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Competing Purposes: Mother Tongue Education Benefits Versus Economic Interests in Rural Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of educators on the barriers to the implementation of the Zimbabwean language-in-education policy, which recommends use of Indigenous languages up to the end of the primary school level. Postcolonial theory informed this case study. Individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 15 rural primary school teachers, 3 school heads, and 2 school's inspectors who were purposefully selected from Masvingo district. Data were analysed using the constant comparative method for thematic coding. The findings revealed that participants strongly believed that the English language offers socio-economic opportunities, a factor which may negatively influence teachers in the implementation of the mother tongue-based policy. Recommendations that inform policy-makers are made.

Keywords

language-in-education policy, mother tongue education, economic factors, Zimbabwe, rural primary schools

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There is overwhelming evidence in favour of the pedagogical benefits of learning in one's mother language, particularly in Africa where the ex-colonial language is hardly spoken outside school premises (Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh, & Wolff, 2006; Bamgbose, 1991, 2009; Brock-Utne & Mercer, 2014; Brock-Utne & Skattum, 2009; Desai, 2012; Ferguson, 2013; Le Mottee, 2008; Ngefacy, 2010; Philips, 2011; Prah, 2000, 2009). Zimbabwe is one of the countries striving to achieve additive bilingualism by using Indigenous languages during the primary years of schooling (Chimhundu, 2010; Magwa, 2008; Makoni, 2012). Under the Education Act (1987a), a policy was put in place whereby learners were allowed to access the curriculum in their home language during the first three years of primary school. The policy was amended in 2006 to enable the mother tongue to be the language of education up to the end of primary school (Education Act, 1987b).

Section 55 of Part XI (revised 1990 and 1994) of The Education Act (1987a) stipulated that children in Grade 1 up to Grade 3 should be taught in the mother tongue in all subjects and that English becomes one of the subjects as indicated below:

Languages to be taught in schools: PART XI GENERAL 55.

1. Subject to the provisions of this section, the three main languages of Zimbabwe, namely, Shona, Ndebele and English, shall be taught in all primary schools from the first grade as follows:
 - a. Shona and English in all areas where the mother tongue of the majority of the residents is Shona; or
 - b. Ndebele and English in all areas where the mother tongue of the majority of the residents is Ndebele.
2. Prior to the fourth grade, either of the languages referred to in paragraph (a) or (b) of subsection (1) may be used as the medium of instruction, depending on which language is more commonly spoken and better understood by the pupils.
3. From the fourth grade, English shall be the medium of instruction: Provided that Shona or Ndebele shall be taught as subjects on an equal-time-allocation basis as the English language.
4. In areas where minority languages exist, the Minister may authorise the teaching of such languages in primary schools in addition to those specified in subsections (1), (2) and (3).

The policy was amended again in 2006, whereby teaching in the mother tongue was extended up to Grade 7 as illustrated by the amended policy quoted below:

The Education Act (1987b, Chapter 25: 04) as amended, 2006 Part XII Section 62

Languages to be taught in schools

1. Subject to this section, all the three languages of Zimbabwe, namely Shona, Ndebele, and English, shall be taught on an equal-time basis in all schools up to Form 2 level¹ (former Group A Schools² included).
2. In areas where Indigenous languages other than those mentioned in sub-section (1) are spoken, the Minister may authorise the teaching of such languages in schools in addition to those specified in sub-section (1).
3. The Minister may authorize the teaching of foreign languages in schools.
4. Prior to form one, any one of the languages referred to in subsection (1) and (2) may be used as the medium of instruction, depending upon which language is more commonly spoken and better understood by the pupils.
5. Sign language shall be the priority medium of instruction for the deaf and hard of hearing.

The position taken by the Zimbabwe Government can be applauded in that the language-in-education policy (hereafter to be referred to as the LiEP) allows students to learn in their mother tongue up to Grade 7 and, at the same time, it recognizes the crucial role played by English as the language of international communication. However, this position may not be appreciated by stakeholders in education, who want their children to focus on the school language from the beginning, as education is equated with thorough knowledge and proficient use of English (Peresuh & Masuku, 2002). This study was motivated by the desire to understand why the LiEP, which is meant for the benefit of particularly rural primary school pupils through learning in their mother tongue, continues to be disregarded. The findings of this study are part of a larger research on barriers to the implementation of the LiEP for Zimbabwe (Ndamba, 2013).

