecturer whose competence in English is limited or not so good!!
- The lecturers need to undergo a series of English language and communication courses because for some of them - - they are very poor in English and hence cannot express themselves in a good manner.

The Language Centre where a compulsory module is provided for all first year students (unless they have been exempted) also comes under criticism. Several comments illustrate this:

- The first year communication (course) must have more activities that involve learners speaking in front of others so that they can improve their level of communications.
- Set up practical session (sic) at Language Centre so that people will be able to improve the language effectively.

Arising from the criticisms made of lecturers and the Language Centre, several students offered practical suggestions on how they might be assisted to learn better and to communicate better:-

- I would like to see teachers (lecturers) to concentrate more on language, especially English for students to cope up with their work at school or in learning.
- Much improvement needed in writing essays, coherent essays and writing logically. I will be very satisfied if there is some example of an academic essay and related topic.
- People should be given time or enough time to participate in class and should be taken seriously because sometimes participate in owner vanucalor (sic) when doing something in groups.
- The first year communication (course) must have more activities that involves learners speaking infront of others so that they can improve their levels of communication.
- I think when it comes to language and teaching and learning, more practical tasks should be given to students, especially of a written nature.
- Lecturers should try to give more notes to the learners instead of them making notes themselves.

- Basically it (language) requires more practices than theories, and I believe if one stick to that he/she can improve drastically to the highest competence in English.
- We need to focus more on grammar and the use of vocabulary and on how to paraphrase.
- Encouragement in reading books (not necessarily prescribed) is essential to improve one's English competence. At UNAM there is no reading culture, eg. a final year economics student has never read Adam Smith's Commonwealth of Nations! That is pathetic!!
- There is a need for more active lecturers who will enable students to understand better. But not presenting boring lecture that will make students hate English forever.
- There is a need for update information. Lecturer should put more effort in assessing English grammar.
- English course should be offered throughout our studies from first year to fourth year, for the student to improve their English.
- The Language Centre should consider giving more language intense courses on English besides "Comprehension and paraphrasing"
- The teaching of English at the Language Centre should be enforced, especially on those learners who did not do well in English in Matric. The course should be made more interesting in the teaching methods; I found it boring and did not feel motivated.

Other suggestions made related to desired improvements within the University and country as a whole. The following are representative of those suggestions:

- English is good and it should be taught more because it helps individuals in life and every student should be able to do it for their own good. More reading books e.g. novels should be bought to encourage reading.
- The University should improve its language curriculum, especially for the first years (First Year Module) which is just very basic.

- I think the number of students per class should be minimized so that each and every student should get enough assistance from lecturers.
- I think UNAM needs to contextualize the first year English courses according to the Department (not only Faculties) - - Make it more relevant.
- English has been and still is a language of great difficulty in our country. It is therefore important that particularly in my own view, more emphasis is to be given to the Education Faculty to provide quality methods of teaching the English language. I believe that is the root of all, it need to start there.
- Students should be taught more about issues pertaining in their day to day lives instead of just following the text that were written long time ago!

All in all, the additional information supplied by the 115 respondents indicated:

(i) an agreement that there was indeed a connection between language and teaching and learning; whereas command of the language would be facilitatory to teaching and learning; inability to have a good command of language interfered with understanding and communication; and hence with teaching, and learning;

(ii) an acceptance that many respondents had difficulties in understanding, communication; grammar, essay writing, and other skills necessary for effective learning;

(iii) an agreement that these deficiencies were attributable to
   (a) the poor background of the schools from which the respondents came;
   (b) the communication skills of lecturers themselves for whom English was not a mother tongue;
   (c) Inadequacies in the courses provided by the Language Centre.

(iv) an agreement on the areas that need improvements and how these can be effected.

6.6 ACTION RESEARCH COMPONENT

Administering questionnaires alone may be considered action research. However, when action research is understood as a process of studying the context of operation and identifying areas which need change and then taking action I can take the questionnaire as the first stage of action research. Both lecturers and students who completed the questionnaires began to understand that there are problems in the areas identified in the questionnaire, which were language, teaching, learning and assessment. In answering the questions they thought about the actual context of teaching, learning and assessment. Once the participants understand the situation it is so much easier to take action together.

6.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the results of the survey based on questionnaires completed by lecturers and students. In addition to the results provided in tabular form and described in the text, the chapter also provided additional information by way of comments, observations, and suggestions provided by both lecturers and students. The next chapter, to which I now turn, presents the results of my own classroom practice and self assessment on the project and the practices of my colleagues.

CHAPTER SEVEN: MY OWN CLASSROOM PRACTICE AND SELF ASSESSMENT ON THIS PROJECT AND THE PRACTICES OF MY COLLEAGUES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I briefly describe the steps I followed in the initiation stage to get students to move away from the familiar methods of learning through lectures, and note-taking to exploring new ways, including seminars, project work, and brainstorming, to exploration where cases of experiences with individual students in which they gradually improve are cited. I also indicate examples of how my colleagues handled their classes, with examples of use of a variety of teaching approaches. Finally, I provide a brief self-assessment of myself as researcher in this project.

7.2 CHANGING MY OWN TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT METHODS

As can be seen in the methodology chapter, I used different methods with a view to developing students' understanding of the subject as well as thinking skills, and giving students the opportunity to use the English language in practical ways.

Initiation

In the Initiation Phase I would put my efforts to change my teaching and assessment methods. It appeared like nothing good was coming out of my good intentioned efforts. My first efforts with the **Psycholinguistics** class were not rewarded with appreciation or applause. Instead I received quite negative reactions from the students. Discussions with students as well as their unsolicited responses informed me that the whole exercise did not go well and may either have had to be abandoned or revised if I had the courage to try again. I will try to discuss some of the difficulties about this first attempt.

The first problem was that the students were not interested in this new approach of moving away from the lecture method to other approaches. They were quite happy

with what had been and was happening in their other classes. They saw no reason to change from the lecture method to a variety of teaching methods including project work; brainstorming and other learner-centred methods. Even after I explained the reasons again and again, there was no motivation to go into something new. During group discussions there were a lot of apathetic students who were just waiting for others to gather the information, which they would copy or write down in their notebooks. When I tried to persuade them to participate some would say, "I have nothing to say" or "I don't have an answer" or, "My brain is blocked". This appeared to be a defeatist way to look at a difficult situation. I was reminded of a rural development programme where one woman, faced with the practice of having to wash her hands and cooking utensils well before and after cooking said to those who were 'bothering' her, "Don't those who are clean also die?"

Seminars were the hardest part for the students during that initiation phase. The students hated that part of the teaching and learning process because they had to do a lot of work. They often compared the seminar method with the lecture and wished I could just get on with the lecture. During evaluation sessions, which I provided, some comments were:

- You are paid to teach, why don't you teach?
- If you can't teach say so!
- Maybe we need a replacement for you because you don't do your job!

Obviously, the students' conception of teaching was different from mine. They saw teaching as a process where the teacher or lecturer provides students with facts, figures, definitions and similar information. This would also mean that their conception of learning was the process of memorising what was given by the lecturer. In turn, the outcome of teaching and learning for them would be the ability to reproduce the accumulated facts. There was, therefore, a conflict between my conceptions of the teaching and learning process with the students' conceptions. This was one of the causes of the difficulties we experience, I on my side and the students on the other.

My new approach to teaching was also made more difficult by the fact that the other lecturers taught in the traditional way, that is, lecturing. The students did not appreciate what they called "your experiment" because others were not doing the same thing. Some of the comments included the following:

- Why don't you do like the other lecturers?
- Other lecturers just give us information, but you, you want us to find the information. This is not right.
- Why you want to be different? Just tell us what we need to pass!

I also learnt that in some seminar groups only one student did the work. The others just added their names to the list of members of the group. This obviously did not serve the purposes of the exercise. If only one person participated actively, the others did not learn much, if anything at all. It meant, too, that the practice, which was expected of students, did not take place since effective discussions did and could not take place. After each presentation I would invite comments and questions, but they seldom came. Very few people got the idea that we would all learn through active participation.

I also tried to get this class to write journals about their experience with my teaching. After one week there were very few students who were able to give me anything at all that they had written. I tried encouraging them with explanations about the benefits, but it didn't work. I had even taken the trouble of buying some special journal books so that they wouldn't complain about the expense of buying paper for such an "extra" activity. After about two weeks of trying I gave up.

I seemed to have brought matters to a head during assessment of learning; that is, the assignments. Instead of giving the students the traditional type of question where they would read some texts and present some opinions in the form of a discussion, comparison, and so on, I sent them all out to do some research in the field. They were to go to the schools, hospitals and day-care centres and look for information for their essays. In short, I was trying to encourage them to do some project work. This was something the students were completely against. They were not prepared to get into

something they had not only done before, but would also involve so much work. Some of their comments were:

- But madam, why can't you simplify our lifes? (sic)
- Surely we shall fail!
- You don't wants us to get our degrees or what?
- This is torture!
- If I pass this course it will be a miracle!

I have to say that on the side of language, that particular class was quite good in comparison with other classes that I have since taught. This may have been because about a third of the cla ss was made up of "returnees", a term used for people who had been in exile during the Apartheid era and had come back to Namibia after Independence. One particular student, a male, was so mad at one time that he threatened me with physical attack if I did not change my ways of dealing with them. His words were:

> Look here, I want to get my degree and go and serve my people. You better make sure I pass. I don't want to come back here to the same class next year.

Knowing that he had been a SWAPO fighter in the bush certainly made his words very threatening. I didn't, however, stop what I was doing; that is, trying to change the way the students were learning through changing the way I conducted my teaching and assessment. Fortunately, that threat came towards the end of the term. Otherwise I might have given up. I persisted. I spent the last few weeks trying to show the students HOW to learn and answer questions in assignments and examinations. They seemed to like that since it was something leading to examinations. During the trimester the operative question was "Will that be in the exam?" Anything that would not be in the exam was not worth discussing. In fact, the students lost interest as soon as they learned that something was being discussed for reasons other than for passing examinations.

As for my "star" student, I did not know what to expect. He got 40% in the Course-work Assessment, which was just the bare minimum to enable a student to qualify to sit for the examination. That is when he really couldn't stand me at all. He would walk the opposite direction if he saw me, so as to avoid talking to me. Surprisingly, he gave me reason to hope. In the examination he got 84%, which was a distinction! I sat and re-read that student's examination paper and could not arrive at a simple explanation for his outstanding performance. His ideas were right on target and his language was flowing. What even gave me the greatest shock was to see him in my office on the opening of the new academic year. I wondered what he had come for since he had avoided me a few weeks earlier. After a quiet reflection, he told me that he had come to my office for two reasons. One was to apologise for his bad behaviour the previous year and the other was to thank me for being kind to him even though he did not deserve it. In class I did not become negative towards him, he observed. The fact that I had given him such a high mark, he told me, was testimony to the fact that I did not bear a grudge against him. He even reminded me of what I had said to the class many times, which was "In my class, marks are earned, not given". All I can say is that I could not believe what I heard. That was one time when I wished I had had a tape recorder because then I would have been able to capture the sentiments of an individual who had been a "victim" of an "experiment" as my new ways of teaching and assessment had been dubbed. It was not only his words that were surprising. Even his demeanor indicated that he was sorry for his behaviour. He looked down all the time he talked, something which was totally uncharacteristic of him. He had been loud, noisy, and bold. He used to stand up and make a mock salute during class if he wanted to say something, much to the amusement of the class.

I also learnt that I should have introduced the process of change gradually and in bits that the students could deal with. I changed too drastically for students who had been taught for the whole of their school life using the traditional ways of teaching. That was something that I would take into account when attempting to repeat the experience with another group of students. Students' previous experience does affect their learning. There was also the fact that I had not read much literature on Action Research when I started, but knew about the need for change. I had had some training in Action Research in my undergraduate days when I was training to be a teacher, but

I hadn't put any of that knowledge to practice. Besides, many years had passed between the training and the practice.

Brainstorming was more acceptable to the students than the other techniques I had tried. This may have been because they didn't have to work hard. They felt that they could contribute something even if it was not quite good. They could even respond to something that another student had said. At least this gave the students the opportunity to express themselves in English. Initially, they were not forthcoming, but with time they got involved, sometimes to quite a high degree.

