

A Different Path: Curriculum Experiences of International Students in a Private Institution's Foundation Programme

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Abstract

The requirement to explore the curriculum experiences of French-speaking students becomes imperative because of the transition they are compelled to make from French to English. This transition seems to be in relation to the curriculum of study and hidden curriculum experiences at their disposal. Their entry to higher education is as a result of the determination to become bilingual in an attempt to compete in a globalising world (Adebajji & Gumbo 2013). French-speaking students (FSS) negotiated communities of practice which enhanced their capacity to interact with more knowledgeable others for learning to evolve. Utilizing a single case study approach, Legitimate Peripheral Participation theory, and Communities of Practice theory to elucidate their experiences of the curriculum, it was found that delayed linguistic adjustment, small class-sizes, interactive student-lecturer relationships, consultation and tutoring initiatives, shyness, homesickness and oral presentation, to mention but a few, were curriculum experiences they negotiated.

Keywords: Academic identity, Higher Education Institution (HEI), Internationalisation, South African students (SAS), Sociocultural, Curriculum, Communities of Practice, Legitimate Peripheral Participation, Foundation Programme (FP);

1. Introduction

This paper explores the curriculum experiences of French-speaking students (FSS) in a private South African higher education institution. The impact of issues cutting across the curriculum such as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT), indigenous South African languages, acculturation, identity and internationalization of the campus environment were explored from the foundation phase to third-year degree programme. These issues were explored because they either manifestly or latently influenced the curriculum experiences of international students. English was the LoLT at the academic institution, used to reach the diverse student population to achieve ease of communicating curriculum content and informal conversation among students with disparate indigenous languages. It is predicted that the language of communication in the ACOP would predispose the FSS to the points of developing academic identities. The dominant indigenous South African languages spoken on campus were Zulu and Sotho. In essence the effects of language, acculturation and mediated identity, referred to as sociocultural factors by Chow (2006) became central in the exploration of curriculum experiences among the FSS.

Acculturation is a term used to assess the extent of belonging and adaptation of foreign students to a dissimilar environment (Berry, 2006). However in this study we refer to academic acculturation as a representation of the acquisition of a sense of belonging to the academic principles at the institution – a measure of academic self-esteem to attain scholastic identity. We draw on Vandeyar's (2008) work by defining identity as a construct which distinguishes an individual from the others. It is a variable construct that results in the formation of cultural hybrids as a result of intercultural negotiation to attain a unique pedestal in a multicultural milieu by foreign students. Therefore academic

identity, drawing on Vandeyar (2010), is a demonstration of the inherent and acquired academic self-esteem, exhibited and developed by foreign students in the midst of other students from diverse cultural origins.

Internationalization is the incorporation of an international dimension of practices in higher education (Gopal, 2011). Knight (2003) defines internationalization as “the process integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education” (p. 2). These international students were either within the Foundation Programme (FP) or had completed the FP as a route to the mainstream degree programme. We sought to answer the following research question: What are the curriculum experiences of French-speaking students at the private provider of higher education from the foundation to third-year degree programme? The discourse is presented in this manner as we explore issues cutting across the curriculum:

2. Background Context

The context of this study was a Private Higher Education Institution in the Gauteng province. This institution offers a FP, with FSS as part of a cohort of non-English-speaking students negotiating the rigours of Higher Education (HE). The FSS are referred to as international students because they came to study in South Africa (SA) from French-speaking countries of Africa. Since International students are not subsidized in the public sector, the private tertiary institution becomes relatively cost effective for sponsors when compared to public institutions.

3. Student Origins

The respondents of this study originated from French-speaking African countries namely; Cameroun, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gabon, Chad Republic and Benin Republic. While actual numbers of international students have remained relatively constant within the programme in the last two years, there has been a relative decrease in the proportion of students in the FP. This proportion has dropped from approximately 28% to 19% from 2011 to 2012 (Goode, 2012).

