

Conceptual and Practical Implications of Blended English Learning for First-entering Students

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Abstract

This paper is a reflection on the notion of blended learning as a non-mother tongue language-enhancing strategy. Multilingual countries usually have to instruct in either a second or foreign language at most levels of the education system; South Africa is no exception. With its nine official languages, English is the medium of instruction from the third year of primary to tertiary. Implications of instruction in non-mother tongue is an ongoing debate [1] but one of its usual outcome is students' challenges with the language of instruction at tertiary level; where students are not able to demonstrate accepted norms of tertiary literacy [2]. This is the situation also in the University of Venda (UNIVEN) in South Africa, despite some compulsory support courses offered by the University [3]. This paper is a discussion of a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) project which was piloted at UNIVEN in response to challenges identified not only with students' general tertiary pragmatic control of the language of instruction but also discipline-specific linguistic demands. This is in line with the new literacies approach of [4] [5] which emphasize the comprehensiveness of any language of instruction and which should inform any intervention. CALL-blended instruction [6] was seen as one approach in offering structured-relevant support for the profile of UNIVEN's first-entering students. The project, therefore, was an intervention to reinforce some academic reading skills of selected first-entering students, using *MySkillslab*, a computer software programme. Students had the opportunity to progress through an individualized intervention plan using activities underpinned by current literacy requirements. Although definite achievements were the results of the exposure, certain shortcomings also became apparent. The discussions will critically examine both the conceptual framework for the activities (reading literacy) as well as practical implementation issues specific to the environment of UNIVEN, such as its non-urban location, its teaching and learning practices, its degrees' curricula as well as the ambience and ethos of the institution [7].

References

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