Exploration

After my first "experiment" I decided to explore these teaching and assessment techniques a little further. This time I had learnt some lessons. As described in the methodology chapter, my next class was a first year Introduction to Linguistics module, which was co-taught. The results of this phase were more favourable than in the first time trial. In this phase, there were more people who were able to develop a more positive attitude towards these new techniques of teaching. The idea was to get students to develop critical thinking skills, learn from each other and rely less on the lecturers. Students appreciated some of the outcomes of the process even as they expressed misgivings about others. Some of the comments (quoted here verbatim) included the following:

- Learning like that is good, but it it not make us pass then is no good. We have to pass. That is important, even we learn in old way.
- So, maybe is good to do things different, but notes help us know what is important. We ourself to make notes is not easy.
- This is good, but maybe we begin to understand and then the term come to an end. (Otaala , 2002:285)

Since this first year module was co-taught, I had some difficulties with the lecturers as well. This was mainly because we were operating at different levels. My colleagues were not too keen on what I was trying to do. One of them, in particular, thought that

because of students' background we would not succeed in trying to teach students how to learn. She was afraid that if many students fail we, the lecturers, would be asked questions, which was the practice at Faculty Board and at Administrative level. She was very fearful of the possible disastrous outcomes of this new approach. In fact, in her groups, she resorted to her old habits of giving students handouts, which she believed would help them pass. It became clear in our weekly discussions that I may be operating alone to quite a high degree. This may have contributed my acquisition of the title "lecturer who is mean with marks". I insisted on helping students learn through making them find the knowledge they need themselves, but with my guidance. I was not generous where I did not see any effort in learning. I rewarded effort, which is important in encouraging the acquisition of new skills. Not only did I praise the students who came up with brilliant ideas, but I also gave extra marks for something that was worth noting. I discussed this with the class with the purpose of making them aware that moving on is better than staying where you have always been. My colleagues were not too comfortable with these attempts of mine. I have to say, however, that after this first year experience, one these colleagues of mine adopted some my strategies and we became "partners" in that we bounced ideas off each other.

My experience with working with the same students over a period of three years has taught me a number of things about students, the teaching and learning process, and other things. One of those things is that students' attitudes are often a product of their experience. Students hated certain new things because they had had an experience which was quite different from this new experience. Teaching in the schools, I learnt, was done through the lecture method and many students were unwilling to move to more active techniques used by some of the lecturers at the University of Namibia. Where they had been given notes, now they had to make their own notes. Where the teacher was the authority in school, I was a facilitator who would guide the students in their learning. My teaching seemed to have disorganised the students as a result of their previous experience. In fact students seemed to have associated being knowledgeable with being authoritarian. Since I am the authority in the class I should tell students what they ought to do, what is important and what needs to be done to pass.

I also learnt that adopting alternative techniques of teaching enables the lecturer to cover the course material within a shorter period than using the lecture method. I heard many times how lecturers do not want to try any other method of teaching because they will not be able to cover the syllabus. My experience is that this fear is unfounded. Since I used the questioning technique quite a lot, I found that when students have discussed one question a lot of material is covered, including some of that which would be forthcoming. Sometimes a student's question would trigger other discussions, which, too, enabled more material to be covered. On the other hand if a student's question touched too closely on the coming topic I would tell the student to hold on to that question until we had discussed some other relevant issues in the forth-coming class. I made it a point to record in my journal that such a student did bring up such a question. During the next class I would remind the students about the question that had been asked previously. Sometimes the student may have forgotten what he/she had asked, but I would remind him/her.

Using the questioning technique also enabled me to judge the quality of my questions. I discovered that some of the questions I had given students to answer in group work were actually ambiguous. What happened was that I allowed all possible interpretations so long as they fitted the wording of the question. The knowledge I acquired in this practice helped me set better questions for examinations. On the part of the students, the practice of answering questions many times in the course of the semester taught them how to answer examination questions. Some students ended up scoring marks that were much better in the examinations than in the course work. Often students asked me, just before examinations, to give them a "scope', which, in their understanding, means telling them what would be in the examination paper. My answer was always standard: "Everything you have learnt!" The students were not very happy with this answer, but with time they understood what I meant. I taught them that answering any question well requires information from all sorts of sources. One needs to be well-grounded in many areas, so that when answering a question one can draw on all those sources. The most important lesson I wanted to teach them was that knowledge is not put in boxes. It is connected through many threads. Chapters in books, for example, are separate for purposes of making learning easier, but the knowledge in each chapter has some connection with the other chapters. It is our duty to pull these threads in order to shift what we need on particular occasions.

My experience with my students also taught me the power of praise. In attempting to get information from students I had to find ways of getting them to make suggestions even if they may not be good or correct. My lesson for the students was: "If you do not express what is worrying you or that which you are not sure about, how can you ever know the truth?" To encourage them to explore I avoided saying anything that would belittle the students. I used praise a lot. I used expressions such as "Very good", "Excellent", "Good point", "Well done". If a student made an effort but was not quite successful I used terms such as "Good thinking", "That is an interesting observation", "We need to explore that further". Later in the lesson I would show the students how and why their suggestion may have been off-point. With practice it became easy for the students themselves to identify areas where their suggestions did not fit. What is important here is the fact than I used my own experience as a student to make life easier for my students. For example, I hated being left without knowing how my idea was taken. Silence can be deafening! I wanted to give students some sort of feedback for whatever it was worth.

Another thing I learnt in my longitudinal work with students is that students can improve their reading with constant practice and guidance. This was on two fronts: the surface reading which involves pronouncing words clearly and the deeper reading of being able to process, interpret, and apply textbook information on their own. When I started with first years many of them could hardly read a paragraph. There were many difficulties with mother tongue interference and the speed of reading was very slow. With repetitive efforts to read something out loud more fluency developed. I also made it a point to explain to the students that it was not their fault that they had these difficulties from their mother tongues. "Many of us have these problems", I often said. I would give them a few of those I was aware of in each local language and there would be uproarious laughter. This was outside the actual reading time so that the people concerned would not feel that I was talking about them. With these explanations came a more relaxed atmosphere when asked to read something.

Reading on a deeper level took longer to improve because there were some embedded attitudes and practices that needed real "surgery" to change them. Since many students had been reading to memorise for the whole of their school life they expected

to continue doing so at university. I managed to change this approach to reading by asking students the type of questions that would not require memorising. Most of my questions in class, in tests and assignments were of a type that required deeper reading skills. In the beginning many students did rather badly. With practice, many have become better than expected. They could have become better because they were also maturing, but I am convinced that their improvement was greatly influenced by what we did together as teachers and learners. For example, in first year about a third of the class qualified to sit for examinations with marks ranging from 40% to 49%. In second year, the percentage of those going to the examinations' room with that range of marks had dropped to about 15% and at the end of third year it was about 6% of the class that qualified with the 40-49% range. The pass mark is 50%. That is calculated in the ratio 60-40 (course work: examination). To qualify to sit for examination you have to get a minimum of 40%. At first year level many usually find it difficult to qualify to sit. The top performers also showed a rise in their entry mark. In first year I had only one student with a mark in the seventies, but in third year there were 9 out 67 students who sat that examinations that got a mark in the seventies. There was even an 82%, a distinction in the scale of the University of Namibia! This was a drop from second year where there were two distinctions. These figures might not mean a lot to people who don't know the teaching and learning environment in which these marks were achieved. One important fact to note is that I am well-known for being "mean" with marks. After receiving back their first assignments the first year class declared me a "lecturer who is mean with marks". This was a label that went with me to every class, new and old. After the first year one student Agnes (not her real name), had the courage to tell me this:

> Ms Otaala, I am really sorry that I cannot continue with English. You are an excellent lecturer, the best I can say, but you are very mean with marks. I enjoy your classes all time and I not want to miss it, but when it come to tests and assignment things are very bad. I am sorry to say this to you.

I thought this was one of the most honest students I have had opportunity to teach. It must have taken her a lot of courage to say this, because she was not one of the most vocal in class. In fact, she was one of those who just sat quietly and waited for notes

to write down. Yet here she was telling me what many of her colleagues would not dare tell me face to face. Although I may have contributed to her lack of success there must have been other factors that brought this about because Agnes failed all her modules in first year, including those taught by other lecturers! Her major problem was the English language. She was poor all round. Her pronunciation was so bad that it was almost impossible to figure out what she was saying. This was partly because of mother tongue interference. Other people, too, had difficulty following what she was saying because, as one of my colleagues said, "She speaks Oshiwambo in English", meaning that her spoken English was like her mother tongue, Oshiwambo.

Given this characteristic feature of mine it has been surprising to many students that they can earn such a high mark. I have to say they showed great signs of having acquired the skills of deep reading, which have enabled them to process knowledge and achieve meaningful learning.

A number of students showed growth in this sphere. I will cite two cases. One is that of Edwin (not his real name). He is a weak student. That became clear from first year. It was reported by other lecturers, too, that he was struggling. This student worked extremely hard. He was always seen carrying a huge bag of books from the library. He was a frequent visitor in the lecturers' offices where he sought answers to questions. In class he appeared to listen attentively, but his questions indicated that he missed much of what was discussed. Sometimes he put up his hand to answer a question the lecturer had not even completed to formulate. This often caused great laughter from his classmates, which was a problem in itself. It was difficult to convince other students that it was a good idea to ask questions because some were afraid of being laughed at. His language, especially the pronounciation, was also a problem. With time, however, Edwin became a classic case and nobody really laughed with the intent to demean him. This continued even to third year. At the end of first year, he nearly failed. He managed to make it through by doing a supplementary. In the second year, Edwin continued to plough his way through many books, often without much achievement. He did a supplementary in almost every module he did. Then I started to have some private discussions with him about his reading. I continued to do this up to third year. It was like private lessons. I did not, however, teach him the content, but showed him how to read more meaningfully, how

to make notes, and how to answer questions. These discussions were revealing in that Edwin had all the possible facts to answer a question, but he didn't know how to organise those facts into a coherent whole. This was the outcome of memorising. So, I spent time showing him how to get more out of his reading. We went through questions to see how Edwin's information could be utilised appropriately to gain a better grade. We also looked at some of the textbooks he was carrying around to see how textbook writers help the reader get the basic information from their books. Some of those textbook features include headings and subheadings, chapter summaries, indexes and glossaries. I tried to show Edwin how ideas may be presented in a hierarchical order of importance with some sections providing the main ideas. Edwin was, however, very concerned about leaving out some material if he approached his reading along the lines I was suggesting to him. The old adage "Old habits die hard" applied here.

Since reading is related to writing it was clear that Edwin's difficulties with reading also made his writing problematic. When faced with an essay he wrote everything he could remember from his reading without sifting it to fit the question. Edwin and I spent a lot of time going through his past assignments to see why his grade was not as high as he expected. One good thing about him during these discussions was that he was very willing to learn. He never missed a session, and he did all the little assignments I gave him to try to give him practice in the techniques we had discussed. I have to confess I spent more time with Edwin than I thought I would. After every session Edwin always came up with another question or problem. That would take us into another area of discussion. I was prepared to give him the help he needed since he seemed so keen. After three years of trying I think Edwin is slowly getting to where he should be. In the final examinations at the end of year three he managed to score a 65% final mark! This was certainly way above his normal performance. On the first week of the new academic year after this star performance Edwin came to my office and was acting like a small boy who had just received a gift. He alternated between covering his face and raising his eyes to the sky; sitting down and standing up; clasping his torso and flapping his arms around. This was the non-verbal aspect of his communication that day. The verbal message to me can be captured in the following way:

> Thank you, thank you, thank you Miss. I made it. Thank you again. Thank you a million. This is just unbelievable. I still can't believe it. My God. So, I can do it. Oh Miss! I don't know what to say!

This kind of response wipes away any difficulties I may have had in the course of trying to improve students' learning and language competence through using different techniques. Here was a student who had done supplementary examinations almost every single semester from first year to third year. He makes it through this time around with a good mark on the general scale, but a personal scale of "very good". Edwin's language has also improved a lot, but I have to say much of his English language errors have focilised and it will take great effort and time to eliminate them, if at all. All I can say is that he can now communicate better. One can actually get what he wants to say, something which was not easy at the beginning. He still has one year of studies. I believe he will improve a little more during that year.

The second case was that of a Portuguese-speaking Namibian who had originally come from Angola. His problems were similar to Edwin's, but he had additional problems of attitude and language. It was obvious that he had learnt quite a lot of grammar but had not used the English language much. This affected his performance a lot in first year. As for attitude he differed from Edwin. Since he was a bright student he expected to get high marks. Unfortunately, when he didn't, he told himself that the problem was with me, the lecturer. Even when there were three lecturers teaching the first year introductory module he attributed his lack of good performance to me partly because I was the coordinator of the module and partly because the tutorial group which was allocated to me believed that I didn't give them enough marks. So, Piedro (not his real name) didn't do well in first year. He, in fact failed that module. He was so angry with me that he made it clear that I may be responsible for his leaving English altogether.