4. Foundation Programme (FP)

The FP is developed as an access opportunity for students who fail to meet entry requirements for degrees or those who have the incorrect secondary school subject combinations for a desired degree (Goode, 2012). At the point of admission, students in the FP had to register for the following modules namely, Bridging English, Bridging Mathematics, Student Skills, Introduction to Economics, English Word Power, Introduction to Science, Introduction to Psychology and English Word Power. Students were registered for modules depending on their categories namely Science or Commerce. These modules were designed to prepare them for transition into the degree streams depending on their academic achievements in the FP.

5. Theoretical Framework

Legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice theories were used as framework to comprehend the curriculum experiences of French-speaking students.

5.1 Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP)

The concept of situated learning originated from Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 29) in their exploration of learning as “situated activity”, which they named LPP. They argue that the newcomer gains the right of entry to the community by virtue of certain defining and eligibility factors stipulated in the community. Despite being marginally placed, the newcomer builds up a character or identity via considerable interaction in the community with advancement towards total membership for reasons relating to a shared or committed realism (Lave & Wenger, 2002, p. 57). This framework applies to our study as we place FSS in the pre-degree programme as newcomers. The committed realism in the case of FSS is to attain degrees as they interact with experts in the COP.

5.2 Communities of practice (COP)

These are individuals who engage in definite activities and learn how to perfect what they do as they work together on a regular basis (Wenger, 1998). Stakeholders in an academic institution comprise different communities of practice, since there are diverse departments assigned to achieve set goals. FSS are stakeholders, required to work together with the other stakeholders to attain an identity – to become graduates. The three characteristics of COP are “domain”, “community” and “practice” (Wenger et al., 2002). The domain defines the common environment and the terrain that grants participants the fortitude to decide on things they have to share and how to offer their acquired skills as they progress to full participation with the other stakeholders. The community fabricates the communal basis that prompts learning via interaction with more knowledgeable others (MKO) (Reyes, 2007). The practice symbolizes an array of shared inventories of available capitals regarding information, ideas, proficiencies, and routes of resolving cyclical challenges (Li et al., 2009). As far as this study is concerned, the domain refers to the strides of FSS to earn degrees. The community symbolises the curriculum (both hidden and manifest) because it is the basis that initiates learning through interaction with experts (e.g. lecturers and tutors). The practice entails teaching and learning, tutoring and mentoring initiatives, as well as the involvement of student advisors and academic managers at the institution. French-speaking students are regarded as dynamic learners within the communities of practice by noticing and showing experts (e.g. lecturers) in the domain what has been learnt. Therefore the FSS are conceptualized to gain the right of entry to the academic institution as legitimate peripheral participants, as they engage with the other stakeholders to full participation by taking centripetal strides. Such centripetal strides surpass the gimmick of becoming an onlooker as Bandura (1977) suggests.

6. Research Strategy

The research was qualitative and used the constructivist approach in an interpretive dimension (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). A single case narrative study was conducted (Schwandt, 2007). This path was adopted in an attempt to embrace new patterns of ideas and writing that make a plea for speaking expressively for further intricate ways of perceiving the world of FSS (Burden, 1997, p. 242). The constructivist approach was used to explore how FSS constructed their domain of interaction (Williamson, 2006). As part of the qualitative terrain, narrative inquiry, within the tenets of case study design played a vital role as methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Stories of the FSS and stakeholders at the academic institution were used as data sources. The idea of narrative involves the cognition that stories are gathered in an attempt to comprehend experience as communicated and lived using the tool of inquiry and artefacts (Savin-Badin & Van Niekerk, 2007, p. 459). Consequently, FSS were investigated as they negotiated HE via a different path (FP) in pursuance of tertiary degrees after obtaining ethical clearance from the research site. A Private HEI in the Gauteng province of SA offers the research site for this study pseudonamed Rivonia University (RU).

The data collection methods employed included a blend of semistructured interviews, participant observation and field notes. Semistructured interviews were conducted with FSS who negotiated the FP, lecturers, academic managers and French-speaking student advisors at RU. Language proficiency and acculturation are key issues in students' narratives, while lecturers perceive language proficiency as critical to academic success. In all, 28 FSS were purposively drawn from the pre-degree programme to the third-year degree programme and interviewed to explore issues cutting across the curriculum. Curriculum content was not investigated because the study focused on sociocultural factors capable of impacting on the curriculum experiences of FSS in the ACOP.

