Uju C. Ukwuoma[1]
Botswana International University of Science & Technology
Palapye

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RETHINKING LEARNING AND TEACHING IN AFRICA:
STORYTELLING AND SITTING POSITION AS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Abstract: This research report uses elements of autoethnography and mixed research to share the efforts of an academic to engage his students during classroom instruction. Participants included 28 science students from a regionally accredited university in Southern Africa, who were taking many sections of a research course. The researcher rearranged students' sitting position in class, integrated local language into instruction as well as turned teacher talk into oral storytelling. Data were drawn using surveys, in-depth qualitative interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations, with attention to nonverbal communication components. Results indicated that participants believed that circular sitting arrangement and integration of oral storytelling into instruction facilitated classroom engagement. However, participants perceived the use of local language alongside English during instruction as lacking instructional utility. This report discusses the implications of these findings and provides suggestions for the directions future research should take regarding student engagement during classroom instruction.

Keywords: circular sitting, oral storytelling, classroom engagement, local language.

Locating my voice

I earned my Doctor of Education in Literacy degree in May of 2014 from a university foundedin 1879 as a teacher preparatory college in the Southern United States. The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education classifies my alma mater as a Doctoral Research University while others consider the school a Tier–II public university (U.S. News and World Report, 2012). Within a period of four years, I learned the place of language in the learning and teaching process. I also learned how to undertake literacy assessment to identify what works, what does not work and how to design appropriate intervention. In fact, my doctoral education positioned me to be a researcher, teacher, and creator of new knowledge that will solve educational problems. Upon graduation, I continued to work on a part-time basis in my department-Language, Literacy and Special Populations-but launched a job search for a teaching position in other universities. On account of having worked for a non-profit, taught in higher education and worked as a journalist in Africa, I beamed my job searchlight to Africa. I also felt obligated to go back to Africa because I promised participants in my dissertation research that I will return to teach in Africa after graduation. After one year and one month, I accepted an offer of employment to teach at a regionally accredited university in the Southern Africa.

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[1] ukwuomac@biust.ac.bw or ujucukwuoma@aol.com

My face lights up each time I enter my classroom to teach. In providing a rationale for that, I believe it is because of the happiness I feel from conversing with my students during instruction. My students are thirsty for knowledge. They are also in a small class size, which makes it easy for me to give them individualised attention. As such, teaching them is complete fun. Nevertheless, each time I engage in conversation with my students during classroom instruction, I notice a classroom culture that is reminiscent of my undergraduate university days in the mid-1990s in Western Africa. Clearly, the classroom behaviour of my students indicates to me that muchhadnot changed from the experiences I had when I was at a similareducational level. To clarify, my students in Southern Africa are passing through a cultural classroom experience that is similar to what I passed through more than 20 years ago in Western Africa. I have the same cultural experience with my students, and time did not seem to have done much to change that. Like I did in 1995, my students expect an "education with a narrative character" (Freire, 2008, p.71). My students expect me to stand in front of the classroom like a preacher while they face me like my congregation, the same way I was taught in Western Africa when I was a university undergraduate at thesame age as they are.

To put it in another way, my students perceive me in the 21st century as the "narrating subject while they are the patient listening objects" (Freire, 2008, p.71) exactly as I perceived academic staff who taught me during myundergraduate universitydays in the 20th century. Such perception contradicts the voice of my doctoral education which reminds me that learning and teaching are different today than they were a few years ago. In fact, current theories of learning and teaching views teacherdelivery and how humans learn in ways that were unimaginable a few years ago. I observe some of my students struggle to be fluent in the English language during classroom instruction but afterwards, they revert to Setswana, a mother tongue for the majority of them. So, I encourage my students to feel free in speaking Setswana during instruction because familiar languages can facilitate student engagement if properly integrated into teaching and learning (Au, 1997; Ukwuoma, 2015). Besides that, several environmental factors influence the learning and teaching dynamic. Thus, it is not out of place to integrate factors such as local languages into the learning process (Ukwuoma, 2015a). Initially, my students were hesitant to integrate Setswana into our classroom conversations.