After that kind of information had been conveyed to me I decided that it was time I had a talk with Piedro. I tried to explain why he didn't do so well. He accepted that part of his problem was English. He, however, insisted that I was not generous with marks. I told him if he passed the first year introductory module he would find things much easier and I would try to help him further. I didn't teach the introductory

module the following year; that is, the year in which he was repeating. He repeated the module while attending the second year classes. During the second year Language and Society module Piedro's attitude was still negative. Half-way through the semester, however, something happened. He moved away from his usual friends and sat at a different place. There used to be three of them sitting next to each other in every class. They used to talk and disrupt the class. The separation became quite obvious.

One apparent effect of the change in attitude of this student was that he concentrated more on his work. He was also able to listen more. I think that Piedro's attitude affected his listening at the time that he had a negative attitude. He spent more time complaining about what was wrong instead of trying to get the most he could out of the classes. Since I had embarked on helping all the students to learn better and improve their communication, both oral and written I made sure everybody had a contribution to make during group discussions as well as in plenary sessions. I had learnt most of the names in the class, something some students found amazing. I would call students by name, and they would be shocked. So, when I wanted contributions I asked different students by addressing them directly. Piedro was included. At first he wasn't forthcoming, but after the change of attitude he started to give more useful contributions.

After the first test Piedro still hadn't got the kind of mark he was expecting. He was very unhappy and made that fact known. He wasn't alone here either. Many other students still kept the belief from first year that I was mean with marks. I explained to them that in their class were students who got between 20 and 26 out of 30 marks for that test. It wasn't good enough for them because each felt he/she needed his/her personal mark to be high. I told them to earn that mark and we embarked on learning how to earn a good mark. We discussed reading techniques, writing techniques, as well as the importance of listening and practising speaking English. Piedro looked like someone torn between taking all this in and just letting it all pass by.

Piedro, however, showed that something must have gone in. The culmination of Piedro's change of attitude was seen after the first assignment in second year, that is, after the first test. He gave me a pleasant surprise. He chose a research topic for this

assignment. I had several topics from which the students could make their choices. When I read his assignment it became clear that he had been up to something good. He scored 72%, a mark that was far from his previous performances. He was so pleased with himself, and me, it seems, that he came to my office to say something like this:

> Now, I believe you. You say if we work hard and do the right thing, we will get good marks. Yeah, I can see. Thank you.

I told him that he had earned the mark and that it was n't me who gave him the high marks. He wasn't too sure about that, but he said, "From today I will work hard and follow your advice". He asked if he could come to discuss things and I responded by telling him that that would the most wonderful thing for me to see happen. He did come several times in second year, to ask for help even in other modules that I wasn't teaching.

In the third year Piedro kept his new self and decided to move from the far end of the lecture hall to the very front, right under my nose! His characteristic place in both first and second year was the back of the lecture hall. He indicated by his contributions that he was really listening. For example, he asked very sensible questions, made very good suggestions, and communicated in a way I hadn't seen before. He came to ask me for additional reading material and often followed me after the class to discuss something further that I said in class. His assignments showed that not only had he had worked hard, but he had also learned how to read and write better. His final mark, however, wasn't as good as it should have been. He got 69%. However, the improvement in the way he presented his work was quite clear.

Most of the feedback was evidence from students' tremendous enjoyment of the opportunities for thought that I as the lecturer presented but it was also suggested in feedback that there were less-time consuming ways of transmitting information. Such comment reveals the extent to which students bring distinct expectations of teaching into higher education.

With these two cases I can say that I have had quite pleasant times amidst some difficulties in bringing about change in students' language ability as well as their learning and critical thinking skills. It is not easy to put a boundary between language and other skills since it is language that is the vehicle for the acquisition of other skills.

We will now move on to see how other lecturers handled the language issues in their classes. This next section concerns observation of classes of three lecturers in the Department of English. The three lecturers were co-teaching the module Introduction to Poetry and Literary Criticism.

7.3 CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

As said in the methodology chapter, I spent some time observing the interaction between the three lecturers and students. Since the observation was not focused on all possible aspects of teaching and learning, I report here only those aspects that are concerned with language.

One thing that was observable in the classrooms of the three lecturers was lack of participation of many students. The lecturers were very active and tried to encourage students to participate. However, only some of the students participated to a high degree. The others seemed to be happy with just sitting around and watching what was happening. Occasionally, they wrote down some notes, but otherwise they were fairly dormant. There are several possible interpretations for this state of affairs. One possible explanation is a cultural one, where students come from backgrounds which do not allow young people to talk while adults are talking. Since the lecturer is an adult, many students may not want to appear to interrupt, contradict, or show that they are just as knowledgeable as the adult, in this case, the lecturer. This situation could have been further fostered by the schools from which the students came. Those teachers out there could have utilized this cultural tool to protect their own position of authority over students. (Bell, 1994; Bason and Nonyonjo, 1997)

A second possible interpretation of the students' lack of participation is lack of experience in class participation. If, in the previous schools they attended it was not

part of the school culture to let students participate in their learning, the chances are that the students who are at UNAM do not have any experience in this approach to teaching and learning. So, they need to be taught and practice will open their doors to this rather different approach.

The third possible interpretation of the students' apparent apathy in class could be accounted for by the fact that some students may not actually be following the lectures because their competence in the English language is quite low. If this is the case then the students concerned would rather keep quiet and not display their ignorance. Some may even be able to follow what is going on in class, but their communicative competence is in doubt. This may have been fostered by a school system that did not give students the opportunity to use the language they were learning. They may have learnt the grammar, but the actual use of this grammar was alien to many. Whichever the reason for students' lack of participation, the fact is that there was not much demonstration of students' use of English in class.

It was also observable that the students used their mother tongues a lot more than they used English during discussions. The lecturers, particularly the females, encouraged group discussions. This may have been because women usually like discussing issues with other women, or because these particular lecturers had mastered the art of using group discussions as a technique of teaching. During the discussions, however, the students spent their time talking in their mother tongues. Ms Hamilton made a plea for the students to use English in class, but this was not heeded as far as I was able to observe. Ms Macy was too concerned about the use of mother tongues in class, particularly among students themselves. She told them to explain to each other what was difficult in their mother tongues and use English during discussions for the whole class. This seemed to have made some students very happy since they were able to talk to each other in their mother tongues.

When students did attempt to use English during class discussions I could see that they were having difficulties expressing themselves. The lecturers would help them out by saying 'You mean…' when a student had said something incomprehensible. A few students were quite fluent. I became curious about these particular students since they seemed to be out of place in the classes I observed. On inquiry I found that these

few students were outsiders. They came from countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ghana and Botswana. There were also some from Namibia in this category of students. These, I learnt, came from privileged schools in and around Windhoek, the capital city. Many of the others were from rural schools where English is not used much.

Another indication of the level of students' competence in English was demonstrated by the amount of time that the lecturers concerned devoted to learning vocabulary. This was not part of the planned lessons, but it became something that was necessary because the progress of the lessons was negatively affected by the fact that many students did not know what many vocabulary items meant in the poems that they were studying. Ms Macy, for example, told the students several times to prepare for the next lesson by looking up the meaning of the words that they did not understand. She even said to them one day, "I am not in the business of teaching and explaining vocabulary and it is therefore your responsibility to find out what the words in the poems mean before we discuss them in class". Unfortunately, this fell on deaf ears. The first few lessons were not completed because of this difficulty. After a few lessons of this nature Ms Macy was compelled to teach vocabulary every time she had a class. Below is a vignette showing part of the lesson she taught one day.

VIGNETTE 1

Ms Macy: "O.K. Let's look at an example now (.) I would like you to turn to page 64 (.) we will look at a poem we touched on last time called 'The King(opened her book) (.) we will look at it literary and explain some of the words (.) I told you I wouldn't do this but I will just help with this once and hope that you will have bought your dictionaries by next time (.) we will see what we can do (.)

On the blackboard she wrote:

Tawny

Then she asked , "Anyone?" There was no answer. She supplied it herself: "tawny is a kind of brown, the same kind of brown as an owl or the same kind of brown as the brown of a leaf of a tree in autumn". (On the blackboard, she added beside the word 'tawny' – brown/aging). She continued, "Next, word: Mane – can anyone tell me what 'mane' is?"

(As she wrote it on the board). Someone volunteered an answer but was not loud enough for others to hear. Ms Macy continued, "Say it loud so that everyone can hear" Rosy (the student) tried again. "Can you hear that", Ms Macy asked the whole class. Students answered in chorus, "No". Ms Macy imitated the softly spoken sentence. There was laughter. Then loudly, really loudly, Ms Macy said, "The hair of a lion. This is how you should say it – really loud. It is that long hair a male lion has". She proceeded to draw a picture of a mane on the blackboard. Then she continued, "Ah…(looking at her copy of the Explorings, the text they were using for the lesson), balding?" It was a question for the students. There was silence. Ms Macy continued, "The second 'balding'?". There was silence again. Ms Macy tried to encourage students to find an answer: "Come on people, you know this. If a man is bald…" Someone put up a hand. "Vicky", Ms Macy indicated a go ahead. Vicky said, "He has no hair". "Yes, said Ms Macy, "losing hair – baldness. Losing hair is 'balding'" She proceeded to write on the blackboard:

Balding – losing hair

Ms Macy read from the text "A balding monk's tonsure". On the board she wrote:

Monk –

Then pointing at a student she said, "Yes?"

Student: "Priest"

Ms Macy: "Priest. Kind of.

Another student: "Ah mm like a male nun".

Ms Macy : "Like a male nun. Yeah? It is a religious man. They usually go and live on their own and they devote their lives to (pause) God. So, a religious person. That is not a good definition, but you know what I mean. She wrote on the board, next to the word 'monk' a meaning as follows:

Monk – a religious man

The above vignette gives an indication of the lecturer's effort to help students with vocabulary before they could even start the study of the poem they were supposed to

analyse. In this one poem there were more than ten vocabulary items that the students did not know. Ms Macy used several techniques to teach the relevant vocabulary. She used pictures which she drew herself, demonstrations such as loosening the hold on her big bag to explain the meaning of the word 'loose', and questioning. When students failed to get the idea she would try to find ways of guiding them towards an answer. She did not just give students the answer. She used several techniques, either singly or in combination. An example of this is seen in part of the lesson. After a student had suggested that the word means "the little hat they [monks] put on their heads", Ms Macy elaborated on this in the following manner:

> You are very close. A 'tonsure' is a hair cut (she demonstrated this by circling on her head with her fore finger). This is a European thing really. I don't know if you have this in Africa, but these monks used to have hair like this (she circled her head with her fore finger again; then she proceeded to draw a picture of a tonsure on the board). They used to shave around here (another circling on the head), and they shave a circle in the middle, Hidipo Hamutenya style. Don't tell him I said that (this person was a minister in the Government of Namibia). He has a tonsure on his head. It is a round spot in the middle.

Here we can see demonstrations, picture illustrations, elaboration, use of local examples, and use of humour and student involvement. These techniques help students who are weak in English to grasp the actual meaning of the words in question. Sometimes Ms Macy asked students to do the demonstration. For example, in the teaching of the meaning of another word in the poem, which was 'flop, Ms Macy asked the students to show by action that they knew the meaning of the word. The techniques of elaboration allowed the lecturer to accept what the students had suggested but added more, perhaps even more correct information to the suggestion. Ms Macy did not just reject the students' suggestions. She used other means to show the students that their suggestions may not be quite as accurate as they thought.

Humour in teaching serves several purposes. First it reduced tension and encourages people to participate. Second it makes lessons more interesting. Sometimes when lessons are boring or when the lecturer goes on talking and talking, the students get

tired and start doing other things such as reading comics or doing assignments for other modules. If there is fun they are likely to be on task. Third, students may be encouraged to ask questions when the atmosphere is so relaxed. It is then that a lecturer may actually find that there are many things the students don't know. Ms Macy attempted to use this technique not only in teaching vocabulary, but in other lessons where she taught the more technical subject matter.

Ms Hamilton, like Ms Macy, also realized that teaching poetry requires an understanding of the vocabulary in any given poem to be studied. In her teaching she checked that the students understood the vocabulary in the poem before proceeding with a discussion of the poem. In many cases she could not proceed with the analysis of the poem because there were many words in the poems she wanted to teach that the students did not understand. In one of the classes she had with ENG 3211 students Ms Hamilton started the discussion of the chosen poem by reading it out loud while the students listened. The idea was to give students a poetic rendition of the poem as well as familiarize the students with correct pronunciation of the words in the poem. She wanted to read the poem again, but she decided that the students needed to understand the meaning of some difficult vocabulary first. This is how she proceeded:

> I am going to read the whole poem again. There are some difficult words. 'Querulous' – what does this mean? There was silence. (Ms Hamilton supplied the answer). A baby can be querulous. It means 'complaining'.