Literature Review

The Advantages of Learning Through Indigenous Languages

Baker (2006) noted that, as early as 1953, a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report, entitled *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*, stated that pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue because they understand it best (p. 293). UNESCO still maintains its position on the significance of the mother tongue and has further developed its stance to consider mother tongue instruction as a means of improving the quality of education by tapping into the existing knowledge base of both teachers and learners (Brock-Utne & Mercer, 2014; Le Mottee, 2008). Citing the United Nations (UN, 2013) report on the post-2015 development agenda, Brock-Utne and Mercer (2014) further noted that the need to bring about “access

¹ In the Zimbabwean education system, Form 2 is a post-primary level, which is attained after 2 years of secondary

² These are schools that during the colonial period catered to White students, as distinct from Group B Schools, which catered to African students. These schools were better resourced than the latter. After independence, they opened up to African students to reflect the spirit of the new political dispensation of equality and non-discrimination.

for everyone to quality education” might not be achieved in Africa where learners continue to learn through foreign languages, which they do not understand (p. 789).

The intrinsic value of local languages and cultures is now being appreciated globally for the purposes of education in particular and national development in general (Ball & Mcivor, 2013; Brock-Utne, 2010; Brock-Utne & Skattum, 2009; Ferguson, 2013). The mother tongue plays a crucial role in creating the capacity for children to access and create knowledge. Prah precisely summed up the benefits of learning in the mother language by saying that “the value of mother tongue instruction is literally incontestable” (cited in Makoni, Makoni, & Rosenberg, 2010, p. 2). Whereas research has demonstrated that learning in the first language allows learners to access the curriculum with ease, those who use a foreign language are presented with multiple tasks, which disadvantage them in making school progress. Such tasks include trying to understand higher-level vocabulary, the abstract concepts being taught, and the unfamiliar language through which they are presented (Ademowo, 2010; Alidou et al., 2006; Bamgbose, 2009; Benson & Kosonen, 2013; Matsinhe, 2013; Mutasa, 2006; Ssentanda, 2013; UNESCO, 2008).

Webb (cited in Orman, 2008) aptly summarised the significance of language in cognitive development by arguing:

Cognitive skills, such as the ability to understand the central purpose of the text or to summarise its main line of argument, the ability to select information and to organise it into a new coherent whole, the ability to discover and formulate generalisations, the ability to understand abstract concepts and to manipulate them in arguments, the ability to recognise relations between events (e.g. cause and effect) and so on can only develop in and through a language in which learners are highly proficient. Generally, such a language is the learner’s first (or primary) language. (p. 96)

The majority of people who live in rural areas in Zimbabwe have a scant understanding of English because social relations and regular communication are largely carried out through the use of the mother tongue. The implementation of a mother tongue LiEP would be of great benefit to learners in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe since they may lack the requisite proficiency in the second language to enable them to tackle analytical skills required in the learning discourse.

Despite the advantages of mother tongue education, some stakeholders in education, particularly most African parents, believe in uninformed language myths that assert that the best way to learn a foreign language is to have it as a language of instruction (Dalvit, Murray & Terzoli, 2009). For example, Brock-Utne (cited in Yohannes, 2009) asserted that it is a misconception to assume that learning in English is helpful in learning to speak, read, and write English better. The same view was further pursued by Benson (2005), who also affirmed that there is no evidence that the second language must be used as the medium of instruction in order for it to be learnt well: In countries like Sweden, learners achieve high levels of competence in the second language when it is taught as a subject and the first language is preserved as the language of instruction. In light of the above stated evidence, Black parents in ex-colonial countries in Africa, therefore, wrongly argue that their children being taught in their second language is the only way through which they can master English effectively (Baker, 2006; Brock-Utne, 2010; Orman, 2008). Thus, simply exposing learners to a second language by using it in instruction does not necessarily assist learners to acquire the second language.

The International Status of English

Barriers to implementation of a mother tongue policy in Africa were viewed by Kamwangamalu (2004) in terms of socio-economic power and the international status of English. This notion was supported by Coetzee-van Rooy (2009) who observed that English was gaining an even more significant role as an international language. As a result, Kamwangamalu (2004) noted that Black parents and pupils were aware of the social, economic, and political power of English and perceived that their own languages had no economic benefits either locally or internationally. The great attachment to English experienced by Africans from countries with a colonial history appears to come from a purely instrumental motivation (Blommaert, 2006; Hornberger, 2002; Orman, 2008; Lo Bianco cited in Ridge, 2004). Consequently, Prinsloo (2011) proclaimed that “English is indeed the elephant in the room” (p. 5), implying that English is the most preferred language because it plays a major role in and offers hope for upward social mobility. Citing opinions viewed as representing those of the majority of ordinary Black Africans in South Africa, Moodley (2000) gave this telling example: “The reason people like me choose English is very simple. There is an entire world of knowledge, skills, jobs, power and influence which is totally closed to us if we can only speak an Indigenous language” (p. 111). The sentiments expressed in this quotation have direct relevance to this study—rural primary school teachers in Zimbabwe may experience such sentiments in their day-to-day interaction with stakeholders in education. For Blommaert (2006), language preferences that favour English should be viewed as being motivated by “international *mobility*, the desire to ‘get out of here’ and into a better, more prosperous environment” (p. 10). Nkomo (2008) supported this observation by arguing that, in the case of Zimbabwe, Indigenous languages are considered to have less capacity in dealing with issues of economic development, international trade, science, and technology. With this background on language choices in mind, in the context of this study, it can be argued that rural primary school teachers may be aware of and may believe in the instrumental value of English—a factor which may hinder them from effectively implementing a mother tongue policy.