They were worried about what other members of the university community will say if they speak languages other than English. I reminded them that Setswana embodies most of their experiences because it is their first language. Thus, the Setswana language should be the foundation on which I can build their learning. I explained to my students that any teacher who disregards his or her students' mother tongue in preference for a standard language such as English is shutting down a major factor forstudent engagement during classroom instruction (Au 1997; Freire & Macedo, 1987'; Ukwuoma, 2015). The attitude of my students suggested to me that formal education in Africa may be slow in adapting to change. Furthermore, their attitude indicates to me that some individuals still perceive literacy as the ability to speak, write and understand the English language. Thus, I began to search for literature on student engagement to classroom instruction in Africa. A simple Google search yielded many studies that have bracketed the lack of engagement during classroom teaching in many parts of Africa (Akpan & Umobong, 2013; Mokgosi, 2015, UNESCO, 2015). I narrowed the search to Botswana, so Ican use the country as a case study to address what is now an apparent Africa-wide educational problem. Furthermore, I noticed that research literature is replete with evidence that students are performing poorly in examinations in Botswana.

Researchers attribute the poor performanceto lack of student engagementduring classroom instruction (Botswana, 2004; Bothoko, 2012; Dailynews, 2015; Martin, Vigneaux & Buckle 2009; Moalosi, 2012, Mokgosi, 2015; The Republic of Botswana, 2014).However, there is apaucity of literature documenting effective intervention aimed at addressing the lack of students' engagement. Specifically, little or no study has been conducted to determine ways of closing the achievement gap created by thelack of student engagement in classroom instruction. As such, this study is timely because engagement to learning in classroom prevents poor performance in examinations (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Wang & Degol, 2014). And, I believe that academic staff in African universities should, as a matter of responsibility, devise ways to facilitate student engagement during instruction. Thus, the purpose of this autoethnography was to describe how I integrated familiar language and oral storytelling into instruction as well as rearranged my students' seating positions to facilitate engagement in an advanced academic writing and research class.

<div align="center">Locating othervoices</div>

I set out in this research to study a part of the school culture of my students with whom I share lots of cultural similarities. Many theories, which I call the voice of my doctoral education, guided my steps. Thus, I drew from theories on student engagement and oral storytelling as a way of learning to those within the realm of seating arrangement. I also draw from theories on the use of familiar languages in instruction, critical literacy, and sociocultural theories of learning. Such fusion is necessary to explain how I engaged my students to achieve successful academic outcomes (i.e., the students passed their semester exams as well as indicated to me that they are able to apply what they learned in class to their daily lives). Perhaps, it is important to point out that engagement is a multidimensional construct that brings different but related lines of research together to predict academic performance (Appleton, Christenson & Furlong, 2008; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004; Natriello, 1984). In other words, research findings show that engagedstudents (i.e., during instruction) have more chances to pass examinations (Klem & Connel, 2004). I should also point out that academic engagement and student motivation are related to what students do in school, but they also contrast (Assor, 2012; Christenson, Reschly & Wylie, 2012; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Martin, 2012).

In providing a rationale for such contrast, Skinner and Pitzer (2012) pointed out that academic engagement centres on classroom activities that go on in schools. Reeve (2009) on the other hand, emphasised that motivation is an impetus that paves the way or gives vitality for such school-relatedactivities. As such, there are behavioural and psychological aspects of student engagement (Appleton, Christenson & Furlong, 2008). Thus, student engagement is an integration of affective and behavioural factors (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004; Natriello, 1984). For that reason, students who participate in classroom activities may be more likely to achieve successful academic outcomes (Finn, 1989). Similarly, students who have an affective connection to their fellow students will have increased chances of achieving academic success (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Therefore, I believe that students will participate in class and develop the affective connection to course contents if teachers often rearrange how they sit in class and integrateoral storytelling and familiar languages into instruction. Pace and Price (2005) found significant evidence to conclude that classroom seating arrangement influences student behaviour and achievement.

After reviewing series of literature on classroom seating arrangement, Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) stated that "seating arrangements are an important classroom setting events because they have the potential to help prevent problem behaviours that decrease student attention" (p. 89). As a vehicle for self-expression, the language or languages students speak embodies the experiences they bring to classrooms. Thus, such language or languages should form the starting point for instruction (Freiere & Macedo, 1987; Ukwuoma, 2015). On the other hand, critical literacy creates room for discussions of how to improve instructional strategies as well as permitting language choice (Ukwuoma, 2015). Additionally, Critical literacy encourages teachers not to ignore the languages students bring to classrooms because such languages constitute an important lens through which those students interpret what they are learning in the classrooms. In fact, the languages learners speak influence their thinking process and are capable of facilitating the development of conceptual understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural theory of learning, on the other hand, does not separate learners from their social environment because learners are fundamentally social beings.