After this opening Ms Hamilton continued to pick out what she considered difficult words and gave the students the meaning of these words as follows:

'Scampered'	:	lightly running, jumping (she demonstrated this)
'Murals'	:	painting on a wall or bridge. You have some in Namibia.
'Adorned'	:	beautiful

After this Ms Hamilton decided to find out from the students if it was safe to continue with the analysis of the poem. She asked the students, "Any other words you don't understand?" This inquiry was greeted with silence. Ms Hamilton assumed that all the other words in the poem did not pose a problem to the students. This, however, cannot be taken for granted since silence does not always mean consent or understanding. It could be explained using the reasons we have already identified above. Even Ms Hamilton did not appear to be convinced of students' understanding of the remaining words in the poem since she went over the poem demonstrating the meaning of words she thought the students might have difficulty understanding. Her approach was definitely different from that of Ms Macy who attempted to test the students' understanding of vocabulary by asking them to tell others what they understood, or by demonstrating the meaning of the words through action.

The use of video in teaching also indicated the need to discuss basic vocabulary with students. This was seen in Ms Hamilton's classes. She used the video "Il Postino" with the purpose of teaching students the basic technical vocabulary of analysing of poetry. The video was about the relationship between an established and well-known poet from Chile who had taken refuge in Italy and a young Italian postman who was trying to become a poet. In the process of teaching and learning between these two characters, the whole essence of poetry is explained and developed. However, since the students could easily enjoy the movie without paying attention to the vocabulary of poetry, Ms Hamilton made effort to prepare the students and to show them what to look for in the video. This took one whole lesson. The viewing of the video was outside this lesson. After the showing of the video there was a follow-up lesson in which Ms Hamilton asked students what they had learnt. Apart from the technical vocabulary, Ms Hamilton also helped the students with other difficult vocabulary. Sometimes Ms Hamilton asked the questions, but students were also given opportunity to ask questions about things they did not understand. Without this exercise of discussing the relevant vocabulary it might have been difficult for the students to benefit from the video.

Another indication that the students had difficulties with language was seen when Ms Macy gave the students the first assignment. She spent time going over the whole list of assignments together with the students. She asked what some words meant and

elaborated a lot on students' contributions. She explained why she was doing this: to make sure no-one comes up with an excuse like "I didn't understand the question".

I learnt several things from observing my colleagues teaching. One of them was that there were other lecturers who used methods other than the lecture. These lecturers were, however, both trained in teaching at lower levels of education. One of them was trained to teach adults, and the other was trained to be a lecturer. Ms Hamilton was actually doing a diploma in teaching in higher education by distance while Ms Macy's training had taken place several years back. Although Dr Ultuwat was also trained to be a Secondary School teacher I did not actually observe him using other methods outside the lecture. In fact, he seemed more comfortable with this method than with group work, for example. He had shown an understanding of the possible methods for teaching, but the practice did not bear this out. This may have been because using methods other than the lecture requires a lot of hard work from both the lecturers and the students. Since he was the Head of Department of English at the time of observation, he may have been unable to prepare for these other methods and techniques.

Observing those two colleagues of mine at work reminded me of how much work is required to make alternative methods to the lecture work successfully. One needs prior preparation and organization. During the lesson, too, the lecturer has to work very hard to follow the lesson plan. Things can go wrong, but one has to try to rescue the situation. Time and classroom management are of essence. If one doesn't keep to the plan the lesson may achieve very little. For example, students may get carried away when there is an interesting topic to discuss. The lecturer has to be firm in bringing the discussion to an end. Sometimes heated arguments may cause temper outbursts, but this can be kept at a minimum. This requires skills on the part of the lecturer.

7.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE RESEARCHER ON THIS PROJECT

In the background to this study I provided my personal background and experiences as an undergraduate student, as a secondary school teacher, and how I became aware

about the challenges of teaching and learning, for both the teacher and taught we also indicate the need to collaborate and partner with one's colleagues both at Department and Institutional levels if we wish to bring about desirable and sustainable change.

In the methodology section of the report I briefly listed the phases that the present study went through starting with phase I: Changing my own teaching and assessment methods and phase II - - interviews; and moving on to phase III - - observations of teaching; and phase IV the survey questionnaire. In each of these phases and the presentation and discussion of the results and presentation of conclusions and recommendations, one looks back to try to capture the change in me as an individual. It is a very difficult exercise trying to undergo, introspection, but a few major "first-time-around" reactions quickly come to mind.

My original individual effort to try and improve myself as a teacher and hopefully the teaching and learning process, and the learner, has grown from an informal learning process to a more formalized one which involved attending formal courses in Germany on higher education and attending the research methods course in the Master of Education degree programme at the University of Namibia, to attending conferences and workshops on improving teaching and learning at University. Following on that was a formal registration for a doctoral degree which although I formally registered for in 1997 I was unable to complete in the expected time for a variety of reasons. Having now gone through the rigour of developing a proposal under supervision, read the pertinent literature, undertaken the study and presented formally the findings of the study and recommendations, I feel that I can convince particularly those with a strong bias toward "evidence-based" work that my findings, though they may have limitations, are things that Namibia as a country and the University of Namibia as an institution need in their efforts for continued review and improvement of tertiary education. On an individual basis I feel that the completion of this project will act as a catalyst to propel me to a range of enquiries, based on the questions that arise from further research. In addition, I feel that when my professional services are requested either within the University or in the Ministry of Education, or indeed in the region, I will be happy to respond positively in the knowledge that I have some professional competence in providing consultancy, particularly in the areas of language and improving teaching and learning.

The present work involved interaction with some fellow lecturers and some students, particularly in the Faculties of Humanities. It was instructive, revealing, and pleasing to learn that both the lecturers and students with whom I interacted found the project of personal benefit to them, as well as an "eye-opener" as to the range of possibilities for self-improvement. These views corroborate those expressed by the lecturers and students in each of the phases of the project, but most markedly in phase V - - the survey/questionnaire.

If Action Research is taken to mean a process through which individuals or groups study their own practice in order to solve their personal practical problems I can now say confidently that the work I have done has been an example of problem-solving within the workplace. Every new step taken has been based on an understanding of the previous actions and situations.

7.5 **CONCLUSION**

Namibia has since independence attempted to reform its educational system to a more democratic and learner-centred system where the curriculum is relevant to and respectful of different cultural traditions and communities (Angula and Grant-Lewis, 1997). The new system encourages teachers to begin their instruction by gaining an understanding of their learner's existing knowledge, skills, and understandings and to actively involve them in the learning process towards the goal of preparing citizens for a new democratic society.

Many students seemed to have little experience with such experience as class discussion and working in groups along with the sense that some craved the familiarity of straight lectures, as witness by their comments: "Why can't you lecture to us as the other lecturers do?"

In Namibia one commendable aspect of the educational reforms is action research or what is locally referred to as 'critical practitioner inquiry'. Student teachers; teachers and now lecturers and teacher educators have been provided opportunities to shape the educational reforms by conducting studies on their own practices in relation to the reform principles. The hope is that practitioners like myself and my colleagues will

participate in defining the meaning of the broad principles of the reform in our local UNAM context and that within the country as a whole, a practitioner-generated research base will be created that will complement the academic literature on education that has been generated within and outside Namibia (Zeichner and Luecke, 2004).

We now turn to the final chapter dealing with the discussion, recommendations and conclusion.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study the responses of both lecturers and students revealed a range of issues, including students' language and academic backgrounds, students' communication skills, students' participation in their learning and lecturers' own use of English. There were also issues related to teaching methods, students' learning styles and essay writing skills.

As indicated earlier my focus was on language where I tried to find to what extent it played a role in teaching, learning and assessment. This chapter focuses on the discussion of the inter-relatedness of language, teaching, learning and assessment. It will provide a discussion, recommendations and conclusion.

8.2 DISCUSSION

In this section a brief discussion will be provided on the general language issues, before I discuss the relationship between language, teaching, learning and assessment.

LANGUAGE ISSUES

The findings in this study indicate that there was general agreement between the lecturers and students involved in the study that many students at UNAM are not fluent and competent in the use of English. Students' self-evaluations indicate that many of them are honest enough to admit that they have a problem which needs to be addressed.

One of the findings in this study is that there are many reasons why students at UNAM have poor English. Ms Macy gave reasons that included the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction during the Apartheid era, students' lack of grounding in their mother tongues, and the teaching of English in isolation without the cultural aspects of language teaching being taken into account. Ms Hamilton's reasons for students' poor English were lack of a reading culture, students' lack of experience in

expressing themselves in English and the fact that for the majority of students English is not their mother tongue. Dr Ultuwat supported the view of one Ministry of Education official that the cause of the problem of poor English at school level (reflectively, at tertiary institutions as well) is the use of the translation method in teaching. The views expressed by the lecturers were echoed by the students involved in the study some of whom gave examples of their own experiences in school as well as university. The causes of poor English among students at UNAM can be summarised and attributed to the fact that many students were not first language speakers of English, learnt English in a non-English speaking environment, were taught English without awareness of English culture, lack grounding in their mother tongues, and came from poor schools with poorly qualified teachers and have no reading culture.

The view that one of the reasons for poor English at UNAM is because the students came from poor schools with poorly qualified teachers is supported by Wolfaardt (2001) who found that with regard to the general language proficiency of Namibia's teachers, reading and usage (grammar) were the weakest areas. The evidence provided in this study, too, suggests grammar as causing the greatest difficulty.

There was also general agreement that students' spoken English was better than written English and that more focus should be on written English.

It was gratifying to note that there was no single person who suggested that students learn to speak "the Queen's English". That means that both groups, the lecturers and students, were of the opinion that being competent in English means having a grasp of the grammar and other aspects of diction that makes one's communication clear to the listeners and readers. That means that "poor" English referred to the kind of English that made communication difficult, if not impossible.

Several solutions were suggested by students who believed that many teachers simply translate the difficult texts into mother tongues, which they hope makes understanding better. The Students, however, observed that although translating English texts into mother tongues helps in understanding, there is a disadvantage in that examinations are in English. Since students have the habit of translating texts into mother tongues

they fail to express themselves in English even though they may understand the questions in the examinations. The outcome of this is often either poor performance or complete failure.

Poor English seems to lead to some problems for the students at UNAM. This study has revealed that because of poor English students find it difficult to express and articulate ideas in English, understand the textbooks, follow lectures and study on their own. This state of affairs leads to poor achievement, a view which is supported by evidence from the University of Transkei where it was found that though low, a positive significant correlation existed between TOEFL scores and achievement scores in Physics, and it was concluded that student's comprehension skills in English play a role in Physics (Thampi, 2000: 113).

LANGUAGE, TEACHING AND LEARNING

The results from the interview revealed that the teaching of Literature as a subject is affected by the students' competency in English, which is the medium of instruction. If students do not understand the meaning of much of the vocabulary in the texts being studied the grasp of the substance of the texts is greatly reduced. That means that lecturers have to spend time explaining vocabulary to students, which reduces the actual time for the study of the content of the texts. This was supported by the evidence from the section on observation, which showed that both Ms Macy and Ms Hamilton spent quite considerable time teaching vocabulary before the actual texts were analysed. Ms Macy had initially told students that it was their responsibility to look up the meanings of words they did not know in the texts before the actual analysis, but in practice she found that it was near impossible to continue with the study of the text when most students did not have a good grasp of the meanings of many of the words in the texts. She was forced to do what she had not considered to be her responsibility as a teacher of Literature.

Along with the study of vocabulary is the need to situate that vocabulary in a cultural setup. Again, Ms Macy was strongly opposed to the study of vocabulary in isolation. It has to be understood in its cultural context. This means that the lecturers have to explain the meanings of words from a cultural perspective.

It was suggested by students that although the problems they faced in teaching and learning are related to their own difficulties there may be cases where the lecturers' own competence in English is the cause of the problem. Results from the focus group interviews and the survey revealed that the lecturers' accents were of particular concern to the students because some lecturers spoke with accents that made it difficult for the students to follow the lectures. This is because many of the lecturers are not first language speakers of English, although there were many who had mastered the language. The good news was that there were not many lecturers whose accents interfered with their communication abilities. For some lecturers, including first language speakers of English, it was the speed with which they taught that caused problems for student learning. Even after some complaints from the students some respondents said that the lecturers concerned did not improve significantly after being made aware of the problem they caused for the students. This suggests that lecturers need to put more effort into listening to the students' views.