In the same context, Prinsloo (2011) demonstrated that speakers of African languages face a dilemma in the sense that an ex-colonial language is viewed as a “supra language” of status (p. 2), hence to insist on equality between and among African and ex-colonial languages does not change the fact that there are linguistic hierarchies that operate in African countries. The question of language policy cannot be determined purely on pedagogical grounds because it is influenced by factors such as historical, political, economic, and cultural issues (Mwamwenda, 2004; Prinsloo, 2011). Such effects of colonialism are evident in the way the images of indigenous African languages are threatened by the high status and dominance of English, a situation that needs to be addressed in order for local languages to be effectively used in education (Mustapha, 2011; Makoni cited in Pennycook, 2002; Ssentanda, 2013). According to Kamwangamalu (2009), due to the instrumental value and status of ex-colonial languages, they are widely held in high esteem in Africa.

The Marketing Problem

Another source of language attitudes is what Kamwangamalu (2004, 2009) referred to as the marketing problem, whereby it is felt that for African languages to be accepted as languages of teaching and learning they need to be given “buying power.” This implies that indigenous African languages need to become languages that empower individuals to access resources and employment, political participation,

and upward social mobility (Webb cited in Kamwangamalu, 2004; Matsinhe, 2013). Since indigenous African languages lack that power, Orman (2008) asserted that in South Africa the position of African languages within the education sector remains very weak, while English is becoming more and more dominant. This point was demonstrated by findings from a study conducted by Chick and McKay (cited in Hornberger, 2002) where principals and teachers in six newly integrated schools in Durban in KwaZulu-Natal Province rejected the use of Zulu in classes, citing the fact that students needed to improve their English and that English is required for economic advancement.

In another study conducted by Mashiya (2011) in KwaZulu-Natal, mentor teachers and school principals did not want student teachers to practise bilingual education skills by teaching in isiZulu at the Foundation Phase (Grade R-2³) as a way of practising skills learnt at university. The main reason given was that the schools would produce incompetent learners who would fail to secure good jobs. According to Orman (2008), although the constitution is committed to mother tongue usage in learning, this position does not reflect the language attitudes of many South Africans who insist on English as the medium for education, even in the earliest stages of primary education. For Orman, the reason why African communities prefer English to Indigenous languages is that, like consumers, they are interested in comparing the material benefits of an education in an indigenous African language with the ex-colonial language. Kamwangamalu (2009) declared, “A language policy that does not have economic benefits is doomed to fail” (p. 139). Applied to this study, the attitudes that educators have about English may also be commensurate with the functions that the language is perceived to be performing in Zimbabwe.

The marketing value of English, as opposed to African languages, which are associated with non-achievement, led Grin (cited in Kamwangamalu, 2004) to ask the following questions:

For instance, would an education through the medium of an indigenous African language ensure the language consumer socio-economic self-advancement? Would that education enhance the language consumer’s standard of living? Would it give the language consumer a competitive edge in the employment market? Or, put differently, what benefits would individuals actually reap, particularly on the labour market, because of their skills in the mother tongue? (p. 40)

It can be argued that the above questions are likely to be asked by language consumers in the Zimbabwean context, where the LiEP encourages the use of the mother tongue up to the end of the primary school. As such, questions like these demonstrate the perceived decreased value of African languages on the linguistic scale (Blommaert, 2006). Kamwangamalu (2004) asserted that the most central question is not so much whether or not the mother tongue should be used as the medium of instruction, but rather on the pay-off of mother tongue education.

The reason for favouring English is because African languages do not offer access to socio-economic benefits such as jobs, power, wealth, and technological and scientific development (Alidou et al., 2006; Banda, 2000; Kamwangamalu, 2009; Simango, 2009). Mustapha (2011) demonstrated the above assertion by noting that in the context of Nigeria any attempt by school administrators to use Indigenous

³ In the South African context, Grade R to Grade 2 belongs to the Foundation Phase, with Grade R being a preparation year for Grade 1. During this phase, the focus is primarily on mother tongue instruction.

languages in education incurs the wrath of parents and guardians who may, in reaction, withdraw their children from such schools and send them where English is used as the medium of instruction. Alexander (2004) further affirmed that for people to have positive attitudes, it is essential to assign an economic value to the mother tongue in the linguistic market place, in the short to medium term.