Thus, thesociocultural theory posits that social interactions are pivotal to learning because learners observe and imitate each other as well as learn through collaboration as they move from one learning stage to another (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978; Wuttikietpaiboon, 2012). Oral storytelling is among the oldest ways of knowledge transmission in Africa as well as in other cultures. Indeed, oral storytelling is a distinctly human phenomenon which facilitates the transfer of ideas through words among human beings (Bruner, 1996; Meek, 1998; Mello, 2001). Researchers often ignore oral storytelling due to the erroneous belief that it lacks scientific rigour. Consequently, teachers have shown little or no interest in using stories to learn particularly in institutions of higher learning in Africa. Nevertheless, oral storytelling relates to learning because when teachers compose and share stories in classrooms, students engage in the process of meaning-making, which in turn, drive instruction. So, teachers have been encouraged to view oral storytelling as an immensely beneficial classroom activity (Matthews-DeNatale, 2008; Ohler, 2008). In fact, rearranging students' seating positions in a classroom and, integrating story and familiar languages into instruction represent important strategies for getting students engaged during instruction.

Voice of autoethnography

Questions that border on how an ethnographer can study his or her culture or the way of life of his or her people are part of the factors that led to the emergence of autoethnography. As such, autoethnography employs data emanating from the self and circumstances surrounding the self to gain understanding of how the self-relate to others under similar circumstances (Goodall, 2000; Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010; Patton, 2002). As a qualitative research method, autoethnography focuses on the self. It pays particular attention to context and employs systematic approach for data collection, analysis and interpretation. The researcher is also viewed as both the subject and object in an autoethnography. And, like ethnography, autoethnography takes the holistic approach to the study of cultural systems (Denzin, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Patton, 2002; Sparkes, 2002; Wolcott, 2004). Autoethnography offers a researcher an avenue to use his or her experiences to gather insight into the larger culture for which the researcher is a part. Reports of autoethnography are usually written in first-person voice (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Patton, 2002). Elements of mixed research were incorporated into this study because many researchers in developing countries perceivemixed research asa credible method of inquiry (Apesoa-Varano, E. C. & Hinton, L., 2013; Bass, et al., 2008; Ukwuoma, 2015).Such perception stems from the understanding that qualitative and quantitative

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research paradigms have shortcomings that might best be addressed by combining both approaches (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010).

Voices previously heard

Unlike traditional autoethnography, the current study is mixed because I employed a variety of methods for data collection. Apart from participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, I used questionnaires to survey my students. I had to mix the study because I wanted to achieve participant enrichment and motivate my students to take ownership of the data in line with the rationale and purpose model (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Sutton, 2006). Also because "mixed research is attracting scholars from many developing countries due to its inherent advantage in combining elements of qualitative and quantitative research to facilitate research outcomes with breadth and depth" (Ukwuoma, 2015a, p.140). AsI have previously noted, there is little evidence of effective intervention to address the lack of students' engagement in Botswana. This is because no study has been conducted to determine ways of closing the achievement gap created by the lack of student engagement in classroom instruction. As a result, this study was conceptualised based on the understanding that university students in Botswana will have increased chances of improving their academic performance if they are properly engaged by their lecturers during instruction (Ahlfeldt, Mehta, & Sellnow, 2005; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Tinto, 2002).

Without a doubt, the task of engaging students during classroom instruction at all levels of education is of scholarly interest to the educational researchers. To achieve such objective at the university level, I believe that university teachers should focus on fostering a sense of community among students as well as view teaching and learning as an inherently social and cultural activity (Gerdes & Mellinckrodt, 1994; Mann, 2005; NYU, n.d, Weiner, 1985). In fact, socio-cultural theoretical perspective to teaching and learning is an indication of the importance of social, cultural, and historical factors of human experience. Accordingly, Woolfolk (1999) bracketed social interactions and experiences of people as the foundation of learning. Similarly, Au (1997) concluded that culture mediates human experience and is of considerable importance in learning and teaching. Undoubtedly, language is a part of culture as well as a vehicle for the transmission of culture from one generation to another. Thus, language has an enormous role to play in the learning and teaching dynamics. Specifically, language is a fundamental tool for classroom instruction in schools. In other words, spoken language help teachers and learners to describe their thoughts, own their world and assume any ideological stance of their choice (Cazden, 2001; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 2011; Gramsci, 1971; Ukwuoma, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978).

