

Assessing the effectiveness of Government Policy of compulsory learning of familiar Local Languages at Early Primary School Level on learners' linguistic skills achievement: A Case of Grade 4 learners in four Primary Schools in Lusaka District of Lusaka Province

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Abstract: The study aimed at assessing the effectiveness of Government policy of compulsory learning of local languages at early primary school level among the selected teachers in four Primary schools of Lusaka district in Zambia. The policy is based on teaching learners in their familiar local language. The study employed a mixed paradigm and descriptive survey design that sampled two primary schools, Head teachers, teachers, PTA executive members and Grade 4 learners. Data was obtained from respondents by means of interviews, questionnaires and classroom observation schedules. Frequency, percentages, tables, graphs and pie-charts were used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data obtained. Data was then analyzed by the use of software MS Access and MS Excel. The findings revealed that learning in the mother tongue at early grade level helps in language development of the child as well in comprehending concepts easily enhancing early literacy attainment helps children to grasp literacy and learn how to read and write faster and that it even becomes easier for learners in later grades to learn other languages and subjects in the curriculum as they would have the foundations.

Key words: Initial literacy, familiar language, local language, national language, policy

I. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are inextricably linked as no one would understand a culture without learning a language and culture is mainly transmitted by the use of local indigenous languages through story telling which may constitute proverbs, riddles, myths, taboos and narratives of social conduct, morals and great heroes of a given people's tradition. However, teaching in local languages promotes an educational principle of moving from known to unknown so that a child can link the old with the new knowledge. Banda (1998) postulated that, in Zambia, while pupils are examined in a foreign language (English), it is well known that in the rural parts of the country most pupils are not exposed to a foreign language in their homes. Studies have shown that

using unfamiliar language such as English for literacy education is not conducive to learners in the early grades.

In 1997 the government of Zambia introduced a policy of compulsory learning of local language at primary level. Zambia is widely claimed to have over 72 languages, although many of these might be better regarded as sublanguages. All of Zambia's vernacular languages are members of the Bantu family and are closely related to one another, together with English, which is the national language and the major language of business and education. Seven vernacular languages have official status. Together these represent the major languages of each province: Bemba (Northern Province, Luapula, Muchinga, part of Central and the Copperbelt), Nyanja (Eastern Province and Lusaka), Lozi (Western Province), Tonga (Southern Province and part of Central), and Kaonde, Luvale and Lunda (Northwestern Province). A retrospective look at the use of African languages as languages of instruction in schools will show that much progress has been made over the years (Akinnaso, 1993).

According to Williams (1995), western education was first introduced to King Lewanika's territory of the Lozi people by the white missionaries in 1883. These architects of the education system encouraged the use of a local language to teach pupils from Sub A to Standard four (4) by teaching vernacular as a subject and using it as medium of instruction. The colonial period (1924-1963), The British government setup the Phelps-Stocks Commission to examine the educational systems in its colonies. The Phelps-Storks Commission recommended that primary education in the colony should be relevant to the practical needs of rural Africans and in particular Northern Rhodesia. In the same vein, it irrevocably recommended the use of vernacular languages in the lower primary years of school.

The advisory board (UNESCO) proposed that four vernacular languages, Tonga, Bemba, Lozi and Nyanja were to be taught in schools for Africans" (UNESCO, 1953). In 1930, it noticed that there was no single vernacular in Northern Rhodesia which could be used as a lingua franca for Africans. Most white missionaries continued running their schools while maintaining their curriculum and language policy towards the natives. By 1953, the language policy stated that a local language most familiar to learners (mother tongue) was used as medium of instruction from Sub A to Standard two while the most dominant local language was to be used to instruct learners from Standard three to four. English was later introduced at Standard five through to upper levels. At that time, vernacular was used as medium of instruction and was accorded more periods per week on average and taught at lower primary school more than any other subject (Kelly, 1999).