In Zimbabwe, English language skills are regarded as one of the crucial factors contributing to global mobility. According to Hungwe (2007), the demand for English appears to be “an essentially rational choice outcome” (p. 146). In order to enrol in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe, learners have to obtain a pass in English language at “O” Level⁴ (Makoni, Dube & Mashiri, 2006). Dominguez (1998) entertained the notion of the economic value of language by declaring that, at a personal level, access to or promotion in certain jobs requires a language qualification, which means language has very tangible economic benefits.

The findings of this study were based on primary data from teachers, school heads, and school’s inspectors who happen to be the custodians of the policy on the language of education. A number of African countries have policies that allow learners to learn in their mother tongue in primary education (Alidou et al., 2006; Chimhundu, 2010; Mtenje, 2008; Mutasa, 2006). However, a review of literature on the implementation of the LiEP indicates that most researchers focus on challenges that learners face when learning through a foreign language (Brock-Utne, 2007; Brock-Utne & Skattum, 2009; Desai, 2012). Few studies, if any, have been conducted in Zimbabwe specifically to examine why rural primary school teachers do not implement the policy on the language of education. This study was thus guided by the following research question: “What perceptions are held by rural primary teachers, school heads and school’s inspectors towards the mother tongue-based LiEP?”

Methodology

The major purpose of this case study was to identify barriers to the implementation of the mother tongue-based LiEP in rural primary schools in Masvingo district. The qualitative research methodology was used since it derives meaning from the perspectives of research participants (Creswell, 2007; De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2011). In order to explain why the mother tongue policy was being violated in Zimbabwe, a former colony, our study was guided by the paradigm of postcolonial theory (Chilisa, 2012; Phillips, 2011; Ratele, 2006; Rivas, 2005; Rizvi, Lingard & Lavia, 2006; Viruru, 2005).

The postcolonial theory paradigm is a relatively new perspective, particularly in the education context in Zimbabwe. Shohat (cited in Mfum-Mensah, 2005) regarded “postcoloniality” as a new designation for critical practice of enquiry that analyses issues emerging from “colonial relationships and their aftermath, covering a long historical span (including the present)” (p. 74). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1998) stated that the term “postcolonialism” is now used to mean the political, linguistic, and cultural experiences of those societies that were formally colonized (p. 186). In this study, we focus specifically on the postcolonial linguistic experience. Hence, with reference to Ghana and other African countries, Mfum-Mensah (2005) argued that the issue of the language policy continues to attract attention in postcolonial education reforms in many formerly colonised nations and yet little attention has been paid

⁴ A post-primary qualification reached after 4 years of secondary education in Zimbabwe. It was inherited from the colonial system run by Cambridge University but is now administered by a local examinations body.

to the discussion about how colonial education contributed to the shaping of the ideology of the colonised. In light of the above observation, the postcolonial theory paradigm was considered appropriate for this study, which assumes that rural primary school learners are disadvantaged by the failure of teachers to teach in the mother tongue in line with the requirements of the language-in-education policy of 2006. This policy is premised on additive bilingual education in a postcolonial context. It was vital to ascertain what teachers, school heads, and school's inspectors perceive as factors militating against the effective implementation of the LiEP.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had the right information for the study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Fifteen rural primary school teachers, three school heads, and two school's inspectors were selected. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used as means of gathering data on the experiences of participants as follows: individual interviews for school heads and school's inspectors while focus group discussions were conducted with primary school teachers. A digital voice recorder was used to record proceedings of each individual interview and focus group discussions. Recorded tapes were transcribed verbatim upon completion of the fieldwork. Analysis of data was done using the constant comparative method for thematic coding.

According to Gray (2009), for most qualitative approaches, reliability is improved and even guaranteed by triangulation, where information is gathered, for example, from multiple sources or by using multiple tools for gathering the data. Accordingly, in order to provide multiple perspectives on various aspects of the same situation in relation to this study, data were collected from rural primary school teachers, school heads, and school's inspectors as a way of achieving triangulation of data sources. By collecting the perspectives and experiences as articulated by people from these different personnel categories, who occupy different positions in the field of education, we are able to focus on the same issue, implementation challenges related to the LiEP in rural primary schools, from various angles.

In addition to triangulation of data sources, methodological triangulation was also employed to enhance the credibility of the study by including individual interviews with school heads (principals) and school's inspectors, as well as three focus group discussions with teachers. Similar questions were raised in both sets of interviews in order to find out how the participants would respond to these questions. The research was a case study on policy implementation challenges; hence, it was an example of a complex phenomenon that deserved the use of triangulation (Cohen et al., 2011). By using triangulation of data sources, as well as methodological triangulation, the researchers had more confidence in the research results.

Participation was voluntary and the selected participants were assured of their anonymity. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form after the researcher explained the specifics of the study. In this research, written permission to conduct the study was granted by the Ministry of Education, through the Provincial Education Director for Masvingo.