The implication of such important role of spoken language is that learners will do better when academic staff integrateslanguages learners are familiar with into instruction. As individuals from Africa, a continent with huge oral tradition, learners in Botswana may pay more attention to their studies if stories are integrated into teaching and learning using familiar languages. Nevertheless, there seem to be deliberate attempts by teachers in many countries in Africa to favour the so-called standard languages such as English and French for classroom instruction at the detriment of local languages (Ukwuoma, 2014). Consequently, many teachers measure literacy and learning through the lens of European languages that are not atrue representation of the lived experiences of many learners in classrooms in Africa. Perhaps, integrating Setswana language into instruction alongside English at the university level in Botswana will facilitate student engagement. Similarly, incorporating stories into

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instruction will facilitate student engagement because most of the learners in classrooms in Botswana are part of the broadoral tradition of Africa as noted above. Ricketts (2015) indicated that "story (e.g., narrative, anecdote, case) is an account of events that take place over time" (p. 51).

In other words, astory is an environment that helps human beings to draw the purpose of their experiences as well as build their knowledge (Short, 2014). Storytelling has become a part of everyday life in Africa that it is easy to overlook its importance. However, several research findings show that integrating stories into instruction and varying instructional delivery arepivotal components of teaching. As such, successful teachers do not rely solely on traditional ways of teaching in classrooms (Nugent, Malik, & Hollingsworth, 2012). Similarly, Bell and Roberts (2010) reported how a team of scholars and researchers from different disciplines collaborated under a storytelling project to change the narrative of racism among their students. They surmised that stories could act as a bridge that will help students connect to their learning. Accordingly, Hooks (1989) noted that stories "can provide meaningful examples and ways to identify and connect" (p. 77). After integrating story into instruction, Campbell and Hlusek (2015) affirmed that "students, including learners with special needs, demonstrated engagement" (p. 160). Furthermore, the authors concluded that students were "observed to be deeply absolved in the task of reading, using the storytelling steps, creating and rehearsing" (Campbell & Hlusek, 2015, p. 160).

To this end, Ricketts (2015) cautioned teachers to keep stories focused and relevant as well as fuse generalised information into their stories. In short, by drawing from prior knowledge of Setswana language and story-telling, students may more easily come to understand contents delivered in other languages and hard to understand instructional contents. Integrating Setswana is necessary because teachers should not always rely on traditional ways to solve classroom problems. Critical literacy paves the way for discussions on how to improve existing conditions concerning permitting language choice in classrooms. As such, English should not be the only language for making meaning in classroom instruction when the learners'mother tongue is not English (Ukwuoma, 2015). On the other hand, classroom seating arrangements have been found to have apositiveor negative impact on academic achievement and overall educational outcomes. In fact, the way students arrange their seats in the classroom can encourage appropriate or inappropriate behaviour among students during instruction (Daniels, 1998; Perkin & Wieman, 2005; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). Additionally, students seating location affects the ability to ask and answer questions in class during instruction, which influences the opportunity to learn (Granstrom, 1996).

According to Granstrom (1996), students who sit at the back of the classroom, unlike those at the front, often interact with each other instead of paying attention to the teacher during instruction. Other researchers have also compared and contrasted circular and rows seating arrangements and concluded that student's seating position affects how they ask question during classroom instruction (Marx, Furher & Hartig, 2000; Rosenfield, Lambart & Black, 1985). In a study that focused on how to use storytelling to achieve fluency and flair for young learners during classroom instruction, Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) observed the impact of classroom seating arrangement on student performance. Thus, the researchers concluded that "the nature of academic task and type of behaviour desired should dictate the seating arrangement" (Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008 p. 91). Next, Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) suggested that teachers who are interested in improving classroom engagement during independent classroom work should have their students sit in rows instead of seating as a group.