The outcome of this language policy shift was quite predictable because there was minimum improvement in pupil performance in numeracy and literacy. The majority of citizens from various sections of the Zambian society have expressed their concern about the declining levels of reading and writing. It was clear that though pupils were physically in school, they had no access to learning due to their inadequate reading ability (Ministry of Education, 1999). The Ministry of Education in 1995, initiated a major research study under the auspices of Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring of Educational Quality (SACMEQ). The report for SACMEQ was published in 1997 and its main findings indicated that, 'only 25% of grade 6 pupils could read at minimum levels and only 3% could read at desirable levels.' It was clear that pupils could not read materials of their grade levels.

Banda (2002), pointed out that, studies in four randomly selected schools in Lusaka Province confirmed low reading levels among grade three pupils. Only 23% out of 106 pupils were able to read at a level expected for their level. Matafwali (2010), also found that while reading is at the center of educational experience, however, a good number of Zambian children reading was below the expected grade level. Children's poor oral language abilities were been identified as the underlying factors explaining the challenges in the development of literacy skills observed among Zambian children, were powerful effects of intelligence, alphabetic knowledge and background factors were taken into account.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design was descriptive survey with both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection in order to attain the comprehensive results (Armstrong, 1968). Qualitative methods was appropriate to this investigation as it produced detailed data from a small group of participants, while exploring feelings, impressions and judgments. On the other hand, quantitative method made the use of questionnaires, surveys and experiment to gather data that is

revised and tabulated in numbers, which allows the data to be characterized by use of statistical analysis Martyn, (2008).

The four primary schools (Chibelo, Woodlands, Kalingalinga and Bauleni) were selected on the basis implementing the government policy of teaching local familiar language in early grades (Grades 1 to 4) and secondly, the school administrators in these schools understand language diversity and its effects on language learning among learners of different linguistic and social contexts. The population for the study was purposefully drawn from the four primary schools- two rural and two urban. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select Head teachers (4) while the simple random sampling procedure was used to select the teachers (16), PTA Executive members (20) and pupils (60), (Bickel, 2007). The sample size comprised of 100 respondents. Also, the primary data was complimented by the secondary data which was derived from government policy documents, ministerial reports and relevant literature on distance to school, learner absenteeism and poverty.

In this research, data was analysed qualitatively as in-depth interviews, questionnaires and observation schedules were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorization of themes from the structured interviews, questionnaires and observation schedules Kombo and Tromp (2006). Charts and graphs were used to analyse data. The data gathered was analysed according to the themes of the study and per the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the interview guide was analysed manually and also, a combination of software MS Access, SPSS and MS Excel was used to analyse data. Analysis was mainly descriptive, that is, mean, median, mode, range, and standard deviation. Related statistics were applied where possible. Statistical testing took the form of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation and regression both simple and multiple, (Buetow, 2010:123-125).

Objectives

1. To investigate the effectiveness of local language learning on learners' linguistic skills achievement in class in the four selected primary schools in Lusaka district
2. To determine the effects of local languages on learners' linguistic skills achievement in the four selected primary school in Lusaka district.
3. To establish measures that can be put in place to enhance learners' local language linguistic skills achievement in class in the four selected primary schools in Lusaka district.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section looked at language policy in general, language policy in Zambia and discusses teachers' practices, parents' perceptions on the use of local familiar language while the focus was on the effectiveness of using a familiar local language in enhancing learners' linguistic skills achievement

in class in the four selected primary schools in Lusaka which is a multilingual city.

A. Language policy

Language policy is what a government does either officially through legislation, court decisions or policy to determine how languages are used and language policy cultivates language skills needed to meet national priorities or to establish the rights of individuals or groups to use and maintain languages (Mbithi 2014). Language policy contributes to the growth of the field by publishing high-quality studies that help build a sound theoretical understanding of the subject area. A language policy is important in education because awareness of education policy and language policy helps teachers in accommodating broader context in their classroom context (Spolsky 2009). Further, a language policy includes the introduction of new words or lexical modernization, the development and change of the writing system or orthography of a language called graphization and the attempted purging of lexical items and grammatical forms deemed inaccurate, inappropriate or otherwise unwanted and this is referred to as purification (Tollefson 1991). Lastly but not the least, there are four major types of language planning which are status planning and this is about the social standing of a language, second is corpus planning which is about the structure of a language, third is language-in-education planning which looks at learning and the fourth is prestige or image planning and language planning may occur at the macro-level, that is at the state level or the micro-level which is at community level (Cooper 1989).