This study has also shown that there may be situations where learning may be improved through the use of mother tongues during teaching. There was, however, disagreement about this possibility. One lecturer, Ms Macy, felt strongly in favour of using mother tongues in group discussions for a number of reasons. She felt that mother tongues could help students to explain difficult concepts to each other, conceptualise difficult aspects of a subject, understand what is being taught, preserve their identity, realise the importance of their mother tongues, appreciate the value of local languages in general and transfer learning to other languages, including foreign ones. The other lecturers, Ms Hamilton and Dr Ultuwat, however, had a different view. They were of the opinion that since English is the official language in Namibia and the medium of instruction in education, it is not prudent to use any other language in teaching at UNAM. Some students also shared a similar view

Although Ms Macy's idea of using mother tongues in teaching is a good idea there may be practical problems associated with its application. One of these is the fact that there are foreign students at UNAM who may be excluded from active participation in group discussions because they do not speak any of the local languages in Namibia. Another reason for concern is the fact that there are minority groups in Namibia who

may also be excluded from class discussion if the students are encouraged to use mother tongues during classes. Yet another difficulty may arise where the lecturer is a foreigner or a local who doesn't speak any of Namibia's mother tongues. One might ask, 'how can such a lecturer monitor group discussions?' Since monitoring group discussions is part of effective group management it would mean that the lecturer is excluded from the real happenings within the groups. The use of mother tongues in teaching and learning may also exacerbate the already polarised group divisions of the community on ethnic grounds. It means that people will only be able to join up with others that speak their mother tongue. This will not encourage the spirit of team building based on a certain degree of understanding between the members from different backgrounds.

Perhaps the biggest threat to learning if mother tongues are used in classroom encounters, in my opinion, is the removal of opportunity for the students to practice the English they may have acquired, but which they have not put to good use in everyday communication. This view is supported by some students during the focus group interviews who voiced the opinion that many of the students who fail examinations in school do so because the teachers used the translation method so much that the students found difficulty in expressing themselves in English during the examinations. Students who understood the subject but had no ability to express themselves in English joined those who did not understand the subject at all. This, in their view, was the outcome of lack of practice in using English in the teaching-learning process. In both the focus group interviews and survey the words that kept popping out were "more practice" as a solution to the lack of English competence at UNAM. Using mother tongues might make this very difficult.

I also think that using mother tongues to solve problems of English will lead to laziness because many students will not put much effort to learning new things since their neighbours who speak their mother tongues will explain difficult things to them. Many students are already known to do just enough work to enable them to pass. This was supported by the focus group members who suggested that students do more, and not expect lecturers to do everything for them.

Sometimes a lot of teaching time at UNAM that would be devoted to the teaching and learning of content is taken up by language problems. This was supported by the views from the lecturers during the interviews as well as from my own experience in trying to improve my own teaching and students' learning. Much of the effort was put on helping students understand what was being taught as well as on how to learn and answer questions in tests, assignments and examinations. Through constant discussions, it was hoped, students' fluency in English would improve just as writing skills would through practice. There are no guarantees in this kind of exercise, but one has to make an effort and hope that something good will come out of this. My own experience showed some real progress in both essay writing skills as well as communication in English generally.

Concerning teaching styles, I would say that the results from the interviews and observation of teaching as well as my own practice reveal that varied teaching styles enable the lecturers to cater for different students' learning styles and abilities. The lecturers' views, particularly Ms Macy and Ms Hamilton, about the teaching methods they use, concur with their practice. They identified the teaching methods they use as being collaborative in nature because these would help the students become participant members of the teaching and learning process. They used the lecture method some of the time and group discussions and seminars most of the time. They used the lecture method to introduce material and then proceeded with methods that encouraged student participation. These approaches were consonant with my own practice. Indeed, in both interviews and observation of teaching I found that the two lecturers, Ms Macy and Ms Hamilton, and I, shared common views on language, teaching, learning and assessment. Since I started changing my own practice before I did the observation of the lessons taught by my colleagues it was possible for me to see the commonality of approaches which supported the lecturers' views. This may have been because the three of us are trained teachers and brought our skills from school teaching to university teaching. Although Dr Ultuwat was also a trained teacher I did not see much application of the theories of teaching and learning in his classroom teaching. He, however, expressed the sentiments of a trained teacher in the interviews. I was very excited about my findings.

There are many reasons why different methods of teaching are beneficial for both lecturers and students, according to the lecturers and students involved in this study. For students, collaborative/group work makes students participate, enables students to bounce ideas off each other, helps in retention of material, gives students practice in articulating ideas, creates a more vibrant atmosphere and is enjoyable. All these advantages, in a way, help the students to improve their oral skills in English where English is used. Lectures provide very little, if any, opportunity for students to practice their language skills. For lecturers, there is the advantage of seeing students' oral skills improve, apart from having enjoyable lessons. My own practice showed me that a lecturer can actually cover more content through alternative methods to the lecture. This may sound impossible when one considers the amount of time one has to devote to preparation, classroom management and time-keeping. Language skills are improved in both students and the lecturer since these active methods are unpredictable and one has to think on one's feet sometimes. Even the teaching methods improve because one always learns from one's mistakes. This became apparent in the way the lecturers whose lessons were observed applied the same methods over the period of observation. My own practice evolved with more practice.

The results of the interviews with both lecturers and students revealed negative attitudes towards the Language Centre, a centre that was set up to help students improve their communication skills, both orally and in writing. Both lecturers and students were not satisfied with the outcomes of teaching and learning at the Language Centre. The results from the survey were particularly devastating. When essay writing skills are taken together with English language competency it was found that a high proportion of students (75.6%) felt that, after the first year, they did not benefit from the courses offered at the Language Centre. It may be that the courses are not appropriate, but I did not examine these courses to make an evaluation of my own. It may also be that the students' attitude towards the courses was not positive enough to allow them to benefit. A combination of the two is also possible as indeed are other possibilities.

It seems from the focus group interview and survey results that students are aware of the fact that general English competency does not necessarily guarantee a good

performance in a subject because each subject has its own jargon. That means that each discipline has its own discipline-specific language which the students have to learn. Even in a department like the Department of English the students have to learn what appears like new English. Some of the students said that what they learned in school was so different from what they found in the department.

LANGUAGE, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

Language is known to play an important role in the acquisition and understanding of concepts. In this thesis it has been shown that, at the University of Namibia, language interacts with other aspects of education such as teaching, learning and assessment.

This study has shown that both lecturers and students are of the opinion that students' achievement in tests, assignments and examinations are greatly affected by their academically disadvantaged backgrounds, which are also linked to their language backgrounds. This was particularly so in the language background of the students. Ms Macy, for example, observed in the interview that there are students who are intelligent, able and willing to learn but their language competency often leads them to failure and frustration.

The results from interviews also reveal that students' low level of English is a barrier to their ability to study on their own because they may not be able to analyse, let alone understand, the texts that they are required to read.

In the area of assessment, this study has revealed that there is a close relationship between language skills and writing skills. There was general agreement between lecturers and students that students' language skills were not good enough to allow them to write sound, coherent, academic essays. Some of the outcomes of poor English are that students resort to memorising texts and reproducing big chunks from them in tests, assignments and examinations, cheating in tests and assignments and copying from colleagues and from textbooks. Both lecturers and students felt that the worst thing to come out of students' inability to use English effectively in their learning is the production of incompetent, unprepared graduates who will not be able to do a good job because they have not acquired the necessary skills to do so.

Degrees awarded to such graduates are only pieces of paper, in the view of the lecturers and students. It should be observed, however, that students who cheat do not all do so because of lack of competence in the use of the English language. It became quite clear from the research that some students cheat because of poor morals.

The importance of separating subject objectives and language objectives was also highlighted in this study. Ms Macy, in particular, felt that often lecturers give marks where they are not deserved and vice versa because they have not made a distinction between the content and the language used to express this content. That means that some students who are good at expressing themselves in English, but do not understand the content of the subject, end up doing very well while those whose English language competence is low, but understand the content, do poorly or fail. This view was supported by the students in the focus group interviews as well as the survey. My own experience has taught me that this is indeed true. To overcome this apparent unfairness lecturers have to have clear teaching, learning and assessment goals which make a distinction between subject goals and language goals. I now turn to an indication of recommendations arising from this study before I provide a conclusion.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

I provide, first, general recommendations arising from the study. I then provide some recommendations relating to future research.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

There were many recommendations suggested by students about ways to improve the Language Centre so that it provides courses that are relevant and also teaches in a way that ensures improvement in the students' level of communication. Some of the suggestions from the survey were:

- The first year communication courses must have more activities that involve learners in speaking in front of others.

- The Centre should set up practical sessions.
- More focus should be put on language, particularly written language.
- More focus should be put on grammar and use of vocabulary rather than on paraphrasing.
- Some examples of good academic essays should be provided to serve as models for students.
- Students should be given enough time in class to participate actively.
- Vernacular languages should not be used in class discussions.
- Lecturers should give more notes to students instead of students making their own notes.
- Reading books (not necessarily prescribed ones) should be encouraged in order to improve competence as well as develop a culture of reading.
- Lectures should be made more interesting.
- More up-to-date information should be provided.
- The teaching of English at the Language Centre should be enforced, especially on those students who did not do well in the secondary school leaving examinations.
- The number of students per class should be minimised so that each and every student can get enough assistance from the lecturers.
- The Faculty of Education should provide quality methods of teaching the English language since this is the root of all problems.
- Teaching should be done using everyday experiences instead of relying on particular texts, some of which may have been written a long time ago.
- There should be more effort put on assessing English grammar.
- Courses on English should be offered throughout a student' period of study from Year 1 to Year 4.

The suggestions made by students with regard to the Language Centre are an indication that students are aware of their language difficulties and how their situation can be improved. Some of these suggestions actually came up in connection with the teaching and learning of subjects other than communication and study skills. For example, the students emphasised the idea of having more practice. This idea was one of the most recurrent in the answer to the question about what should be done to

improve teaching and learning at the Language Centre. In other subjects both the lecturers and the students involved in the focus group interviews also suggested more practice for students in the use of English. My own practice confirmed this. I, therefore concur with this recommendation.

I also endorse most of the suggestions made by the students regarding the Language Centre, but wish to extend these to all other subjects. One of the recommendations which I do not agree with is the one that asks lecturers to provide students with notes. In my opinion, this practice will undermine the intentions of the lecturers to help students participate in their own learning. My experience, as well as that of the other lecturers interviewed, is that students will gladly get the notes and then keep them under wraps until there is a test or an assignment when these notes emerge and then the process of memorising starts. These notes are reproduced, which means that no real learning has taken place. My recommendation would be that lecturers should help students learn how to make good notes through practice. They could take some minutes off the scheduled time for lectures to deal with this matter. Ms Macy and Ms Hamilton both discussed tests and assignments after they were marked and this, in my view, helped students to make their own notes. This was also my own practice.

On the suggestion that vernaculars should not be used in class, I would recommend that limited vernacular could be used so as to help a little in understanding some concepts, but it should not be used to the extent that students get only a limited opportunity to practice their English. Indeed, I would recommend the bilingual approach to this matter where students try to get meanings for the same concept in both the mother tongue and English. This could be an exciting experience for the students since they will also find that there are no exact meanings for words in any two languages. This will, however, be time consuming and wrought with difficulties because of the multiplicity of mother tongues in any classroom.

I concur with both the lecturers and students who recognise the need to put more emphasis on written English since many students can string together a good sente nce in oral communication, but fail miserably in producing coherent and grammatical sentences in essays.

It has been suggested by the students that students should be given more time to participate actively in class. I support this recommendation based on my own experience and that of the lecturers whose classes I observed. I learnt that some students know the answers to questions given in class but they are too slow in processing information in order to give an immediate answer. That is often because of the language problems discussed above. I felt that students would have answered some of the questions if given enough time.

Reading widely is certainly one way of improving one's communicative abilities. One can acquire more vocabulary, learn new ways of expressing oneself, widen one's knowledge about the world and develop one's skills in putting ideas together. I support the recommendation that students should be encouraged to read more leisure material that is both entertaining and eye-opening.

It was also recommended by the students in the survey that lectures should be made more interesting. I support this recommendation. Some of the lectures I have observed, not only for this study, but for other purposes, indicate that there are indeed many lecturers who are very boring in their approach to teaching. I have also been a victim of such lectures. Boring lectures do not lead to learning since most students will simply sleep or do something else they consider more interesting. I saw this in one of the classes I observed for this study. Fortunately, most of the classes I observed were extremely interesting. I have to admit that these classes were very interesting not just because of the subject matter, but because of the teaching styles adopted by the lecturers. These lecturers, in my view, "taught" rather than "lectured". My recommendation would be that lecturers should adopt teaching styles that will make their classes interesting.

The students in the survey also recommend that the teaching of English at the Language Centre should be enforced, especially on those students who did not do well in secondary school leaving examinations. This is a good recommendation and I support it whole-heartedly because my own experience and that of the other lecturers involved in this study is that some students do not take these courses at the Language Centre seriously. They bank lessons and make minimum input when they are in class.