The authors encouraged teachers to also be prepared to move desks to other positions in class to facilitate interactions among the students. Similarly, Paciga, Lisy, Taele and Hoffman (2015) noted that teachers' lack of understanding of the impact of seating arrangement during classroom instruction affects student engagement. In a study that used seating arrangement to examine students' classroom behaviour, McKeown, Stringer, and Cairns (2015) found that students segregate among themselves along gender, ethnic or religious lines if they are allowed to determine where to sit in class. Such finding makes it imperative for teachers to take initiatives regarding how their students sit during instruction. In short, these studies demonstrate that classroom seating arrangement can be used to minimise negative and unintended outcomes during instruction as well as engage students to attain instructional objectives.

I and my students

It is the beginning of the second semester in the 2014/2015 academic session. Shortly before students returned to campus from first semester holidays, I had a meeting with myhead of department and the dean of the college of sciences. They asked me to design an academic writing and research course, which I will teach third-year undergraduate students. Later on, lectures commenced in earnest, but my students did not appear as excited about the course as I was. It was my first time to teach their class so I guided them to see the importance and relevance of the course on a personal and professional level. I included various classroom activities such as peer review, paired presentations, and fieldwork among others to facilitate active learning. Thus, I expected to see a participatory class where students will engageeach other, the content and myself. I became worried because none of these activities could get my students to participate in class. They did not ask or answer questions. I made class introductions interesting and voluntary. Each student was expected to tell the class his or her name and share one thing they believe we do not know about them. I also told them that we could only take three introductions per class as a way of spreading the introduction over many weeks.
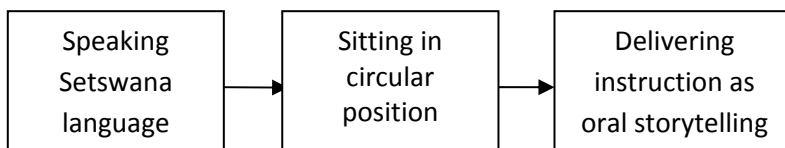
Nevertheless, my students appeared uninterested and reluctant to participate, even in class introductions. I am surprised. My teaching assistant is equally surprised.   I walked into the classroom on the fourth class day, greeted my students and told them to rearrange their seating position and sit in a circle. They are to face inwards towards the circle. I sat ina space that was also part of the circle and announced that henceforth, any student in the class could speak any language he or she prefers during instruction. In an instant, I noticed the faces of my students lighten up. Next, I shared the story of Khurumela in the State of Palapye with my students to introduce research and its importance in everyday decision making. By the way, Khurumela and Palapye are names of local communities around the university. I had actually crafted the story with materials I prepared for the day's lecture titled *Introduction to Research*. As a participant and non-participant observer, I watched mystudents' use of circular seating and integration of stories during lectures for the remaining eight weeks of the semester.The above adjustment changed the rhythm of my classroom. So Iredesigned all mylecturesand centred them on story lines using local examples. During class presentations, I told my students to speak any language of their choice.

The few who began their presentations by speaking Setswana switched to English within a minute or two and we went from a non-participatory class to a fully engaged class. I began to

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question myself as to what went wrong during the first three class meetings and how I can sustain the current classroom tempo. Sustaining the tempo is important to me because I did not want my students to lose interest again. In line with my expectations, my students did not lose their excitement from integrating story and, circular seating position and interpolating local language into instruction until the end of the semester. As a result, I designed the current study around what has transpired in the classroom and quickly sought for institutional approval to turn all that has transpired into a study. Upon receipt of the approval during the last two weeks of the semester, I divided myclass into fourfocus groups (i.e., sevenstudents in each group)to discuss all that has happened in our classroom over the semester. They had three sessions of focus group discussions. Further, I engaged them in one on one in-depth qualitative interview to seek clarifications from what they said during their focus group discussions. Next, Iconstructed, and pilot-tested the Feedback on Instruction Questionnaire (FOI-Q, Appendix 2), which I used to survey and solicit more data from my students.