B. Language policy in Zambia

Zambia is a multilingual nation with seventy-two ethnic groups and has had challenges on choosing familiar local languages as medium of instruction. Nevertheless, the seven official familiar local languages chosen as medium of instruction have negative effects on some ethnic groups whose languages are not closer to familiar languages of instruction in their areas. Zambia being a multilingual nation has about seventy-three languages and dialects, Ohannessian and Kashoki (1978). One of the most important factors in education is language of instruction and a medium of instruction, according to MOE (2000:22) “is a pedagogical tool for explaining, communicating, asking and responding, understanding and activating the learning process.” It is not easy to come up with a language that is acceptable to everyone, especially in a multilingual nation like Zambia. However, the Zambian Ministry of Education has been trying to make appropriate changes in terms of language policy since independence in 1964 A significant change in language policy in education took place in the year 2013. This is when, “the policy on education recognized the use of familiar Zambian languages as the official languages of instruction in the pre-schools and early grades (grades 1-4)” (MESVEE 2013:19). This policy implied that all teaching and learning in all subjects were to be conducted in a zonal Zambian language.

The policy was actually implemented in the year 2014. The speakers of these languages feel disadvantaged and some have tried to take a step further. The Lamba chiefs of the Copperbelt Province which is a Lamba land for example, rejected the use of Icibemba as a medium of instruction from Grade one to four as stated in the Daily Nation of 11th February, 2014 “All the fifteen (15) Lamba chiefs on the Copperbelt Province had resolved to outrightly reject the newly introduced government policy to teach Icibemba in copperbelt rural schools”. Though the policy is advocating for use of familiar languages, what are being used currently in Zambia are regional official languages which may not be familiar to other learners. In Zambia, the language policy states that the language commonly spoken in the school’s catchment area which may be the child’s first language or mother tongue should be used as the language of instruction in lower primary from Grade one up to the end of Grade four. The approved familiar languages for use in school as languages of instruction are Icibemba, Kikaonde, Chitonga, Silozi, Cinyanja, Luvale and Lunda (MESVEE 2013). However, in certain areas, these approved familiar local languages may not actually be familiar to certain learners as they use a different language at home or the language used in the locality may be quite different from the one used for instruction at school.

Before independence, the first missionaries who came to present day Zambia, found a variety of local languages and the first thing they did was to learn some of these languages so that they could communicate well with the people. They even started teaching people in vernacular. The missionaries encouraged the use of local languages. The general practice in the school system of Northern Rhodesia during the colonial period was that in the early years of an African child’s schooling, instruction should be in the vernacular (Carmody 2004).

The colonial government recognized four vernaculars namely Icibemba, Cinyanja, Chitonga and Silozi. The missionaries participated in preparing vernacular text books. It was only when a child had reached fifth grade, that he or she was introduced to English as a medium of instruction. The 1966 Education Reforms recommended that English was going to be the medium of instruction from Grade one to tertiary level of education. The reforms also allowed the use of the seven official languages where it was necessary in order to make instruction easier. This was allowed because it was a known fact that not everyone would comfortably learn English more especially with those children living in rural and peri-urban areas where English is hardly used.

In 1992, Focus on Learning, an education policy, acknowledged the negative impact of using English as the medium of instruction especially for initial literacy acquisition but took no action to resolve the problem. In 1996 Educating Our Future, another education policy had similar concerns as those observed in the 1992 education policy. The policy observed that English had contributed to the backwardness in

reading. It also promotes rote learning because the language being used is not very familiar to the learners (MOE 1996) and at this level, teachers were allowed to use local languages when teaching initial basic skills while maintaining English as the official medium of instruction.