The students also recommend that the students per class be minimised to allow maximum assistance to each student by the lecturers. I agree with this statement. Efforts have been made to do this by the appointment of more lecturers in the Language Centre. However, there are limitations as to the possible numbers of lecturers that can be appointed at any one time. Financial constraints may not allow a certain number of appointees in any 5-year development plan. While I agree with this recommendation, I would add "within given limits".

I agree, too, with the recommendation that puts the Faculty of Education at the forefront of the changes that need to be made to improve the quality of English in schools since it is the Faculty that deals with the training of teachers for Grades 11 and 12 from which the university gets its students. This matter needs to be brought up in that faculty so that they may start to do the necessary to improve the teaching of English in the schools. Although I agree with this recommendation I have to observe here that there are other teachers in the schools already that the Faculty of Education has not trained. These are teachers who have been in the field for almost all their lives, but who may not have the necessary qualifications to teach adequately at the level where they are. These teachers need a different kind of training, perhaps in-service. Efforts have been made through distance education, but, in my opinion, these efforts will not yield much fruit because of the language problems of these teachers. Since I have experience teaching them through distance I know that they are struggling to understand material that has been made even simpler than for full-time students. The Faculty of Education will definitely have to come up with innovative ways to deal with this group of teachers.

When students recommend that teaching should be done using everyday experiences I am reminded of the observation of teaching that I made. Those lecturers certainly made their lessons down to earth for many students because they used local and realistic examples such as well-known figures in Namibia and elsewhere. Reading material and discussion topics could certainly be from familiar experiences, although there are instances where this is not possible. I accept the recommendation so long as it is understood that this should be implemented where it is possible to do so.

Putting more effort into assessing English grammar is also a good recommendation as far as the Language Centre is concerned. When it comes to the lecturers of other subjects in other faculties there could be problems. One of those problems is the fact that many lecturers themselves cannot handle grammar problems because they are not specialists in the area. Another problem is that some lecturers are concerned only with the content of their subject. Asking them to deal with language matters as well would not be a welcome suggestion. They would also complain, as I have heard them do, that there is no time for such "extra" duties. In my opinion, however, it is worth every lecturer's effort to see that his/her students leave the university with the ability, not only to express themselves well orally, but also produce good documents that their jobs may require. Employers will not be concerned with the degree certificate, but they will want to see the products of the work of the employees that are in accord with the degree obtained.

The final recommendation of the students that the training of students in English should be an on-going process is dear to me because many students cannot jump from a state of being incoherent to absolute competence in English within the one year that is set aside for them to improve their English competence. These students need further and persistent monitoring and guidance. There is abundant evidence from this study that some students complete their education at UNAM without really being competent in English. I would therefore, support the recommendation that requires training and monitoring of performance in English for the entire period a student stays at UNAM, unless that student shows that he/she does not need that extra support.

Complaints about the Language Centre coming from both lecturers and students seem to suggest that there is need to approach academic support for students differently. One of the ways to do this is through following the suggestions made by students who are the recipients of this academic support. That is restricted to the Language Centre. The other is to encourage the development of further support for students beyond that provided by the Language Centre. This would entail integrating language into all the discipline programmes so that lecturers can help students develop language competence, knowledge of the discipline as well as some knowledge of the theories of learning. This view is supported by Kilfoil (1996) who made a similar

recommendation for South African universities where similar problems were being experienced.

Integrating the development of language and discipline competence needs to be carefully planned and executed. The results from this study have shown that certain strategies need to be adopted to ensure success. I recommend that assignments should be used as a tool with which mainstream lecturers can support the efforts of the Language Centre. This view is supported by Mammen and Mjojo (1996) who believe that "[A]lthough the corrective effects of tests in ensuring mastery of teaching objectives is considerable, the cumulative effects of experience derived from completing assignments are by far superior in ensuring a high level of achievement to justify the extra effort from both student and teacher" (1996: 119).

It is my belief that both lecturers and students must work hard to redress the effects of poor language and academic backgrounds. I recommend that both lecturers and students should actively reflect on their teaching and learning on an ongoing basis rather than at a particular time such as the first year academic support. This view is shared by de Villiers (1996) who advises that the disadvantaged students of South Africa, particularly first year students, need to adapt to the demands of tertiary education through increased awareness of their progress.

One of the complaints about students that arise from this study is that they do not have the necessary skills to enable them to learn at university. Some of those skills involve taking responsibility for their own learning. To develop these skills there is need to teach students to be independent learners even as they are given guidance in some areas. This independent learning ability "is underpinned by many traits, such as intrinsic motivation, a reading ability, an ability to comprehend, the ability to relate ideas and to be able to explore the depths of meaning" (Fransman, 1995:176). I support this view and recommend that lecturers put more effort to develop students' motivation, reading and comprehension skills as well as skills in deeper learning. This will reduce their dependence on lectures alone.

Poor communication skills, including low levels of sophistication in language use, have been found, in this study, to be necessary ingredients for learning. I recommend

that these skills should be developed for understanding as well as for examination rather than the accumulation of facts. This will teach students to be flexible enough to see different patterns in new situations and express themselves in different ways in given situations. This view is supported by Nyamapfene and Letseka (1995) who present a situation similar to Namibia, that is, South Africa.

Rote learning has also been given as a strategy that students use to overcome their lack of competence in English. This practice may have been created by teachers who were inadequately trained to teach students both the content and language skills. They instead relied on giving students lists to memorise and model answers for examinations. This view is supported by Nyamapfene and Letseka (1995) who say, for South Africa, that the untrained teachers usually resort to 'survival teaching' which discourages questions, discussion, problem-solving, pupil participation and critical thinking. To reduce or eliminate this problem I recommend that students' language competence be improved, but more importantly, that lecturers change their assessment strategies in such ways that they ask questions that will not be answered through memorisation. Literature indicates that assessment determines learning. That means that the way a lecturer assesses students will determine how students learn.

It has been found in this study that writing is a major problem for second language students, in particular, and that English language competency contributes greatly to these problems. We have also seen how some strategies can help improve the situation. I, therefore, recommend that all lecturers and/or tutors should discuss students' essays with students so that what is valued in writing in the different disciplines and the rules of academic writing, can be made explicit to the students. This will help the students become more competent writers in the discipline. This view is supported by literature (Paxton, 1995) whose work focuses on responses to student writing and suggests that discussions of essays allow for negotiated meaning.

Writing problems can also be reduced or eliminated through the adoption of certain strategies that allow the students to have a wholesome battery of skills. Here, I would like to recommend that lecturers at UNAM adopt the recommendations made by McDermott (1995) who suggests that a course in writing skills "should entail at least

the following (more or less in the given order): question/topic analysis, brain-storming (both in groups and individually), research/reading techniques, reference method consistency, compilation of a reading list, selected bibliography compilation, material organisation techniques, essay framework techniques, draft writing and footnoting, revision techniques, editing techniques, and proof-reading techniques" (1995:186). This list gives the students an integrated skills-development programme that will cover language, learning and assessment strategies. Lecturers, too, will develop their teaching skills in the process of helping students develop the required skills.

One of the reasons identified in this study for students' poor English, particularly in the area of grammar, is lack of a living experience of English, along with mother tongue language acquisition deficiencies. The majority of the students at UNAM are second language speakers of English, who learnt English in poor environments from teachers who were themselves poorly qualified. To overcome these deficiencies I recommend that UNAM, particularly the Language Centre, offers students more intensive courses on grammar and writing skills practice, according to their needs. It should not be assumed that all students have skills in this area. These training courses will reduce students' meaning-incoherence and argument-incoherence, especially if they are supported by good evaluation feedback practices. Even first language English speakers could benefit from such courses.

The results, particularly from the survey, seem to suggest that some lecturers do not have the skills to deliver effective lessons. Strange accents, fast speech and boring classes cause problems for students, particularly first year students. Perhaps some of the problems for lecturers are related to lack of training in teaching. I recommend that teaching skills should be given to lecturers either through workshops or certificate award programmes within or outside the university. Lecturers with the proper qualifications will help students to develop the study and research skills required in university education as well as adapt to the teaching situation at university. This concurs with Ferreira's (1995) findings that a student entering university has to make numerous complex adjustments to the university environment: new teaching methods, different standards of work, new ways of approaching his/her studies and a whole lot of other unfamiliar experiences.

With regard to assessment, this study has revealed that there is sometimes discrepancy between assessment methods for course work (CA) and examination methods. During the semester the lecturers may use quizzes, worksheets, oral presentations, group work and assignments while the examinations have only essay type questions. This creates disharmony in the students' minds about expectations. I recommend that similar methods be adopted for CA and examinations.

Continuing with expectations in assessment, there may be a widely differing degree to which lecturers are tolerant of different weaknesses in essays. These may range from content, language control, argumentation, analysis and conclusion. I recommend that lecturers in departments or faculties discuss and come to an agreement about their expectations of good essays in their discipline or area. This will allow for fairness and consistency in assessment. For example, Ms Hamilton gave an idea of how she assesses her students: she allocates marks for content, expression, grammar and style, with content taking 60% of the marks while other areas share the remaining marks. This should be discussed and agreement reached concerning these components of assessment and the allocation of marks for each. This is supported by Moyo (1995) who seems to suggest that there is subjectivity in assessment where the grade the student will get in the end is dependent on the lecturer's "degree of tolerance".

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has indicated that there are many issues that concern both lecturers and students, but what has been presented here provides an entry point into the intricacies of language, teaching, learning and assessment in education. At the level of further research there is need to:

i) replicate the present study in other departments and faculties to confirm the findings of the present study, and generate additional appropriate and contextualised recommendations;

(ii) replicate the present study using more traditional research methods to authenticate the results of the action research used in this study;

(iii) conduct further research into the writing habits and abilities of Namibian students, in order to identify means of developing the skills which secondary and

university students require to effectively produce English essay writings of adequate quality;

(iv) explore, on a wider scale, the views, beliefs and practices of lecturers on language, teaching, learning and assessment;

(v) undertake research to draw up a training and development index designed as a needs assessment and audit of academic development for UNAM, similar to that of South African Association in Academic Development (SAAD, 1997) (See Appendix 5); and

(vi) investigate practices elsewhere to improve pedagogy. Appendices five, six, and seven provide information that could help various stakeholders, including lecturers, and administrators to improve pedagogy.

8.4 CONCLUSION

Using an Action Research approach, this study aimed at finding the views of students and lecturers on language, teaching, learning and assessment. The focus was on the inter-relatedness of these four areas. Several methods, including interviews, focus group discussions, and completion of questionnaires, were used to obtain information from students and lecturers. Results from the study have provided information which has been discussed in the light of the pertinent literature, and the researcher's own experience in classrooms and with teaching colleagues.

All in all, the results from the study indicate that there was:

(i) an agreement that there was indeed a connection between language, teaching, learning and assessment; whereas command of the language would be facilitatory to teaching and learning; inability to have a good command of language interfered with understanding and communication; and hence with teaching and learning;

(ii) an acceptance that many respondents had difficulties in understanding, communication, grammar, essay writing, and other skills necessary for effective learning;

(iii) an agreement that these deficiencies were attributable, among other things, to:

- the poor backgrounds of the schools from which the respondents came;

- the communication skills of lecturers themselves for whom English was not a mother tongue;
- inadequacies in the course provided by the Language Centre;

(iv) an agreement on the areas that need improvement and how these can be effected.

A number of recommendations for the improvement of the teaching, learning and assessment situation at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Namibia, and for further research have been made.

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APPENDIX 1: FACTORS AFFECTING LANGUAGE, TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LECTURERS

1. Introduction
    (a) Reasons for the interview and expectations of the interviewer

2. Lecturers' background
    (a) How does your background affect teaching and learning?

3. Objectives
    (a) What is the role of objectives in teaching and learning?

4. Conceptualisation of teaching
    (a) What is your understanding of teaching?

5. Conceptualisation of learning
    (a) What is your understanding of learning?

6. Role of the lecturer
    (a) What is the role of the lecturer in teaching and learning?

7. Characteristics of a good lecturer
    (a) What, in your opinion, are the characteristics of a good lecturer?

8. Teaching and learning resources?
    (a) What is the effect of the availability of resources on teaching and learning?
    (b) How available are the resources at UNAM?

9. Lecturers' teaching styles
    (a) What methods do you use in your teaching?
    (b) How do you feel about these methods?

10. Students' expectations of lecturers
    (a) What do you think are your students' expectations of lecturers?
    (b) Have you fulfilled those expectations?
    (c) In your view, have other lecturers fulfilled those expectations?

11. Students' workload
    (a) What is the state of your workload?
    (b) How does your workload affect teaching and learning?