I had to use both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments to achieve participant enrichment. I believed that such mixture would motivate my students to take ownership of the data in line with the rationale and purpose model of mixed research as previously noted. Specifically, I used eight weeks of 16 class periods totalling 16 hours (one hour each for lectures and tutorials respectively) to act as participant and nonparticipant observer. Ikept field notes wherein Idocumented mystudents'behaviours during lectures and tutorials as well as surveyed and interviewed them. I paid attention to the nonverbal behaviour of my students because I agree with Mehrabian (1981) that nonverbal communication represents a higher percentage of what human beings do when theycommunicate with each other. Their body language offered me another avenue outside the survey questionnaire to triangulate findings from this study. By the way, my students who participated in this study ranged in age from 19 to 23 years with a slight female (n = 18) majority and male in the minority (n = 10). Let mealso add that they were a convenientbut purposive sample because they were taking my research methods course. Thus, theyconstituted an "information-rich source" that canplay animportant role infacilitating a robust research outcome (Patton, 1987, p. 58; Ukwuoma, 2015a). Also, my students were excited about the study similar to the excitement students' exhibit during reading clinics (Ukwuoma, 2014a).

Figure 1
Factors Interpolated Into
Instruction

Speaking Setswana language	→	Sitting in circular position	→	Delivering instruction as oral storytelling

What we found
The semester is over, so I used the holidays to engage in data analysis.I began with quantitative data followed by qualitative data in an iterative manner. In fact, it was a kind of mixed sequential analysis, which involves using both qualitative and quantitative methods of

data analysis in sequence (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). I used simple frequency count and percentile distribution to analyse quantitative data from structured survey responses to the FOI-Q whereas transcripts from focus group discussions, interviews, and my field notes were coded as well as categorised with the framework of Bogdan and Biklen (2007). Themes emerged from qualitative data through constant comparison analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I used the nonverbal behaviour of the study participants, which I recorded in my field notes to broaden my understanding of the themes that emerged from qualitative data. Finally, I compared and contrasted qualitative and quantitative data to check how they complemented each other in addressing the purpose of the study. In one sentence, the result of this study indicated that my students believed that circular seating arrangement and integration of stories into instruction facilitates academic engagement during classroom instruction.

On the contrary, my students do not believe that integrating local languages into instruction has any instructional utility. Additionally, my students showed little or no understanding of oral storytelling as an Afro-indigenous teaching method. Such lack of understanding corroborateswith findings from a previous study, which found that most African students are unaware of what constitutes African indigenous learning systems (Ukwuoma, 2016). Quantitative data showed that almost 100% (n = 27) of FOI-Q respondents agreed that integrating story into instruction facilitated their engagement during instruction. Similarly, 100% (n=28) of the respondentsagreed that circular sitting position during instruction facilitated engagement. However, the participants differed in their explanations of what constituted engagement.

According to themes from the interview transcripts, 78.57% (n = 22) of the participants consideredthemselves engaged during instruction if they can recall and integrate class discussions into their daily lives including being able to pass the course examination. About 21.43% (n = 6) professed the belief that being engaged during instruction only meantthat they are confident after the lecturethat they canpass the course examination. Nevertheless, qualitative and quantitative data showed that all of the study participants believed that integrating local language into instruction does not facilitate engagement. Interview transcripts demonstrated that their major reason for not supporting the integration of local language is because they are in an international university with students who may not understand local languages. Table 1 shows some of the comments from participants regarding the integration of local language into instruction, circular sitting arrangement and the use of oral storytelling during classroom instruction.

As I reflect

This study did not set out to do a pre and post measurement of students'performance but I believe that the students who participated in this study did well because I recorded a 100% pass rate at the end of the semester. The majority of the students also confirmed that they felt engaged during instruction due to the two factors I integrated (i.e., rearranging seating position and turning teacher talk to oral storytelling). However, I have to point out that thesample size of this study is small. As such,I view it asa limitation because it is non-representative. Nevertheless, I consider the sample convenient and purposively chosen. Moreover, findings from this study merely representsa first step in understanding how little things can engage students and drive instruction to attain curricular objectives. As Iperuse my reflexive journal, I see the need for scholars to look at student engagement anew because the

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way students are learning in this 21st century seems to be different from what we write in our school curriculums.

As I sievethrough the feedback I received from the participants in this study, it gets clear that circular sitting position and oral storytelling helped open the minds of my students in an extraordinary way. Such openness made them receptive to new information thatfacilitateschange in behaviour. Clearly, the time has come for teachers at all levels of education in Africa to rethink learning and teaching. Further research on the impact of sitting position and integration of oral storytelling into instruction should take several steps. First and foremost, it is important for researchers to replicate this study in other institutions of higher learning. Secondly, researchers should use academic success as theoutcome variable to measurethe impact of circular sitting position and integration of oral storytelling into classroom instruction. Until we read findings from such studies, we do not have the necessary empirical base for generalisation.