The Basic school Curriculum Framework document of 2000 made some changes to the language policy. When the Primary Reading Program (PRP) was introduced, a local familiar language was to be used during the literacy hour only as a language of instruction while English continued to be the medium of instruction in all other areas. Nevertheless, at all levels and in all subjects, teachers are encouraged whenever necessary and relevant, to use the familiar language for explanations, clarifications, questions and answers (MOE 2000).

C. Multilingual language policy

Multilingual is most commonly used to describe a person who can speak or understand multiple languages more especially a person who can speak several languages with some level of fluency. In Zambia, most of the citizens are multilingual in that they are to speak multiple Zambian languages. At the centre of the education system is the language policy in education which dictates the language used in disseminating knowledge at various levels (Okal, 2014). This is because local languages are inimitable benefactors to social, political and economic development of any country. However, multilingual language policies aim at measures that eliminate or at least reduce the factors that lead to language loss. Multilingual language policy encourages the use of many languages in the private domain and also ensures that the use of languages in the public domain is non-discriminatory.

D. Limitations of Multilingual language policies

In most multilingual societies, language policies have had limited success, partly due to a lack of appreciation of the context in which such policies are implemented. For example, many African parents assume that mother tongue policies have been imposed for political rather than sociolinguistic or demographic reasons (Baker, 2001). In addition, parents want their children to master the official language, or the language of wider communication (LWC), early in the education process. There is a common though mistaken belief that African languages are not equipped to deal with scientific and technical concepts. Like many African countries, Uganda, which gained independence from Britain in 1962, has been struggling to develop and implement effective multilingual policies in its schools. English is the official language of the country, but there is, yet no national language because none of the Ugandan languages has been considered demographically strong enough to take on this role.

According to UNESCO's "Global Education Monitoring Report 2016," teaching in the mother tongue is vital, especially at a primary school level. It recommends that children should be taught in their mother tongue for at least

six years, to avoid knowledge gaps and increase the speed at which children learn and understand the taught material. Children are more active, think more critically and create an entirely different classroom atmosphere when taught in their mother tongue (Bickel, 2007).

Perception on the use of Icinyanja in Primary Schools in Lusaka

Parents have a negative view on the use of Icinyanja as a medium of instruction in Lusaka district. Both rural and urban parents see Icinyanja as a draw back in the education of their children. Parents in urban centres look at Icinyanja, the familiar language of instruction as not beneficial to their children and also due to prestige, they look down upon Icinyanja and prefer their children to learn a foreign language (English) instead. With parents in rural parts of Lusaka, the problem is that Icinyanja is not the familiar language in the rural parts of Lusaka district and that is why it has received negative views from parents who are mostly speakers of other languages other than Icinyanja. It should also be noted that each tribal group would like to maintain its culture and this is usually done through language (UNESCO 2008). In addition, the socio-cultural theory requires the involvement of parents and other more knowledgeable people to be involved in the learning process for positive results. Moreover, parents and other caregivers are tools which help children internalize what they learn.

Most of the teachers teaching early grades in the schools in Lusaka district may not be speakers of the familiar local language of instruction and therefore find some words difficult to know their meanings in local language as they are not familiar with the local language. Also, they find problems as explanation of some terms in local language are difficult because some terminologies may be difficult to explain to pupils such as those in Mathematics and Science. Some concepts cannot easily be translated into Icinyanja and even explanation of some terms in local language seem to be difficult to the teachers in the early grades. In addition, some concepts cannot be easily translated in the familiar local language and some words are usually wrongly spelt and pronounced due to language barrier. Teachers who come on transfer from other regions who are not speakers of the familiar local language of instruction face language barrier challenges, planning is also a challenge on the part of teachers as the books they use are written in a foreign language. On the whole, some parents both in rural and urban parts of the district think that a foreign language is better than familiar local languages being taught to their children at early grade level.