12. Role of students
    (a) What is the role of students in teaching and learning?
    (b) Have students fulfilled that role?

13. Characteristics of good students
    (a) What, in your opinion, are the characteristics of a good student?

14. Students' learning styles
    (a) In your view, how do students at UNAM learn?
    (b) What is the effect of this situation on teaching and learning?

15. Teaching and learning resources
    (a) What is the importance of resources on teaching and learning?
    (b) How available are teaching and learning resources at UNAM?

16. Class size
    (a) What is the effect of class size on teaching and learning?

17. Role of language
    (a) What, in your opinion, is the role of language in teaching and learning?
    (b) How competent in English are the students at UNAM?

18. Assessment of student learning
    (a) What methods do you use to assess students' learning?
    (b) How effective are those methods?

19. Evaluation of teaching and the curriculum

    (a) What is your opinion on the university's evaluation system?

20. Role of the department

    (a) What is the role of the department in teaching and learning?

    (b) How far has your department fulfilled those roles?

21. Role of the University Administration

    (a) What is the role of the University Administration in teaching and learning?

    (b) How has the UNAM Administration fulfilled that role?

22. Other factors affecting teaching and learning

    (a) What other factors affect teaching and learning at UNAM?

    (b) What is the effect of these factors?

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* This guideline was developed to cover a wide range of factors indicated, but for in-depth study I needed to focus on a narrower area dealing with language, teaching, learning and assessment. The questions I focused on are reflected in the relevant section of the results in chapter six.

APPENDIX 2: FACTORS AFFECTING LANGUAGE, TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

1. Introduction
    a. Reasons for the interview and expectations of the interviewer

2. Students' background
    a. How does your background affect teaching and learning?

3. Objectives
    a. What is the role of objectives in teaching and learning?

4. Conceptualisation of teaching
    a. What is your understanding of teaching?

5. Conceptualisation of learning
    a. What is your understanding of learning?

6. Role of the lecturer
    a. What is the role of the lecturer in teaching and learning?

7. Characteristics of a good lecturer
    a. What, in your opinion, are the characteristics of a good lecturer?

8. Teaching and learning resources?
    a. What is the effect of the availability of resources on teaching and learning?
    b. How available are the resources at UNAM?

9. Lecturers' teaching styles
    a. What methods do your lecturers use in their teaching?
    b. How do you feel about these methods?

10. Students' expectations of lecturers
    a. What are your expectations of your lecturers?
    b. Have the lecturers fulfilled those expectations?

11. Students' workload
    a. What is the state of your workload?
    b. How does your workload affect teaching and learning?

12. Role of students
    a. What is the role of students in teaching and learning?
    b. Have students fulfilled that role?

13. Characteristics of good students
    a. What, in your opinion, are the characteristics of a good student?

14. Students' learning styles
    a. In your view, how do students at UNAM learn?
    b. What is the effect of this situation on teaching and learning?

15. Teaching and learning resources
    a. What is the importance of resources on teaching and learning?
    b. How available are teaching and learning resources at UNAM?

16. Class size
    a. What is the effect of class size on teaching and learning?

17. Role of language
    a. What, in your opinion, is the role of language in teaching and learning?
    b. How competent in English are the students at UNAM?

18. Assessment of student learning
    a. What methods do your lecturers use to assess your learning?
    b. What do you think of those methods?

19. Evaluation of teaching and the curriculum
    a. What is your opinion about the university's evaluation system?

20. Role of the department
    a. What is the role of the department in teaching and learning?
    b. How far has your department fulfilled those roles?

21. Role of the University Administration
    a. What is the role of the University Administration in teaching and learning?
    b. How has the UNAM Administration fulfilled that role?

22. Other factors affecting teaching and learning
    a. What other factors affect teaching and learning at UNAM?
    b. What is the effect of these factors?

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* This guideline was developed to cover a wide range of factors indicated, but for in-depth study I needed to focus on a narrower area dealing with language, teaching, learning and assessment. The questions I focused on are reflected in the relevant section of the results in chapter six.

APPENDIX 3

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LECTURERS

Dear Colleague

I am conducting a research on the effect of language on teaching and learning. I would appreciate it if you could spare a few minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire provided below. I believe the outcome of this research will benefit us all. I will make the information from this research available to you if you are interested. Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Laura Ariko Otaala

Department of English

Please TICK the appropriate box

LANGUAGE AND TEACHING

Because many students I am teaching are not competent in English

1. They do not follow the lecturers

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

2. They ask a lot of questions after class

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

3. They do not make good notes from lecturers

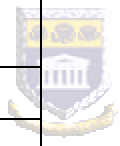
1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

4. They do not participate in class discussions

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

5. I have to lower my standards of teaching

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	



6. I have to speak very slowly

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

7. I have to leave out some of the material in the syllabus

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

8. I have to say the same thing in several ways in order for the students to understand

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

9. I have to give students more support than I would normally do

1	Strongly agree	
2 3	Agree I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

10. I cannot cover the course content

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

1. Lack of competence in English inhibits a student's learning even if he/she is intelligent.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

2. Many students I am teaching do not have good language skills

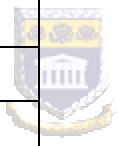
1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

3. Many students I am teaching find it difficult to express themselves in English.

1	Strongly agree	
2 3	Agree I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

4. Many students I am teaching find it difficult to understand academic texts.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	



5. Many students I am teaching find it difficult to analyse texts.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

6. Many students I am teaching find it difficult to study on their own.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

LANGUAGE AND ASSESSMENT SKILLS

1. Many students I am teaching lack essay writing skills.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

2. Many students I am teaching cannot write coherent essays.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

3. Many students I am teaching cannot write logically.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

4. Many students I am teaching cannot write good essays even after doing their first year communication skills course at the Language Centre.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

5. Many students I am teaching cannot write good essays even though they are in their 3rd and 4th years of study.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	

4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

6. Many students I am teaching copy from each other's work.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

7. Many students I am teaching copy from textbooks.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. How long have you been teaching at university level?

1	Less than 2 years	
2	2 to 5 years	
3	6 to 10 years	
4	More than 10 years	

2. How long have you been teaching at UNAM?

1 2	Less than 2 years 2 to 5 years	
3	6 to 10 years	
4	More than 10 years	

3. Is your mother tongue English?

1	Yes	
2	No	

4. How would you rate yourself in your English language skills?

1	Excellent	
2 3	Very Good Good	
4	Fair	
5	Poor	

5. Are you

1	Female	
2	Male	

6. To which age group do you belong?

1	20 to 30 years	
2	31 to 40 years	
3	41 to 50 years	
4	51 and above	

7. If you have any additional information regarding the effect of language on teaching and learning please write it here.

APPENDIX 4

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

Dear Student

I am conducting a research on the effect of language on teaching and learning. I would appreciate it if you could spare a few minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire provided below. I believe the outcome of this research will benefit us all. I will make the information from this research available to you if you are interested. Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Laura Ariko Otaala

Department of English

Please TICK one box only.

1. Is your mother tongue English?

1	Yes	
2	No	

2. How would you rate yourself in your English language skills?

1	Excellent	
2	Very Good	
3	Good	
4	Fair	
5	Poor	
6	Very Poor	

3. Owing to my English competence I do not follow the lectures.

1	Excellent	
2	Very Good	
3	Good	

4	Fair	
5	Poor	
6	Very Poor	

4. Owing to my English competence I ask a lot of questions after class.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

5. Owing to my English competence I do not make good notes from lectures.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

6. Owing to my English competence I do not participate in class discussions.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

7. Owing to my English competence I want the lecturers to speak very slowly.

1	Strongly agree	
2 3	Agree I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

8. Owing to my English competence I want the lecturers to say the same thing in several ways in order for me to understand.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

9. Owing to my English competence I want the lecturers to give me more support than they are giving at the moment.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

10. Owing to my English competence I want my lecturers to cover less course content.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

11. Owing to my English competence I find it difficult to understand academic texts.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

12. Owing to my English competence I find it difficult to analyse texts.

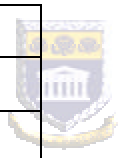
1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

13. Owing to my English competence I find it difficult to study on my own.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

14. Owing to my English competence I cannot write coherent essays.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	



15. Owing to my English competence I cannot write logically.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

16. Owing to my English competence I sometimes copy from other students' work.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

17. Owing to my English competence I sometimes copy from textbooks.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

18. Owing to my English competence I tend to memorize from books when studying.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

19. Owing to my English competence I tend to rewrite text from books when writing tests and exams.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

20. The first-year communication skills course the Language Centre did not improve my English competence.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

21. The first-year communication skills course at the Language Centre did not improve my essay writing skills.

1 2	Strongly agree Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

22. My competence in English inhibits my learning even though I am intelligent.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

23. I find it difficult to express myself in English.

1	Strongly agree	
2	Agree	
3	I do not know	
4	Disagree	
5	Strongly disagree	

24. In what year of study are you?

1	First year	
2	Second year	
3	Third year	
4	Fourth year	

25. What are your major subjects?

1	African Languages	
2	Afrikaans	
3	Biblical Studies	
4	Economics	
5	English	
6	Fashion	
7	French	
8	Geography and Environmental Studies	
9	German	
10	History	
11	Industrial Psychology	
12	Information Studies	
13	Linguistics	
14	Mathematics	
15	Music	
16	Philosophy	
17	Political Studies	
18	Portuguese	
19	Psychology	
20	Religious Studies	
21	Sociology	
22	Spanish	
23	Textiles	

24	Theology	
25	Visual Arts	

26. Are you

1	Female	
2	Male	

27. To which age group do you belong?

1	Up to 20 years	
2	21 to 25 years	
3	26 to 30 years	
4	31 to 35 years	
5	36 and above	

28. If you have any additional information regarding the effect of language on teaching and learning please write it here.

APPENDIX 5: TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT INDEX

In order to throw an appropriately sharp light on the nature and scope of AD, however, it is necessary to probe somewhat further; for it is also illuminating to attempt to distinguish four key forms or types of AD programme. These are student development, staff development, curriculum development and organizational development. Each of these has a distinctive and predominant focus:

Student development
On helping students to learn and study effectively.

Staff development
On assisting individual members of staff to acquire and enhance the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to teach effectively.

Curriculum development
On supporting the design and updating of particular courses and programmes of study.

Organisational development
On supporting the implementation by departments, Faculties or the HEI as a whole, of strategic initiatives and policy-related developments.

Emerging from this working definition is a need to delineate (in a summary form) the training development needs identified during the Needs Assessment study. The training and development index attempts to specify activities in each of the categories of AD outlined earlier. This index is not prescriptive not exhaustive, but is rather a directory of activities that constitute academic development in higher education.

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

"Student development is the educational function in real student development should am at producing graduates with the quality of graduateness. Student development must be the end, all other developments must be the means". (Student)

Student development need to shed its racial and remedial connotations and become part of every student study programme. It also need to come into the mainstream and be regarded as a priority – not just a short term redress issue, but as an ongoing, incremental capacity building excercse. In that it will receive the recognition and institutional support it so much requires.

Student development programmes should aim to integrate both subject specific academic skills and generic life skills:

PERSONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- Leadership
- Assertiveness
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Communication
- Note taking
- Academic writing
- Seminar
- Presentation
- Computing
- Self Evaluation
- Creative and critical
- Entrepreneurial
- Decision making
- Managing (Coping and Adapting) to change

ENHANCING STUDENT LEARNING

- Resource aided support
- Modular scheme
- Personal and Peer

- Group based learning
- Experiential learning
- Problem based
- Case Study
- Research Skills
- Action learning
- Interactive learning (games, simulation, role playing)
- Learning contracts

ASSESSMENT METHODS

- Traditional Exam
- Open Book Exam
- Structured Exam
- VIVAS
- Essays
- Reviews
- Report
- Practical work
- Portfolios
- Presentation
- Group Assignment

EXTERNAL EXAMINATION

External Examiners and their role

MATURE STUDENTS

- Campus and its services
- Writing Skill
- Time and Stress Management
- Managing Change
- Computing Skills

- Literature searches (Paper and Technology based)

ACCESS AND RECRUITMENT

"As an enterprise aimed at facilitating the evolution of learning environment in which developments of students from diverse education and social backgrounds may be fostered, and implies a focus investigating admission criteria and procedures so that selection may be linked with placement into appropriate courses, developing effective academic and language interventions and alternative approaches to teaching and course design, and contributing to the rethinking of degree structure and curriculum design. (Frielick et al).

- Clearing Houses
- Potential/Aptitude Assessment
- Flexible entry and exit levels
- Foundation and Bridging programmes
- Articulation and Portability

DIVERSITY

Diversity has important implication for institutional management and practice. From anyone's is the same to "Acknowledging differences there's a need to move to 'Valuing Differences'. Institutions will need to shift their philosophy from treating every students and staff alike, to recognizing differences and responding to differences in ways that it creates a good environment for teaching and learning.