Table 1
Selected comments from participants

Local language	Circular sitting	Oral storytelling
	The arrangement made me feel confident	You use local examples in the stories making it easy to relate to
There are difficult variants of Setswana, which all of us will not understand	We became kind of equal in class sitting that way and facing each other	
We are in an international university, so it will not be a good idea	It helped me loosen up	The way youlocalise everything in the storymakes it fun and relatable. It is practical
	I felt like a primary school kid at a birthday party having fun. I loved it	
	It was better than the usual set up where I was constantly staring at someone's back. Now, I could see all my classmates	
	There was no hiding behind other classmates. It helped me pay attention	

Appendix 1

The Story of City of Khurumela in the State of Palapye

In June 2010, Palapye Governor signed a law giving Chief Dumela, chairperson of the city of Khurumela, control of Khurumela public school system. Most Palapyans agree that all the schools in the Khurumela public school system are in dire need of reform. They feel this way because about 250 who attend thecity of Khurumela public school systemwill not enter

secondary school next year. They have not passed the Botswana Primary School Examination Council test in over a three-year period. Only 3% of the population of the children enter secondary school, while only 2% score acceptable grade in English language, mathematics and Khurumela language. For sure, something needs to be done.

While campaigning for the council chairmanship of Khurumela, Chief Nkwe promised to establish a board of trustees that will supervise the entire school if elected. A current member of Khurumela council Mrs Babedi disagreed. She wants the Governor to employ more teachers and pay the teachers in US dollars, not in Pula but the state of Palapye cannot afford to pay teachers in US dollars. Members of the Khurumela Association of Tuckshop owners believe that these schools should change their opening and closing times so that children will have more time to sell for their parents at the Tuckshop before and after school. Members of the Parents Teachers Association resolved at their annual meeting that new principals should be employed to train teachers in Palapye. However, Palapye teachers believe they are competent and would not go for further training. Patrons of Greenhouse Bar, a popular bar in the city, think that the school system should be left the way it is. These suggestions represent many philosophies and opinions. Moreover, all the suggestions have advantages and disadvantages.

Given different views about what should be done to revive the Khurumela public school system, which idea do you think should be implemented? Which idea will havethe support of the majority of Khurumela people? Which idea will help more students pass the entrance test to secondary schools? How can we know the exact number of students in the Khurumela public school system? How can we know the opinion of all the teachers in the Khurumela public school system? How can we design and monitor intervention programmes to help students do better in English language, mathematics and Khurumela language? How can we monitor the progress of the children in Khurumela public school system when they are in secondary education?

Research can provide answers to these questions andmuch more that have not been asked in the story of the city of Khurumela in the state of Palapye. Everyone in Palapye and Khurumela will benefit if the answer is from research because research removes personal bias and vested interests. What are apersonal bias and vested interest? Tuck shop owners are interested in having their children sell for them before and after school. As a politician, chief Nkwe wants the people to vote for him. Mrs Babedi is a council member who does not want to be recalled from the council by her people. Greenhouse bar is interested in what is happening in the schools because many teachers stop at their bar on weekends to drink one or two bottles of beer, so their business will suffer if teachers are sacked or sent elsewhere for training. These are examples of personal bias and vested interest.

If you go to Meriam Websters Student Thesaurus on http://www.wordcentral.com/cgibin/thesaurus you will see that it has two entries for the word *Research.* It defined research as "systematic search for the truth or facts about something". It gives an example of how to use research in a sentence. The example is "I will have to do some research for this project". The Thesaurus also compared the research to "inquiry" and defined inquiry as "a systematic search for the truth or factsabout something". It also used inquiry in a sentence like this: "an inquiry into the origins of the universe". Now, to find out solutions to the problems confronting Khurumela public school system, we can

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conduct an inquiry or do a systematic search about Khurumela public school system. When we try to find out how to get to Gabs from BIUST campus in Palapye, we are conducting research. According to the Meriam Websters Student Thesaurus, other words that are related to research or inquiry are: delving, examination, exploration, inquest, inquisition, investigation, probe, probing, research, study, quest, audit, check, check-up, diagnosis, inspection, hearing, interrogation, trial, feeler, query, question, poll, questionnaire, challenge, cross-examination, grilling, quiz etc.

