

English Language Competency among the Mathematics Teachers as the Precursor for Performance in Mathematics

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Abstract : Language in mathematics instruction enables the teacher to communicate mathematical knowledge to the learners with precision. It also enables the learner to deal with mathematical activities effectively. This scholarly piece was motivated by the fact that mathematics performance in the South African primary classrooms has not been satisfactory, and English, which is a Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) for the majority of the learners, has been singled out as one of the major impediments. This is not only on the part of the learners, but also on the part of the teachers as well. The study thus focused on the lack of competency in English among the primary school teachers as one of the possible causes of poor performance in mathematics in primary classrooms. The qualitative processes, which were premised on the social interaction theory as a lens, sourced the narratives of 10 newly qualified primary school mathematics teachers from the disadvantaged schools on the matter. This was achieved through the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The data, which were analyzed thematically, highlighted the actuality that the challenges cut across the pre-service stage to the in-service stage. The findings revealed that the undergraduate mathematics courses in the number of the institutions neglect the importance of language. The study further revealed that the in-service mathematics teachers lack adequate linguistic command, thereby finding it difficult to successfully teach some mathematical concepts, or even to outline instructions clearly. The study thus suggests the need for training institutions to focus on improving the teachers' English language competency. The need for intensive in-service training targeting the problem areas was also highlighted. The study thus contributes to the body of knowledge by providing suggestions on how the mathematics teachers' language incompetency can be mitigated.

Keywords : Competency, English language proficiency, language of learning and teaching, primary mathematics teachers

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