The effectiveness of local language in enhancing learners' linguistic skills achievement in class

On the effectiveness of local languages in enhancing learners' linguistic skills achievement in class at the early grades, the study found that the Head teachers 85% complemented this as something that is effective. Second were teachers at 75% who

insisted that issuing instructions in local language was effective on teaching and learning. Parents were at 65% who supported the effectiveness of the policy while learners were at 55% as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Respondents' views on effectiveness of local language of instruction

Views on effectiveness of local language instruction	Effective (%)	Not effective (%)
Head teachers	85	15
Teachers	75	25
Parents	65	35
Pupils	55	35

The study found that local languages were effective in enhancing learners' linguistic skills achievement in class had as suggested by the respondents as pupils learn better and faster in their mother tongue than in a foreign language. They as well believed that pupils participate fully in class and contribute to the learning activity effectively. Even the pupils themselves believed that the local language can help them improve their academic performance as the fully understand the materials taught to them by the teachers. Some of the advantages included; good communication between teachers and pupils due to the language, learners will be learning from known to unknown, pupils are able to understand a given instruction faster, Pupils have a sense of belonging since it is their language that is being used (Mundende 1977), Reading becomes easier because they read in a foreign language easily in their language and they also believed that pupils can easily remember what they learn in class. On the hand most of the respondents had a view that the teaching materials were not readily available in local language which was very difficult to teach in local language

Effects of local language on learners' linguistic skills achievement in class

According to study results, teaching of local languages at early grades has beneficial effects learners' linguistic skills achievement and these were: letter-sound knowledge (90%), non-word decoding (90.91%) and oral passage reading (93.64%) while local language vocabulary (Nyanja) was at (87.28%). Study results also indicated that 83.64% of the respondents said that it helps to orient learners to print at an early stage.

Data also showed that there was an association between linguistic knowledge and an individual learner's performance in class. According to data obtained, 90.91% of the learners were good in reading comprehension and listening comprehension (91.82%), learners were aware of their culture were at (86.37%) while being able to bolster learners' academic performance was at 85.46% as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Effects of local language on learners' linguistic skills achievement

Effects of local language	Actual	Percentage	
		Yes	No
Letter sound knowledge	11	90	10
Non-word decoding	10	90.91	9.09
Oral passage reading	7	93.64	6.36
Nyanja vocabulary	14	87.28	12.72
Orientation to print	18	83.64	16.36
Reading comprehension	10	90.91	9.09
Listening comprehension	9	91.82	8.18
Cultural awareness	15	86.37	13.63
Bolsters academic performance	16	85.46	14.54

Overall, teaching learners in a familiar language at early grade level has positive effects on learners' linguistic skills achievement in class on all the nine sub-tasks among Grade 4 learners in the four selected schools. Most of the Grade four learners in the sample could read with enough fluency to allow for real comprehension. Most learners were unable to sound letters or read syllables or words or read words in a passage or passages correctly. .

Literature, showed that learners should be able to read early or by the end of the end of their first grade in Primary school if they were to succeed in their future education development (Townsend and Konold 2010). It should be noted that in most cases, learners' inability to read is therefore, a reflection on teachers' poor pedagogical practices. The mother tongue is important because it is part of the learner and it is the language that builds an individual. It shapes one's personality and mannerism. It is deeply rooted and it represents the child and also, the learner's thinking is based on the mother tongue since language and thinking cannot be separated, (Medwell et al 2012). The mother tongue helps the learner to understand and interpret the world and above all, the child organizes the world through a language and one's beliefs, convictions, attitudes, and so on are influenced by the mother tongue. Learners feel more confident and therefore, respond better to learning, if that learning is taking place in a language with which they are familiar (Aitchison, 2012).

Results obtained suggest that using a foreign language as a mode of instruction of a disadvantage to the pupils in the selected primary schools as the majority of the pupils came from families that did not use the foreign language (English) frequently and therefore, using a foreign language cripples and destroys the learner's productive and mental processes in education. These findings agree with what Benzies (1940) found. In that study, Benzie found using an unknown or foreign language for early education as medium of instruction destroys the productive powers and holds the mental abilities problem of lack of understanding the policy is even worse for pupils who most of them do not seem to have a clue of its existence. Therefore, teaching learners in a familiar local

language enhances early literacy attainment as learning in local language helps children to grasp literacy and learn how to read and write faster and that it even becomes easier for learners in later grades to learn other things as they would have the foundations (Mwansa 2007).