So, we are taking Academic Writing & Research because the research part of the course is interesting and will help us make better decisions. We will also learn critical thinking skills. Instead of just believing that Bmobile, Orange or Mascom has better signal in Palapye because someone said it is a "fact"or that they have "proof"or that it is the "truth", you can learn research techniques to evaluate their points of view. Okay, as scientists, it is important to understand that we do not use the word *prove*, *truth* or *fact* when we talk about research. Proof exists in mathematics and deductive logic but in science and research, we give evidence. What we call evidence this semester may also be discarded next semester by another research because just as all fingers are not equal, all research is not created equal. After this class, you will not believeeverything you read in *Mmegi* or hear from *BTV* because you will know that they have vested interests in reporting issues.

We will discuss different kinds of research in classbut as scientists; we should understand that science is about using scientific methods such as describing things, exploring, experimenting, explaining, predicting, etc. to generate scientific knowledge. We do not assume anything to be true in science instead we sue the scientific method to justify our description or explanation of things around us. In science, we make an empirical observation, generate and test the hypothesis (another way of saying that is to make an educated guess), we generate or construct and test theories as well as make predictions.

Two major scientific methods are exploratory and confirmatory methods. In the exploratorymethod, the researcher begins by making observations, next he or she studies the observations and try to find patterns, and third, the researcher makes tentative conclusion or generalisation about the observed patterns. In the exploratory method, the researcher begins by stating a hypothesis based on an existing theory. Next, he or she collects data to test the hypothesis empirically. Finally, the researcher will decide to accept or reject the hypothesis based on the tested data. Remember that data is plural while datum is singular. Now, can you tell me in one sentence how we can solve the problems raised in the story of Khurumela?

Credit: Some materials for the story of city of Khurumela in the state of Palapye were adapted-sometimes word to word-to avoid losing their meaning from Johnson and Christensen's Educational research, Scott and Usher's Understanding educational research and Shank and Brown's Exploring educational research literacy.

Appendix 2

TWAL 302 FEEDBACK ON INSTRUCTION QUESTIONNAIRE (FOI-Q)

PLEASE CHECK (MARK OR SHADE THE CIRCLE) THE CATEGORY THAT APPLIES TO YOU:

1. INDICATE YOUR GENDER   () FEMALE   () MALE

2. WHAT ARE YOU STUDYING   …………………………………..

3. WHAT IS YOUR NATIVE LANGUAGE …………………………….

4. Have you read "The Story of Khrumela in the State of Palapye"?   () Yes   () No
5. Did the above story help you understand the meaning of research? () Yes   () No
6. Why do you think it helped or did not help you? (Write your answers below)

7. Did you attend all TWAL 302 classes this semester?   () Yes   () No
8. Did the class circular seating arrangement help you learn?   () Yes   () No
9. Why do you think it helped or did not help you? (Write your answers below)

10. Do you like it that you were allowed to speak Setswana and English language in TWAL 302 class?   () Yes   () No (Explainthe reasons for your answer at the back of this questionnaire)

THANK YOU

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Biographical notes:

Uju C. Ukwuoma is a teacher and literacy researcher, who is passionate about conducting literacy assessments at various levels of formal education, to identify what works and what does not work so as to design appropriate intervention. He is a senior lecturer at the Center for Academic Literacy of the Botswana International University of Science and Technology. His Doctorate in Literacy is from the Language, Literacy and Special Populations programme in the College of Education of Sam Houston State University in Texas, USA. He also has a postgraduate diploma and degree in Education, International relations and strategic studies, Journalism, Political science and Reproductive health. Such interdisciplinary background has provided him with multiple perspectives in teaching and the conduct of research. Dr. Ukwuoma startedteaching in higher education in July of 2000. Currently, heis teaching courses in academic literacy, research and work-place communication. His research focuses on the use of familiar languages to facilitate students' engagement during classroom instruction. As an expert in research methodology, hehas facilitated workshops and presented research findings at local and international conferences. Hehas also published in the areas of academic literacy, mixed research, Afro-indigenous learning systems and the integration offamiliar but unofficial languages into instruction.