Separate semistructured interviews were conducted with 5 lecturers who taught them, 5 French-speaking student advisors, the head of the Foundation Phase Course (pre-degree) and the Dean of the IT Faculty. The lecturers at the academic institution comprised black and white lecturers. These were drawn from various African countries, an attempt to internationalize the campus. French-speaking student advisors were interviewed because they catered to the needs of FSS. The head of the FP was a white female who ensured the smooth running of the faculty, and reported to senior management. The deans were in charge of the day-to-day running of the 6 faculties on campus. They ensured curriculum responsiveness as a practise by meeting regularly to explore areas requiring attention. The FSS were observed during normal lecture hours, free periods and on their way home to obtain the natural context of their environment. The duration of the interviews and observation sessions ranged from 45 and 60 minutes. Field notes were taken as the video-recorded interviews and observation sessions were conducted. During classroom observation sessions the mode of facilitation of lecturers, accents, energy invested by lecturers during facilitation exercises and interaction among class members with FSS were observed. We could not observe all the FSS, especially those whose

lecture schedules could not accommodate our study design period. However, we did observe a few of them when they were doing group work in class. The data capture took place over a period of two years because it was part of a doctoral study of one of the authors. The observation sessions were extensive because one of the authors lectured to students at the institution. The observation sessions provided data which assisted in making constructive judgment as the study was being conducted. In 2012 interviews were conducted with all the respondents. Additional interviews were conducted in 2013 with 13 French-speaking students (FSS), 6 South African Students (SAS) and 3 French-speaking student advisors on areas that required further elucidation.

The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000). Emerging themes were retrieved from the data and taken through a rigorous process of categorization. This was to provide sufficient space for new data and novel perception of the obtained data from the study (Sandelowski, 2000). This rigorous exercise culminated in far-reaching themes which were further analysed to pinpoint data that answered the study's research question in relation to the theoretical perception and the echoing of the literature (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data were thoroughly read, organized in consonance with the data from field notes and the observations made (Merriam, 1998). These emerged in identifying common themes and categories which frequently reflected the essence of the study in terms of findings as we subsequently discuss.

7. Findings and Discussion

The following were the themes that emerged from the transcribed and analyzed data. The themes are discussed in connection with the COP, LPP and findings in the voluminous literature.

7.1 Linguistic transition

Curriculum experiences of FSS hinged on linguistic adjustment concerns. The question put to French-speaking students entailed knowing the challenges confronting them at the institution. We commence our argument with the narrative of a female FSS in the FP. She could not understand the English used to communicate the curriculum at the school. She had not yet made the transition from French to English at the pre-degree level as she legitimately and peripherally participated in the curriculum. She was asked to divulge the challenges she experienced. She explained sighing:

When I came the first time to this institution it was difficult to understand mathematics because I couldn't understand the English. SA students speak Zulu, when they do so I go away from them.

A male FSS in the FP corroborated the linguistic challenge of FSS. The struggle of FSS with the English language was a curriculum experience and challenge. He narrates his concerns:

When I came in from my country, my English comprehension was bad. I had to start making friends with students who could assist me because I could not understand what my lecturers were saying in class. My association with English-speaking friends helped me to learn English fast. However I detach from SA students who speak Zulu always.

These experiences agree with the conceptualization of Lave and Wenger (2002, p. 57) that although being marginally positioned, the beginner builds up a character or identity via significant interaction in the community with progression towards total membership for reasons relating to a shared or committed realism. These students realized that they needed to take centripetal strides to interact with other English-speaking students because of the requirement to learn English. The requirement to learn English was an indication of the reason to attain a status, "committed realism."

One of the female mathematics lecturers in the FP presented the curriculum challenge of FSS as an inability to solve word problems in mathematics. The question put to the lecturer was to explore the curriculum challenges of French-speaking students. According to her, their diminished comprehension of English was attributed to their inability to solve mathematical word problems. She reiterates, in response to the question put to her, to reveal the challenges confronting FSS:

French-speaking students are intelligent, but they are linguistically challenged. They are not able to solve word problems in mathematics because they do not understand English. I pair them with peers capable of speaking French and English in an attempt to assist them during group work sessions. This has been helping to improve their vocabularies.