Measures to enhance learners' linguistic skills achievement in local languages

From the study, the responses on measures to enhance learners' linguistic skills achievement in class were teachers' linguistic knowledge in local languages at 88.9%, finance procurement of learning resources at 85%, use of variety of teaching methods and techniques at 80.1%, monitoring and evaluation at 79.6% and the least was use of local resources at 66.4% as illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Distribution of measures to enhance learners' linguistic skills achievement in local languages in class

Strategies to enhance CSE among school girls	Percentage	
	Yes	No
Teachers' linguistic knowledge in local languages	88.9%	11.1%
Finance procurement of learning resources	85%	15%
Use of variety of teaching methods and techniques	80.1%	19.9%
Monitoring and evaluation	79.6%	20.4%
Use of local resources	66.4%	33.6%

The study revealed that there are several measures that can be employed in schools to enhance learners' linguistic skills achievement in local languages in class such as administrators ensuring that subjects for learners are not taught to pass examinations and that teachers handling early grade literacy have linguistic skills knowledge in local familiar languages (MOE 1996).

The other strategy to enhance learners' local language linguistic skills achievement in class revealed by the study was the use of a variety of teaching methods and techniques in order to cater for a range of learning needs taking into account the availability of local resources (Kelly 1999). Teachers should as much as possible use methods that promote active learners' participation and interaction and in addition, they should use methods that encourage learners to reflect, think and do rather than reproduce from rote learning and should therefore be advised to use the learner-centred approach in the teaching and learning process.

The Ministry of Education should adequately finance the effective running of learning institutions and institutions should spend financial resources largely on the acquisition of learning materials as quality education requires the availability and use of educational materials (Carmody 2004). It should be noted that educational facilities and resources are not available for effective teaching and learning in of literacy in early grades in schools and therefore most of the teaching is done theoretically.

Monitoring and evaluation is another strategy which can help to enhance the teaching of literacy in local languages among primary school learners as monitoring and evaluation improve teaching practices. Learning institutions should monitor, evaluate and analyse the effectiveness of their programmes and the teaching and learning strategies and then, there should be follow-ups and continuous monitoring and evaluation (MOE 2000).

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The language of instruction policy needs extensive sensitization among teachers and the general public, if it is to be carried out and supported by all stake holders. The introduction of local languages at primary school from Grade one to four in the Zambian education system has brought more advantages to the pupils because most of them are not used to the foreign language (English) and more disadvantages on the teachers because some of them are not so familiar with teaching in local languages. It is imperative to adopt the teaching of language in the familiar local language in a given locality as it is the initial language and it is more effective on language development of a child before he or she is finally introduced to the second language in this case English and this could be achieved by the introduction of language specialization, the provision of materials in local language to pupils, enhancing early literacy attainment helps children to grasp literacy and learn how to read and write faster and that it even becomes easier for learners in later grades to learn other languages and subjects in the curriculum as they would have the foundations. On the other hand, English as a mode of instruction somehow disadvantages the pupils as the majority of these pupils came from families that did not use a foreign language frequently.

V. CONCLUSION

The teaching of a familiar local language is effective in the four selected schools in Lusaka city and the respondents emphasized that learning in local language helps children to grasp literacy and learn how to read and write faster and that it even becomes easier for learners in later grades to learn the second language and other subjects in the curriculum as they would have had the foundations.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study:

1. There is need for more elaborate study into language learning by children in Zambia to fully understand whether the policy is actually achieving its intended purpose, or how to better implement the policy to positively impact on the target groups.
2. Further national wide research needs to be carried out on a larger population and sample size to increase the generalizability of the findings despite a large number of studies on use of local language to issue instructions in class.

3. The language of instruction policy needs extensive sensitization among teachers and the general public, if it is to be carried out and supported by all stake holders.
4. The government through the Ministry of Education should reconsider the teaching of familiar local language and revert to teaching in mother tongue as some learners in certain localities are forced to learn a familiar language which is not their mother tongue.
5. Teachers handling early Grades should be deployed in localities where the familiar local language of instruction is their mother tongue.

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