Findings

Mother Tongue Education Benefits

In acknowledging the benefits of learning through the mother tongue as opposed to using English second language as the medium of instruction, the following statements from teachers at each of the three schools are representative of the views of the majority of teachers:

The recipients find it very difficult to comprehend English as the medium of instruction. Perhaps it's because of the rural environment where they come from. Very little English is spoken at home. (Teacher 2, School 1)

They will not understand what you want to say to them. They will just stare and look at you until you appear to be stupid then you have to come back again in order for you to be in line with them, that is when you need to speak in Shona. (Teacher 4, School 2)

Most of the time you tend to be just talking to yourself and pupils do not enjoy when they do not understand. They feel bored and some may even play truant because they are afraid of this language, the L2⁵, yes. (Teacher 2, School 3)

Thus, it is clear from the above excerpts that learners struggle to understand concepts taught in a foreign language whereas they may improve their performance and maximize their learning when the curriculum is accessed through the mother tongue.

English was highly favoured by participants in this study due to economic interests, a factor that may contribute to neglect in the implementation of LiEP. Five categories were identified to support their preference and these are:

- a. English is an international language of communication;
- b. It is the language of examinations;
- c. It creates employment opportunities;
- d. Parents expect teachers to use English from the beginning; and
- e. Learners prefer to learn in the English language.

English as an International Language of Communication

Almost all of the 15 teacher participants indicated that, if they were given a choice, they would opt for English as the only language of education for various reasons, chief among them being that English was viewed as the language of communication both locally and internationally. This finding is illustrated in the following responses from each of the three schools, which are typical of most responses from teacher participants:

⁵ It is a second, foreign language a person knows or is learning in addition to their native language (L1).

The pupils will be able to read any information exposed to them. The pupils will also be able to communicate with people from anywhere in the world. In fact the pupils will fit well in the global community. (Teacher 3, School 1)

English is a language on demand. It enables young and old to be on the net developing skills and knowledge. The era we were brought up encourages us to know much about the world due to English. (Teacher 1, School 2)

English is the best to use. Limiting the pupils to Shona will hinder them from keeping in touch with information on health and other important information internationally. (Teacher 4, School 3)

Similarly, one of the three school heads had this to say:

Our school would prefer to use English as a medium of instruction. The reason is that u-m-m we will make our pupils fit in the society well because this language is an international language so children will end up in America and Britain, where ever. (Head, School 3)

One of the teacher participants who preferred mother tongue use had this to say:

I would prefer vernacular language particularly if all the people in that country share one vernacular language. Pupils understand instructions in vernacular language more easily than they do with a second language. (Teacher 4, School 1)

The Role of English as the Language of Examinations

Participants in this study viewed English as a superior language because they believe that it enables learners to answer examination questions. All the participants raised the issue of examinations as one of the major reasons why educators preferred English as the language of education. English hegemony in Zimbabwe was evident in that examinations for all primary school subjects except for Indigenous languages were written in English. As a result, the teachers who were study informants strongly felt that they were justified to favour English because:

Most of the teaching business in schools is exam oriented, so teachers' concerns have to do with preparing a child who passes at the end of the course. Anything that exists out of the limits of the exams is not worth committing oneself. (Teacher 3, School 1)

If assessment is going to be done in English then it holds no value [laughter] because the pupils will even find it more difficult in converting what I will have said in Shona and change it to English in an exam, it will be difficult. (Teacher 2, School 2)

The problem is that in future, you see, the exam is set in English and English is the current official language so it does not make sense later when the exam is in English. (Teacher 5, School 3)

The above sentiments were corroborated by one of the school's inspectors who declared that:

As for the use of the mother tongue as the sole language of education up to Grade 7, I totally disagree with that because right now when it is not being fully implemented we are seeing the effects. Children don't master concepts, they cannot express themselves and it will be worse when it comes to exams. They will not be able to attack questions; they will not be able to express or to answer questions meaningfully because their level of understanding will be very low. (School's Inspector 2)

Therefore, participants were of the opinion that as long as tests and examinations were set and written in English, it was illogical to teach in the mother language and then examine candidates in English as learners would not have grasped the requisite vocabulary to enable them to tackle examination questions at the end of Grade 7.