The effort taken by the lecturer to pair FSS who could not understand English well with more knowledgeable others was an initiative to encourage them to take centripetal strides into the core of activities in the COP. This action was an indication that experts in COP have to take the initiative to observe the trend in COP until they are capable of providing beginners with the fortitude to engage in interaction with more knowledgeable others. Despite being marginally placed in the COP, the paired FSS gradually built up an identity by considerable interaction as they moved on to the core of scholastic activities in the COP. This effort, in terms of pairing novices with experts symbolises the notion of Lave and Wenger (2002, p. 57) because the FSS began to take ownership of learning as they built up their vocabularies – a demonstration of academic self-esteem.

In a focus group interview session with 6 South African students, it was agreed that speaking Zulu was an involuntary exercise, not intended to deliberately sideline the FSS. During the focus group interview session with the SAS, a question was put to them because the FSS accused SAS of deliberately excluding them from their conversation during group discussions. We provide the response of one of the SAS:

We do not deliberately exclude them from our discussions. It is the same with them because when French-speaking students are communicating in their groups, they also speak French. When they speak French we also move away from their groups. Language is very powerful, capable of sidelining people.

We argue that the use of Zulu sidelined the capacity of newcomers to learn from stakeholders. Such actions led to dysfunctionality in the communities. In order to maintain learning the intervention of the other stakeholders becomes vital, as seen in the intervention of an academic manager subsequently. As part of the formative and summative assessments, students had to orally make presentations on assigned topics in English. This initiative was geared towards enhancing their linguistic and communicative abilities. FSS benefitted from this initiative, which was set in motion by stakeholders in the FP. In doing this, students made concerted efforts towards presenting assignments in English. Prepared topics allowed students to rehearse and gain assistance from peers. The introduction of the oral aspects of English provided the opportunity to interact with the other stakeholders, an initiative which facilitated participation among FSS and experts in the COP. An academic staff manager explained the initiative, when she was asked to explain the steps taken by faculty to alleviate the linguistic challenges confronting FSS:

What we've done in the language curriculum has taken foreign students into account. However, we've found that it was focused on reading and writing. So this year, we've piloted an initiative to deal with more of the oral aspects of English. Students now prepare topics which are orally presented for others to learn as the lecturer moderates the sessions.

The initiative taken to afford the opportunity among FSS to partake in oral presentation with stakeholders was an indication that faculty was prepared to teach international students with the recognition that RU was a multicultural institution. This was an indication which challenged the notion of Gopal (2011) that faculty is not always ready to teach cross-culturally. It follows that in COP, it is possible for a subset of COP to create initiatives capable of alleviating the concerns of members not in possession of the adequate dimension of linguistic potential. It required the effort of an academic manager to identify the challenges confronting novice learners (FSS), resulting in the initiative to create opportunities to interact with more knowledgeable others through the oral presentation initiative. Nearly all the FSS who participated in this study were found to struggle with communication in English as they newly began to participate in the communities. Consequently a curriculum experience among FSS was an exhibition of diminished proficiency in English as they newly came to RU. Consequently linguistic challenge and oral presentation became curriculum experiences of FSS at RU. Their linguistic challenges point to the relevance of Chow (2006, p. 109) that acquisition of English is the briskness at which students comply with tenets of academic activities because English is required for the extraction of facts and information in an academic institution. Using the lens of Lave and Wenger (1991), inability to communicate eloquently in English seemed to hinder the participation and interaction of the FSS with the curriculum and the other stakeholders in the ACOP. It implies comprehension of English is vital for the extraction of scholastic facts, which at the point of entry to the COP, FSS were linguistically excluded.