Cultural Diversity

- Inequality
- Racism and Ethnicism
- Institutional Racism
- Cross cultural miscommunication

Multicultural Education

- Curriculum Content (Afrocentric curriculum)
- Citizenship (Political Education)
- Culture and Language
- Cross-cultural training

Gender

- Gender awareness
- Gender sensitive appraisal and planning
- Communicating gender
- Affirmative action programme
- Leadership styles
- Sexual harassment
- Mentoring
- Networking
- Work and family
- Strategies for change

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

In staff development for teaching is to be truly effective, programmes must include attention to the needs not simply of lecturers but of all staff who contribute, directly or indirectly, to the quality of learning and teaching. Institutions therefore needs to consider that all staff attach appropriate importance to their own continuing developments and regularly take steps to review and enhance their teaching expertise.

The institution should ensure that the staff development programmes are well designed, relevant and certified. They should offer adequate incentives and rewards and secure appropriate links to promotion and career advancement. There should be increased resource commitment by the institutions for these programmes to be valued

by those who undertake them for their contribution to enhancing expertise and fostering worthwhile changes in practices.

The spin off would be effective teaching and learning strategies and better management of current learning and teaching strategies, and also produce the same quality and excellence in distance education.

Teaching Methods

- Large classes
- Small classes

Resource Based Learning

- Paper based
- IT
- Audio visuals

Curriculum Development

Quality Assurance

Portfolio (teaching practice and development)

Personal and Professional Development

- Transferable skills
- Self Assessment skills
- Peer Assessment
- Career Review

RESEARCH

- Action Research
- Qualitative
- Quantitative
- Managing Information
    - range of system available for efficient and effective storage and retrieval of data
    - mapping research territory
    - documentation of the research process (diary)
    - designing presentation
- Academic Writing
- Grant proposal

OPEN LEARNING

Material Development

- Non print media
- Study guides and supplementary materials
- IT

Management Assessment Methods Support-Tutoring

- Written work
- Telephone
- Face to face
- Computers

Evaluation of Open Learning

- Learner self evaluation
- Tuition
- Counseling and learner progress

- Course content
- Learning material

EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMES

- Process of evaluation
- Planning and data collection
- Analyzing and interpretation of evaluation findings

INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT

Higher Education has been subjected to political and economic demands and to social and institutional changes, it has been subjected to the transformation process. Yet the questions still remains, how should it transform? Past, present and future challenges require human and material resources and a parallel need to new skills to cope with these challenges.

Institutions will therefore need good leaders, who will be able to integrate various job activities, coordinate communication between institutio nal subunits, monitor activities and control deviations to ensure that transformation process is aligned with the vision and mission of the institutions.

- University policies and its values
- Leadership roles
- Strategic management and planning
- Operational skills
  - Productivity
  - Efficiency
  - Implementation
- Decision making strategies
- Conflict Management strategies
- Flexibility/Diversity management
- Communication skills

- Team building/Coaching/mentoring
- Performance Appraisal
- Negotiation skills
- Presentation skills
- Program Management and Evaluation
- Proposal writing and tendering
- Budgeting Planning and Control
- Time and Stress Management
- Analyzing and interpretation of evaluation findings

APPENDIX 6: SOME KEY INSTITUTIONAL INDICATORS (CHEMS, 1996)

Student indicators

Population

Entry qualifications

Progression and completion rates

Destination

Student satisfaction

Staff indicators

Qualifications (e.g. staff with PhD)

Gender Balance

Age ratios

Academic/support staff ratios

Resources/Finance statistics indicators

Operating funds

Research funding

Other income

Staff/student ratio

Expenditure – academic centers/central administration/library

Different ratios of income to expenditure

Other selected financial ratios

Research

Number of reach students

Research funding

Public sector research funding

Industry research funding

Total research income per academic staff member

Research expenditure per academic staff member

Ratios of research expenditure and income

Publications

Number of journal articles

Number of books

Other publications/conference papers

Patents and licences

Income earned

Estate Management / Physical resources indicators

Space utilization

Performance in maintenance, improvement and capital expenditure

Appendix 4: A sample evaluation form for course and instructor by students

Please kindly fill in this sheet after your examinations. Do not put your name on. Let the academic registrar have it by any means possible. Its aim is to improve the quality of teaching in the university.		Calendar year …… Faculty …… Department …… Subject …… Course no. ……. Academic year ……..

The course

1.	Arouse my intellectual curiosity ……	1 2 3 4 5	NA
2.	Was pertinent to my major field of study ……	1 2 3 4 5	NA
3.	Challenged and engaged my attention ……	1 2 3 4 5	NA
4.	seemed unimportant and insignificant for my academic needs ……..	1 2 3 4 5	NA
5.	provide significant insights and helped me grow as a professional (academician) ……	1 2 3 4 5	NA
6.	Seemed integrated into a coherent whole …….	1 2 3 4 5	NA
7.	Readings were to difficult to assimilate ……	1 2 3 4 5	NA
8.	Readings were appropriate in length and stimulated thinking ……	1 2 3 4 5	NA
9.	Requires restructuring and revision ……	1 2 3 4 5	NA
10.	Entails an outline with specific goals and objectives	1 2 3 4 5	NA

Comments

1. What changes, if any, would you like to make in the course/subject?
2. What are the subjects whose content you would like to change and why?
3. What subjects are you satisfied with and why?
4. What aspects of this course do you have complaint with?

The instructor

1.	Is always punctual and prepared	1 2 3 4 5	NA
2.	Clearly explains the objectives of the course and has a good sense of instruction	1 2 3 4 5	NA
3.	Has a very good grasp of the subject matter	1 2 3 4 5	NA
4.	Is familiar with current methods of instruction	1 2 3 4 5	NA
5.	Successfully communicates the subject matter and clearly explains the assignments		
6.	Provides opportunities for student participation and involvement	1 2 3 4 5	NA
7.	Is sensitive to individual differences and encourages encourages personal opinions	1 2 3 4 5	NA
8.	Provides immediate and meaningful feedback to to students' efforts	1 2 3 4 5	NA
9.	Is dependable and commands respect	1 2 3 4 5	NA
10.	Is an effective and efficient instructor	1 2 3 4 5	NA
11.	Lecturers too often and does not evoke thought	1 2 3 4 5	NA
12.	Yells so hard that it is not possible to concentrate	1 2 3 4 5	NA

Comments

1. What weaknesses did you notice in the instructor?
2. How do you think he or she could change these weaknesses?

Key

1	=	Unsatisfactory
2	=	Below average
3	=	Average
4	=	Very good
5	=	Excellent
NA	=	Not applicable

APPENDIX 7: CHALLENGING CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING: SOME PROMPTS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

Designing for learning

A large part of learning is influenced by the ways that students perceive the course/subject and the expectations of the learner. Formal courses/subject requirements, content, teaching methods, assessment policies and practices and the provision of learning resources are all aspects of the teaching design which will have an impact on student learning. Students learn most effectively when these aspects fit together coherently for them, and when they perceive that course content is related to their own interests and values and to their longer term goals.

1. What do you do to inform students of course/subject requirements and help them to understand the reasons for them?
2. When you can, do you find out about student's expectations of your subject and use this information to adapt your curriculum?
3. How do you build upon students' life experience in your subjects and in your teaching?
4. Do you ensure that there is consistency between your subject objectives, the ways you teach and the ways you assess?
5. What opportunities do you give students to choose aspects of course work or assessment which are relevant to their interests and experience?
6. How do you encourage students to make effective use of libraries and other learning resources?
7. Do you take note of the gender, ethnicity and other characteristics of students in your classes and respond to their learning needs?

Reading to students

Learning is not a purely intellectual activity. It also involves ethical and personal development. For such development to occur there needs to be a climate of mutual respect, trust and open communication in which ethical and personal beliefs can be

examined without anxiety. Students need to be able to discuss concerns and misunderstandings with their teacher and with other students.

1. How do you indicate to students that you respect their values and beliefs without necessarily accepting those values and beliefs?
2. In what ways do you assist students to reflect on the values they hold and to develop ethically?
3. What do you do to encourage students to become ware of the potential for learning from each other and the benefits of working in groups?
4. In what ways do you provide personal assistance to students, and/or refer them to the range of resources and agencies which are available to assist them?

Teaching for learning

Students' learning and skills development may be enhanced in many ways. However, in order to learn and develop skills and understanding in a subject or profession students must actively engage themselves. Active engagement is assisted by such things as appropriate role models, precisely structured learning activities and by encouragement to think about learning processes.

1. How do you show students your enthusiasm in the subject?
2. Do you make a conscious effort to be an effective role model for thinking and practice in your profession or discipline?
3. What approaches do you use to induct students into research and other forms of active scholarly involvement?
4. What steps do you take to extend the range of learning activities that you draw upon in your teaching?
5. How do you allow for students preferring to learn and participate in different ways?
6. What approaches do you use to help students to reflect upon their own learning intentions, behaviour, and practice, and to develop effective skills for lifelong learning?
7. What strategies do you adopt to help students look critically at accepted knowledge and practice in your discipline or profession?

8. What work do you include to make explicit the forms of thinking and writing in your discipline, and to help students develop competence in these?
9. How do you frame questions to help students learn effectively?
10. How do you encourage questions from students and respond in a way that facilitates their learning?
11. How do you encourage questions from students and respond in a way that facilitates their learning?
12. How do you check that your explanations are clear to students?
13. How do you respond when students indicate difficulties with content, pace, emphasis or style?
14. If necessary, how do you find out about the causes of disruptive behaviour and remedy them?

Assessing and giving feedback

Students' approaches to learning are directly affected by the type of assessment that is used. If assessment allows for inappropriate rote learning, then some students will respond accordingly. Effective assessment strategies encourage students to engage deeply with the content material of the course. Such strategies need to provide constructive feedback to students as quickly as possible as well as being valid and reliable measures of achievement.

1. How do you help students develop habits of routinely assessing their own work?
2. What strategies do you use to provide immediate feedback to students to help them improve their performance?
3. Do you identify for students the specific strengths and weaknesses of their performance and offer precise feedback about how to improve?
4. In what ways do you ensure that your assessment methods accurately assess the learning outcomes that you intended?

Evaluating teaching

Evaluation of teaching and subjects/course for purposes of development involves collecting information from a range of sources by a range of methods and using that information to make changes. The information collected should include more than outcome measures, since the quality of student learning is related to the way students learn, information from the students on their learning processes can be an important component of evaluation.

1. What forms of information about your teaching and your subjects do you collect on a regular basis?
2. How do you change your approaches to teaching and/or your design of your subjects in the light of the information obtained?
3. How do you find out about the approaches students take to their learning and the ways your teaching and/or your subject design affects that approach?
4. How do you use the information obtained from student assignment and examination work in evaluating your teaching and/or your subjects?

Developing professionally

For the quality of teaching and learning to improve staff should actively extend their knowledge and skills not only in their discipline of profession but also in their teaching. This may involve discussing teaching and learning issues with colleagues, reading about teaching strategies, participating in teaching development activities, reflecting upon teaching practice and engaging in research in relation to it. For senior staff members it may also involve providing developmental support for more junior members teaching in the course and also valuing their ideas.

1. How do you keep your expertise in your own field up to date?
2. How do you stay in touch with developments in teaching in your own discipline and profession?
3. What opportunities do you make to discuss aspects of learning and teaching with colleagues?

4. What opportunities to you make to receive feedback on your teaching from colleagues?
5. How do you go about developing your skills and expertise as a teacher?
6. What strategies do you employ to reflect upon your teaching practices and identify areas for development?
7. Do you participate in seminars, courses, or conferences which focus on learning and teaching?
8. What reading related to teaching and learning do you do?
9. In what ways do you ensure that your more junior colleagues receive your help and support?

Influencing the context of your institution

Some aspects of teaching and learning are influenced by the institutional, political and social contexts in which they occur. Good teaching involves recognizing these influences and responding at the departmental/institution/community level to enhance teaching and learning.

1. What opportunities do you create to discuss with students the wider conditions that affect their learning?
2. In what ways do you contribute to decision-making processes in your institution in order to enhance teaching and learning?
3. In what ways do you maintain and develop communication with your colleagues who teach related subjects in your department/division?
4. How do you ensure that your institution is using a comprehensive approach to teaching achievement for the purposes of tenure, promotion and developmental review?
5. Do you make use of your professional association to raise issues of curriculum concern for the discipline?
6. In what ways do you maintain your familiarity with national or local policy directions, monitor effects on teaching and learning, and voice your concerns in appropriate forums?