Employment Opportunities

Most of the participants claimed that the major reason for them choosing English as the language of education was that it had an advantage over the mother language—it was currently a requirement for one to be formally employed and to enter institutions of higher learning. This kind of thinking was expressed in the statements below:

The advantage is that the popular language is currently the official one. It enables you entry into white-collar jobs you see, without that you don't get there as of now. (Teacher 1, School 1)

The major advantage is that u-m-m when pupils leave school they want to be employed formally; they want to go to universities and colleges. They can't go to those important places of their lives without having passed the English language, so they need to exercise speaking it and they need to pass it and need to know it fully in depth because they will need it in future for their careers. (Head, School 2)

Teachers want to be promoted, they want to advance. One cannot enter the university, now there are so many universities which have mushroomed in this country. (School's Inspector 2)

The other school's inspector was of the opinion that the government contradicted itself by changing goal posts, thereby causing confusion with regard to teachers' confidence in the mother tongue as the language of education. This view was expressed by one of the school's inspectors as follows:

The same teachers who were allowed to enter tertiary (teachers' colleges) without English, they were asked now to obtain English language on their certificates and very old women and men found themselves now attending lessons in the afternoon at the nearby central schools in the rural areas so that they can write and so that they can have the English language as a subject, as a requirement, because for now you cannot be promoted. (School's Inspector 1)

All the three categories of participants in this study, namely, teachers, school heads, and school's inspectors claimed that English had to be maintained as the language of education in primary schools because of its superior role as the language of communication internationally, for examination purposes, for subsequent access to tertiary institutions, as well as for the acquisition of good jobs later on in life.

Parents' Perceived Beliefs on the Role of English

Teachers, school heads, and school's inspectors expressed how parental opinions might negatively influence the implementation of the LiEP in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe. All the participants in this study were of the view that parents had a high regard for English, as they believed that it would assist their offspring in getting good jobs. The following statements represent this kind of thinking from many of the participants' responses:

The parents are aware of the importance of English. I think it will be a problem for them to hear that teachers are now teaching every subject in Shona [laughter]. They will come and have a battle with us here and say, what are you doing here? (Teacher 5, School 1)

Most jobs require someone to have English, so they know that if the child is developed at primary level, he or she will be able to obtain English at "O" Level and it will be easy for the child to be enrolled in white collar jobs. (Teacher 2, School 2)

Right, I don't think they are going to appreciate it (policy) because they feel that language may be inferior you see, that inferiority complex that we have as Shona people [---]. I feel they need that English language to be used for teaching so that pupils can fit in the society well. (Head, School 3)

But the war with parents, I doubt if we will win the war with parents [---]. The problem is that when now the parents will compare their children they will say ah! No, in the rural areas there is no education because pupils are doing everything in Shona, while these ones in town do it in English. Teachers in rural areas are getting government money for nothing because our children cannot talk in English. (School's Inspector 1)

The above responses from the teachers, school heads, and school's inspectors demonstrated their assertion that parents held conservative views whereby the mother language was looked down upon and English was perceived as profitable.

Learners' Perceived Reactions

The expected reactions from learners, who are the direct beneficiaries of the intended LiEP, were sought from teachers and school heads. Some of the responses were as follows:

They may have a negative attitude towards the teacher, thinking that he or she cannot use English. They won't be eager to learn. (Teacher 5, School 2)

We mean that children mainly like English so if Shona is used continuously you would see that children, the learners, will get bored [laughter]. (Teacher 3, School 3)

I don't think they would appreciate it, I don't think they would take it up as a good policy as such [...]. They have a negative attitude towards their own language, yes, they don't feel it is a good language because once you learn in English you can communicate with someone in America in which everyone wants to go there and talk with those White people, you see. (Head, School 3)

One of the school heads expressed a directly opposite view pertaining to what he perceived to be the reaction of learners if the mother tongue policy was implemented. His response was:

As far as the learners, from my experience as a head, when I supervise, you find the learners feel more at home when the teacher teaches them in Shona. In English there is a bit of a problem there, so they will actually accept it hundred percent. (Head, School 1)

One teacher participant who felt that learners would welcome such a policy had this to say:

I think they will enjoy it since it enhances better comprehension of concepts. English is a barrier to their understanding since it is a second language. (Teacher 1, School 2)

Results indicated that the majority of participants in this study preferred English as the language of education, contrary to the recommendation of the current LiEP of 2006.

Discussion of Findings

In this study, teachers admitted that there was little comprehension of lessons taught in the second language because learners did not understand concepts that were presented in English. As a result, the learners' second language could not be counted as a tool for learning (Desai, 2012). Since the results show that learners' understanding was limited when the second language was used, it can be argued that, as a result, learners lacked the necessary confidence to engage in discussion, debate, or to be involved in problem-solving activities using English (Orman, 2008). In a study conducted in South Africa, Holmarsdottir (2003) found that when a foreign language was used learners learnt through memorization and could hardly answer questions that required explanation until the teachers reverted to the mother language. Valdes (cited in Baker, 2006) also established that learners who were not conversant in English as a second language found it impossible to question, apply critical thinking, and collaborate, although they had the ability to complete these tasks when using their first language.