These experiences indicated the versatility of Wenger's (1998) scholarship that "Identity combines multiple forms of membership through a process of reconciliation across boundaries of practice" (p. 163), because FSS were confronted by an array of experiences necessitating them to take the effrontery to interact with the other stakeholders in possession of needed capitals to learn in the COP. They had to adapt to the accents of lecturers during learning facilitation, and take initiatives to look for other foreign students who could speak English in attempts to learn in the COP. These were semblances of what Wenger refers to as a combination of "multiple forms of membership" because they had to engage in

"a process of reconciliation across" COP by detaching from dysfunctional COP. Furthermore the initiative taken by faculty in terms of providing the opportunity that engaged foreign students in the oral aspects of English seems to support the argument of Crose (2011, p. 388) that tertiary education institutions have contributed and will remain key contributors "in cultural understanding and the formation of cross-border relationships through internationalization of the classroom and university". The attempt made by faculty to introduce the oral aspects of English to the English curriculum in the FP was an attempt to enhance the linguistic potential of students. This initiative paved the way for FSS to find a common ground to learn from their indigenous and other foreign peers. It was also a means of negotiating curriculum deficiencies across frontiers of practice, according to Wenger (1998, p. 108). It implies faculty moved beyond the task of accepting students from various cultural backgrounds to inculcating remedial actions which seemed to work well for academic acculturation to take place among its stakeholders.

Another initiative was revealed through this study that facilitators of learning should endeavour to project curriculum content to engage FSS for learning to evolve. As noted in the conversation of many of them, the common consensus was that *"lecturers had to help them by writing a summary of curriculum content on the white board, instead of speaking in English all the time."* It follows that a number of times FSS remained outlandish while present in COP because they could not comprehend the English employed to disseminate the curriculum. A FSS said, *"We learn better when texts are written on the board."* We argue that except the correct measure is taken to engage non-English-speaking students, they may exhibit postures of reticence and outlandishness, though physically present in COP.

7.2 Academic acculturation and academic identity

French-speaking students developed academic acculturation and academic identity because of the academic degrees they wanted to earn. The prominent question put to them was explored whether they were acculturating and developing academic identity. According to the observation sessions conducted in the study, they were at home with the academic environment. It could be as a result that the campus was gradually being internationalised for academic acculturation and academic identity to have been observed among FSS. Another reason may be as a result of their future goals and aspirations of obtaining degrees. A second-year FSS narrated her experience thus:

I am attached to this institution because I have to get my degree. South African students are not really friendly but I am not moved because, attaining success is my goal.

One of the FSS in the FP expressed satisfaction with academic and social life at the ACOP. This expression in terms of satisfaction with life according to Chow (2007) is an indication of the development of a sense of belonging to the academic institution. The FSS expressed satisfaction with RU by saying, *"I enjoy this institution because of the assistance I obtain from lecturers and mentors. Student advisors are also helpful."* This could have arisen because of initiatives that internationalized the campus environment, especially with respect to ensuring the use of English by faculty and the influence of foreign lecturers. Such initiatives also pertained to the presence of other foreign students who brought international ideas and cultures into the campus. A major advantage that evolved from the initiative to internationalize the campus was the use of a unifying language of communication (English) as expressed by this foundation level student. The question put to her was to find out if she was acculturating to the campus environment:

This institution is meeting my needs, for example in Gabon, mathematics is more difficult. But here in South Africa, mathematics is easier for me. In Gabon, I studied in French and there are certain figures of speech in English that are not in French, but here in English I am learning them. I am happy to be a student of this institution.

As the FSS took responsibility to attend lectures, tutorials, seek consultation with lecturers, they engaged in what Wenger (1998, p. 108) refers to as "brokering" to obtain degrees. Our prediction that the language of communication in the ACOP would predispose the FSS to the points of developing academic identities therefore becomes relevant based on our analysis of data, juxtaposed with the COP theory. The undertone of language predisposes FSS to issues of power relations because of the political nature of languages other than English, spoken at the HEI. Consequently, a curriculum experience of FSS was the posture of attaining academic acculturation and academic identity. Based on our findings in this study we agree with Wenger (1998) that the development of academic identity among FSS in an ACOP is a connection "of multi membership" (p. 163), since the development of identity draws on diverse forms of association through a path of compromise from one subset of COP to another. Findings obtained in this study suggest that the idea of internationalizing the HE context is diverse and disparate in terms of meaning. This line of thought coincides with the

suggestion of (Gopal, 2011).

7.3 Group work strategy

A continued challenge was in terms of assisting FSS to engage with their peers in an ongoing manner. One of the student skills lecturers unravelled a strategy used to integrate FSS to the community of other students. This was an attempt to ensure that they interacted with English-speaking students. It was a strategy to alleviate their communicative challenge. She speaks on the strategy, as a question on how faculty ensured interaction among stakeholders in the COP was put to her:

When we are conducting group work in class, I divide students into different groups by putting French-speaking students in the groups of English-speakers. This idea helps them to interact with English-speaking students.

The attempt made by this lecturer, pairing stakeholders in possession of linguistic capital with FSS was an indication of the process referred to as "brokering" and "reconciliation" by Wenger (1998, p. 163) to attain an identity. It was found to have given FSS who were new entrants to the COP the opportunity to legitimately and peripherally participate in the tenets of the COP for learning to evolve. A FSS from Gabon in the FP spoke on group work as a strategy which assisted her to learn in the ACOP. We present his narrative:

I engage in group work with South African students because of the opportunity to learn English from them. During the time of oral presentation, in the student skills module, my lecturer didn't allow me to be the first presenter. So I always attended to see how the South African students that presented before me introduced themselves before presenting the topics. This idea has helped me to learn how to do oral presentations in class. It gives me pleasure that I have other students to learn from.

As far as this FSS was concerned, he did not see SAS the way the other FSS labelled them. She seized the opportunity to learn from SAS when they engaged in oral presentation. The strategy employed by her lecturer entailed that she did not start the presentation slots in class because her lecturer wanted her to learn from more knowledgeable others, as suggested by Reyes (2007). Her experience supports the notion of Bandura (1977) that observing more knowledgeable others in a community supersedes the gimmick of learning via trial and error, because she watched different students perform before she had her turn to demonstrate what she learnt from them.

7.4 Personalized attention, tutoring and small class-sizes

French-speaking students experienced one-on-one attention from lecturers, tutors and student advisors. French-speaking student advisors were put in place to act as liaison between parents and the academic institution. Student advisors furnished the institution with vital aspects that needed to be put in place to aid the acclimatization of students. These were initiatives by faculty to address the concerns of students. Personalized attention from key stakeholders (experts) and small class size initiative became subsets of COP which fostered interaction between new entrants and experts. The impact of stakeholders and small class size initiative on the education of FSS supports Wenger's (1998, p. 108) conceptualization that in COP there are subdivisions of COP working together for a common good. At most public universities, lecturers seldom reached students on personalized basis. The FP aims for an average of 60 students in each class. One of the French-speaking student advisors at the academic institution elaborated on the advantage of small class-sizes when she was asked to explain the roles played by these initiatives on students:

The students are not many, so the lecturers and tutors have one-on-one contact with them. The fact that the French-speaking students have student advisors here is also helping. If they have any difficulty in terms of financial, personal, school etc., we assist them.

A female French-speaking student commented on the relationship between lecturers and students which fostered rapport to learn and engage with the curriculum. Our intention was to explore the relationship between experts and novices. This student responded thus to our inquiry:

I like all of my lecturers because they are very friendly, but some of them are very funny because of the way they explain to us (This was about how some of the lecturers pronounced words, she did not want to be rude, so she

preferred not to have this session recorded. We didn't record this aspect). Secondly we are very few in the classrooms.

Using Wenger's (1998, p. 108) lens to analyse the scenario, French-speaking students, tutors and their lecturers co-produced knowledge during consultation and learning facilitation. The lecturers, tutors and FSS understood their roles in the COP. Consequently this study agrees with Leibowitz (2009, p. 262) that interaction between lecturers and students is vital because learning is coproduced by students and lecturers. The findings of this study regarding student-lecturer relationships, impact of tutors on students and personalized attention given to students depart from the observation of Serpell (2007, p. 45) that lecturers confront students in a multiculturally diverse academic environment with limited understanding of their needs. At the research site faculty was vast at identifying prominent challenges capable of limiting interaction among stakeholders in the COP. These were strategies put in place by faculty to enhance interaction between newcomers and experts, a scenario which worked to the advantage of French-speaking students.