The superiority of English as an international language was a prominent theme in responses: It is the language of examinations, further education, future employment, and promotion to posts of responsibility. As a result of beliefs and positive attitudes associated with the English language, it was difficult for teachers, school heads, and school's inspectors to embrace a LiEP that recommends mother tongue use in education. Therefore, when teachers strongly believe in English hegemony and do not see a compelling reason for policy change, they may ignore or resist the mother tongue policy in education (Collarbone, 2009; Rogan & Grayson, 2003).

Owing to its perceived superiority, the central issue raised by participants in this study was that English played a significant role as an international language, as learners expected that they would get good jobs in the international community upon completion of their studies. Learners in this study were alleged to have fallen in love with English from an early stage. It can be argued, since teachers in this study were aware of the learners' language choices, that factor could contribute towards implementation failure pertaining to the current LiEP. The same findings were established in South Africa, where Black African

and Coloured⁶ students indicated that they preferred to learn in English for the purpose of international “mobility” (Moodley, 2000; Prinsloo, 2011). However, despite their assumed high hopes for becoming a part of the international community, relatively few would enter the mainly white-collar jobs for which English is useful (Matsinhe, 2013). Learners in the current study were likely to get sub-standard varieties of English (Blommaert, 2006) since, as Makoni et al. (2006) reported, some Zimbabwean primary school teachers in their study were found not to be competent enough to teach in English.

In describing the positive attitudes towards European languages, Adebija (1994) asserted that such attitudes were created when those with the knowledge of English were promoted to higher positions, which were instrumental to their gaining material rewards. Likewise, findings of this study indicated that qualified teachers who did not have English language at “O” Level could neither be promoted to headship positions nor enter tertiary institutions for professional development. The result is that participants have come to strongly believe that the English language is superior because it is the only language that is used in higher education and other positions of power.

Speakers of African languages are said to be facing a dilemma in the sense that an ex-colonial language is viewed as a language of status (Mwamwenda, 2004; Owino, 2002; Prinsloo, 2011). In Uganda, Ssentanda (2013) reported that mother tongue education is influenced by colonial legacies, which in turn affect stakeholders such as teachers and parents. According to Ferguson (2013), English is seen as “a potential path out of poverty” (p. 18). Similarly, teachers in this study appeared to face the same dilemma because they considered English to be a prestigious language that learners cannot do without because it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to be successful in life without a working knowledge of English. Thus, colonial effects were evident in the study findings as teachers, school heads, and school’s inspectors all wanted to be associated with English because of its history as the language of education and employment, whereas Indigenous languages have been too long underrated as result of colonialism (Ball & Mcivor, 2013; Kamwangamalu, 2004, 2009; Magwa, 2008; Mustapha, 2011; Orman, 2008; Ssentanda, 2013).

The marketing problem facing the mother language, therefore, may be considered as a factor that contributed towards implementation failure of the current LiEP. Study findings indicated that all the three categories of informants had positive attitudes towards English, whose perceived functions were seen as superior for socio-economic benefits. This finding was similar to the major concern raised by African communities pertaining to the extent to which learning in the mother tongue would benefit individuals in terms of accessing resources and employment as well as global mobility (Kamwangamalu, 2004). Adebija (1994) further illustrated the perceived role of ex-colonial languages by arguing that European languages are positively evaluated because of “what they can give, what they stand for, where they can take you to, and what they can make you become in life” (p. 46). With reference to Canada, Ball and Mcivor (2013) stated that among the factors that threaten the use of Indigenous languages in education is that in some cases there is lack of support from the Indigenous people themselves because of the global expansion of English.

⁶ In Southern Africa, “Coloureds” is the name given to an ethnic group composed primarily of persons of mixed race.

In South Africa, Mashiya (2011) found that, during the foundation phase, teachers did not want to teach in the mother language because that would “prevent children from getting good jobs and from travelling and working abroad” (p. 25). Consequently, by teaching in English, teachers were convinced that they were creating better opportunities for children since English was viewed as the language of power. Likewise, teachers in this study saw no relevance in the LiEP of 2006, which they viewed as being of no market value since it calls on mother tongue use in education (Nkomo, 2008).

For this study, it was vital to gain insight from participants about the attitudes of parents and learners in order to establish the extent to which these beliefs may actually impact teachers’ practices. Parents in this study, who are the major stakeholders in education, were alleged to have high hopes for their offspring. The research informants assumed that parents and guardians would not accept the mother tongue policy, a finding that was corroborated in Nigeria (Mustapha, 2011). A possible explanation is that the negative attitudes towards the mother tongue may emanate from uninformed language myths, which research has found to be more false than true (Dalvit et al., 2009). Nkomo (2008) reported that, in Zimbabwe, Indigenous languages were viewed as less capable of adequately dealing with economic development, international trade, and science and technology issues. In a related study, Ndamba (2014) conducted research whose findings indicated that Zimbabwean parents believed in language myths that favoured an English-only policy from Grade 1, while Indigenous languages were denigrated. African parents, therefore, may wrongly assume that the language of education ought to be the second language in order for their children to learn it well (Brock-Utne, 2010; Brock-Utne & Mercer, 2014).