7.5 Mentoring experience

A work-in-progress initiative was inaugurated to consolidate efforts at revamping the linguistic challenges of FSS. This was an avenue where linguistically deficient students were directly linked with specific lecturers who addressed issues bordering on assignments and oral presentations. The opportunity to be mentored was a curriculum experience of FSS. An academic staff revealed this experience when responding to a question put to her concerning the effort taken by faculty to ensure that foreign students were adequately motivated to participate in COP for learning to evolve:

Our last aspect is a mentoring programme that we've been working on. We try to link French-speaking students to specific lecturers who follow them up, to help them prepare for specific assignments or proof read their work.

Mentoring initiative became a curriculum experience of FSS and it assisted them to focus on the curriculum. This initiative was seen to have prevented the FSS from dropout. It was the initiative offered by faculty to enhance interaction with more knowledgeable others and the curriculum of study for learning to evolve in the COP. Accessibility of lecturers in COP seems to be an important aspect of interaction experienced by FSS with the curriculum and the other stakeholders. This line of thought supports Wenger's (1998, p. 108) conceptualization that in COP there are subsets of other communities of practice working for a common good of stakeholders.

7.6 Shyness

Shyness was an indication of the French-speaking students' states of incommunicado. It resulted from their reluctance to speak in English because they were afraid that when they made mistakes during normal conversation with peers and during learning facilitation, they would be embarrassed by their classmates. A FSS revealed her inadequacy with these words as she answered the question put to her on whether she had boldness to ask questions during learning facilitation. She answered:

I don't like standing in front of many people because I am a shy person. I learn from hardworking students who are presenting in class.

One of the French-speaking student advisors mentioned the reason why FSS were shy in the COP. He said:

They have the fear that they do not know how to communicate in English. I try to talk to them that the only way they can learn is only if they communicate with English-speaking students. I advise them to put away shyness so they can learn.

FSS initially had diminished association with the other stakeholders because they did not immediately negotiate a transition from French to English. They lacked the linguistic capital to interact with stakeholders in the ACOP. Consequently shyness was a hidden curriculum experience of FSS. Listening and speaking are required by students to participate in COP. Listening is linked to accents because of the differences in the way people pronounce words. FSS could not initially grasp pronunciation of words because they needed to legitimately and peripherally participate in the COP involving how to learn to listen and pronounce words. With centripetal participation they gradually began to engage in COP pertaining to listening and pronouncing words for effective learning to take place. FSS were required to vacate redundant COP pertaining to shyness, leading to an inability to audibly and vocally express their views. These findings agree with the work of Tackett et al. (2013) that shyness may be linked to poor association between people. In this case

the inability of FSS to initially speak and listen to English during conversations and lecture periods became their challenge. These findings furthermore agree with Rubin et al. (2011) that social detachment ensues when people exhibit traces of shyness. Some of the FSS became outlandish and could not fully participate in the activities of the ACOP when they were supposed to commence LPP at the FP level. Consequently they became reticent and had delayed transition from French to English. Until FSS found that SAS did not discriminate against them when they made grammatical errors, they began to come out of their dysfunctional COP which entailed lack of communication with stakeholders. We support the borrowed concept of Cowden (2005), in a study conducted on worry and the associated relationship to shyness that individuals who are shy may not possess interactional skills, may exhibit self-distrust, may be encumbered by their nervousness, or display magnified feelings of biased assessment about themselves. However a point of departure from Cowden (2005) echoes the importance of the short-lived nature of reticence when international students take the effrontery to commence participation by relinquishing dysfunctional COP (French-speaking enclaves). Consequently shyness was a hidden curriculum experience of FSS, short-lived because other stakeholders encouraged them to participate when they took the initiative to belong to RU.

7.7 Homesickness

FSS experienced homesickness because they were in a new environment. We present evidence to this claim by presenting narratives from them. A foundation level FSS from the Republic of Benin expressed feelings of homesickness. He was asked to divulge challenges confronting him as a foreign student. He said:

Apart from the English, the problem I face is homesickness. As a foreigner, I always miss home. Since I came here it is normal for me to miss home.

Second evidence was provided by a female FSS from Gabon in response to the question put to her on the challenges she experienced. Cultural disparity seemed to have constituted her feelings in terms of homesickness. She narrates her experience:

We're using the European kind of system. There are some things that they do here that I don't understand, and I am sometimes homesick.

Third evidence was provided by a female third-year FSS whose feelings of homesickness was aggravated by loneliness and unfriendliness exhibited by certain SAS. She lamented thus:

I am homesick because I am away from my family members and friends. South African students are not friendly with foreigners. It is certain to be lonely and isolated but this is my third year in the degree programme, I will soon be with my loved ones.

These findings support the work of Gu et al. (2009) that international students experience feelings of homesickness despite being in touch with family members through emails and short message services. These were indications suggesting that interaction with more knowledgeable others in COP may not surpass the feelings of affection for family and friends. Feelings of affection for family and friends are indications that the family comprises COP surpassing ACOP. Our findings support the work of Summers and Volet (2008) that the experience of international students in terms of homesickness is further aggravated by the trend of host students not voluntarily communicating with them in their undertakings. The intermittent experiences of incommunicado between them and SAS were found to trigger feelings of homesickness, although SAS did not intentionally exclude FSS from their discussions. It implies if foreign students are not properly integrated into COP the feelings of homesickness may be aroused. Our findings in this regard support the work of Tartakovsky (2007) that homesickness is an emotional response to cross-cultural transition. We argue that homesickness may result in reduction in social participation and increased psychological suffering among international students.

7.8 Accent

One of the French-speaking student advisors interviewed in this study mentioned that the French accent was a disadvantage which resulted in the inability of FSS to publicly speak in English. She spoke thus on the issue as she revealed challenges confronting FSS:

At times the other students recognise that FSS have a different accent. Consequently they keep quiet in the class. When time goes by and they have interacted with the other students, they improve in their English-speaking ability and in their accent.

This experience was supported by a female FSS from Gabon whose concern was put in this manner:

I want to be able to speak with the English accent and when I speak French, I must speak with the French accent

This French-speaking student's experience in the COP could lead to dysfunctionality because other stakeholders may not comprehend her accent. Since learning in COP should be reciprocal the other stakeholders may be challenged because the issue of incomprehensible accent may impact on the rate at which negotiation among members takes place. The issue of participation in COP seems to entail rapt attention when unfamiliar accents constitute subsets of COP. Findings in this perspective resonate the importance of subsets of COP in an internationalized tertiary institution, in support of Wenger (1998, p. 108). These findings support the notion of Halic et al. (2009) that foreign students recognized accent as an important feature in determining their understanding of concepts and values necessary for academic survival.

8. Concluding Remarks

The curriculum experiences of French-speaking students entailed a combination of opportunities and challenges which hinged on linguistic adjustment. They engaged with subsets of COP across frontiers of practice for different perspectives of learning to evolve. The pedagogical implications of this study point to the requirement to train foreign and indigenous lecturers to adjust the pace at which they speak as well as their accents so that non-English-speaking students would not be marginalized during learning facilitation and group work initiatives. These implications border on the continuous preparedness of stakeholders to embrace the challenges confronting foreign students in an attempt to arouse their potential to participate in COP. Furthermore the strategies employed in the FP as new entrants arrived at the periphery of the COP should be embarked upon across the six faculties to ensure homogeneity as far as the development and enactment of the curriculum are concerned.

The programmatic implication of the study entails the requirement of faculty to continuously and responsively develop the curriculum in an internationalized academic milieu because the challenges confronting foreign students are multifaceted. It is recommended that experts should be charged with the contest of initiating participation and interaction in the communities of practice, in an attempt to ensure the full participation of international students. As suggested by Vandeyar (2010), we agree that the development of academic identities "is to a large extent defined by power relations inherent and characteristic of an institution." According to Lave and Wenger (1991, 115-116), the issues of power relations evolve as the "continuity-displacement contradictions." Linguistic incongruence, originating from the incessant use of indigenous SA languages symbolized tinctures of power relations. This is what Adebajji (2013) refers to as linguistic power relations, triggered by diminished intercultural competence between indigenous and foreign students in an internationalised COP. This study contributes to the voluminous literature by reiterating that the awareness of an internationalized academic milieu predisposes faculty to prepare to teach cross-culturally, deviating from Gopal's (2011) argument that faculty is not always prepared to teach cross-culturally.

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