Foley (2008) declared, “If learners and their parents do not desire mother tongue instruction, then all the effort in the world will not make the policy viable” (pp. 9-10). It can be argued that when teachers are aware of parents and pupils’ expectations on the instrumental role of English, they may find it difficult to implement a policy that recommends the use of Indigenous languages in primary schools (Benson, 2005; Brock-Utne & Skattum, 2009; Makoni et al., 2006; Ndamba, 2008, 2014; Orman, 2008; Peresuh & Masuku, 2002; Setati, 2005; UNESCO Bangkok, 2008). In order for parents and their children to appreciate the use of Indigenous African languages in education, it may be necessary to enlighten African communities on the role of mother tongue education in learning, which leads to clear benefits by empowering people economically, socially, and academically (Ferguson, 2013; Foley, 2008; Qorro, 2009; Ssentanda, 2013). If parents and learners in rural areas in Zimbabwe believe that quality education comes from learning in English, Zimbabwean primary school teachers may resist the mother tongue policy in a bid to please these stakeholders.

With regards to the superior status of English, it is assumed in the literature that Africans from countries with a colonial history look up to the ex-colonial language for social, economic, and political power and prestige. African languages are thus viewed as being of no “market” value (Kamwangamalu, 2004, 2009; Matsinhe, 2013) for the reason that they do not empower individuals to access high paying jobs, power, wealth, and further academic opportunities. Hence, the positive attitudes towards English, which appear to be driven by the instrumental value of this language, tend to contribute as a barrier towards implementation of a mother tongue policy in education (Coetzee-van Rooy, 2009; Foley, 2008; Hungwe, 2007; Makoni et al., 2006; Prinsloo, 2011; Ridge, 2004).

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the benefits of a language can be measured in economic terms. Participants in this study believed in the superior role of English in terms of socio-economic interests at the expense of mother tongue education benefits. Participants in this study saw English as mainly being capable of creating opportunities for further education and a profitable future, whereby those who learn in English could join the ranks of global elites. Such a finding clearly demonstrated that the challenges that appear to be hurdles with regard to mother tongue education in Zimbabwe may be a response to the colonial language legacy; thereby, making it almost impossible for teachers, school heads, and school's inspectors to accept and implement the current mother tongue LiEP.

Recommendations

It is only when they become aware of the didactic benefits associated with education in the mother language that education authorities would then be able to support and monitor the mother tongue policy more seriously (Ball & Mcivor, 2013). Therefore, in order for the current LiEP for Zimbabwe to be successfully implemented, school's inspectors, school heads, and primary school teachers may need to be educated accordingly through in-service programmes which can be offered by the Ministry of Education and Teacher Education institutions. Use of the mother language in education was also shunned because it was not considered of value since Grade 7 examinations were written in English, and English was also demanded as a requirement for entry into tertiary institutions, and into the future world of employment. For the status of the mother language to be raised, firstly, Grade 7 examinations should be set and written in the mother language. Secondly, an African language should be supported by an economic advantage such as making it a requirement for entry into tertiary institutions along with English and other subjects so that stakeholders may view it as an instrument for upward social mobility.

It would be paramount to inform parents about the current international research findings on the pedagogical benefits of learning in the mother language (Qorro, 2009; Ssentanda, 2013). This sensitization exercise should be deliberately conducted as an advocacy measure meant to popularize the LiEP. The dissemination of knowledge on the significant role of the mother language could be done by school's inspectors and school heads who are currently working with parents through the School Development Committees. When the parents and the entire community are convinced about the value of teaching and learning in the first language at primary school level, they can make informed decisions pertaining to the choice of language for the education of their children. Therefore, before the government enforces the use of the mother language in line with the requirements of the current Zimbabwean LiEP, it is prudent that they hold awareness campaigns for the benefit of parents and learners, in order to avoid conflict between the school and societal expectations. If parents are enlightened on the academic role played by the mother tongue, they may not resist the policy change in cases where universities may want to conduct experiments pertaining to teaching and learning in the first language in rural primary schools.

Limitations of the Study

Our study may be useful as a source of literature on economic factors that contribute towards implementation failure with regards to the mother tongue policy in Zimbabwean rural primary schools. However, there are some limitations that may be considered when future studies are conducted. The

findings of this study were based on views given by rural primary school teachers, school heads, and school's inspectors pertaining to the attitudes of parents and learners. As parents and pupils are crucial stakeholders in the language of education, getting data directly from them would have been an ideal situation in obtaining more in-depth information.

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