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THE USE OF SHONA AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN THE FIRST THREE GRADES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL IN A TONGA SPEAKING COMMUNITY: PARENTS AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates teachers' and parents' perceptions of the use of Shona as a medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school in a Tonga-speaking community. Research was carried out at four schools and their surrounding communities in Nyaminyami District of Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. Data were collected mainly using interviews and some of the data were collected using observation and document analysis. The major findings were that while a few parents and teachers felt that Shona should not be used as a medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school in a community where the majority of the pupils' mother tongue is Tonga, a large number of them felt that Shona should continue to be used as a medium of instruction at this level, mainly for the purpose of integrating Tonga children in the wider Zimbabwean society.

Introduction

Shona and Ndebele are the two most widely spoken indigenous languages in Zimbabwe. There are, however, other minority languages such as Kalanga, Tonga, Venda, Nambya and Shangaani which are spoken in the country. According to Hachipola (1998) there are sixteen indigenous languages in Zimbabwe. Most of the minority languages are spoken in communities living close to the country's borders namely, Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia. Tonga, the minority language spoken in the community which is the focus of this study, is spoken in districts such as Binga in Matebeleland North, Nyaminyami in Mashonaland West and Mudzi in Mashonaland East.

The Zimbabwean Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture's 2006 policy with respect to the language of instruction to be used in the first three grades of primary school as enshrined in the Education Act (25:04) is that such a language should be the mother tongue of the majority of the pupils in a particular community.

According to subsection 4 of the Act, "In areas where minority languages exist, the Minister may authorize the teaching of such languages in primary schools...." From the fourth grade upwards, English can then be used as a medium of instruction. However, the reality on the ground is that in most such communities the medium of instruction is either Ndebele or Shona depending on which of the two is predominantly spoken in the communities in geographical proximity to the community where the minority language is spoken. For example, Nyaminyami District is located in Mashonaland West province where Shona is the predominant indigenous language, so it is the medium of instruction largely used in the first three grades of primary school. Mukorera (2000:38) asserts that,

Language Policy formulation and implementation is a vexing and emotive issue. The question arises in contexts where two or more languages exist within a community and there is need to assign functional status to the languages.

The decision on which language to use for what purpose in such a scenario naturally becomes a difficult one. This research was, therefore, motivated by the desire to find out how parents and teachers in selected schools in Nyaminyami District view the use of Shona as a medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary in a community where the majority of the pupils' mother tongue is Tonga.

Four schools were selected for the study. These were Siakobvu, Negande, Mola and Murembera Primary Schools, all of which are in Nyaminyami District of Mashonaland West Province. The selection of the schools was guided by the fact that Tonga is the first language of most of the children in the communities in which these schools are found.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Theoretically there are arguments both for and against the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction for children in the early grades of primary school. Use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school in the selected schools would, therefore, entail use of Tonga only as the medium of instruction. As pointed out earlier, the practice at the schools is that Shona is mainly used as the medium of instruction.

Arguments for the use of Shona (a second language) as the medium of instruction from Grade 1 to Grade 3 at the selected schools

Some linguists argue for the use of a second language as the medium of instruction even in the early years of a child's education. For example, Cummins and Swain (1986) cite studies that established positive correlation between

bilingualism and cognitive development of learners. These include studies by Barik and Swain (1978), Tremaine (1975) and Elkstrand (1978). According to Cummins and Swain (1986:11) some of these studies reported a positive association "...between both bilingualism and both general and intellectual skills and divergent thinking." Cummins and Swain (*Ibid*) also say "... several studies have reported evidence that bilingualism promotes an analytical orientation to linguistic and perceptual structures and increases sensitivity to feedback cues." On the basis of such findings it could, therefore, be argued that Tonga children would benefit cognitively from the use of a second language as a medium of instruction in the early years of their formal education.

According to Fasold (1987: 292), the other question raised in favour of a bilingual approach to the choice of a language of instruction in children's early years is whether the use of a monolingual approach would be "... consistent with overall nationalist aims." On the basis of this argument, in Zimbabwe, where since independence in 1980 the government has always advocated national political unity, use of common languages is one way through which this unity could be achieved since language, in addition to playing a communicative role, also helps to identify members of any society as one in several ways if they speak a common language. This argument is succinctly put by Haugen in Pride (1979: 74) when he says, "... necessity is the mother of bilingualism." According to this argument national unity could be instruction, in education, of children from minority language speaking communities such as the Tonga. However, Peresuh and Masuku (2002: 29) dismiss the integrative argument as one by reason of which, "Political considerations are given primacy over pedagogical issues."

Fasold (1987) also says that the other critical question in favour of a bilingual approach is the one pertaining to whether the materials written in the minority language and the number of people competent to teach it are adequate for effective adoption of the language as a medium of instruction. This is an especially relevant question with respect to the early years of a child's education. Thus, they would be need to establish whether, in the communities in which the schools are found, there are no children for whom Tonga would also in fact be a second language, necessitating the use of their own first languages as the media of instruction. The issues surrounding these questions are often mired in a lot of controversy, and emotion makes it difficult to justify the adoption of a monolingual approach.

Fasold (1987:294) also says that the UNESCO Committee of Experts expected objections to the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction on the grounds that "...to teach in the mother tongue will make it more difficult for a youngster to learn a second language later." The thinking behind such an objection would be that for a child to learn a second language well, the language must be

used as a medium of instruction in the early years of learners' education. Currently in Zimbabwe the only indigenous languages examined at Grade Seven, O' and A' levels are Shona and Ndebele. On the basis of this argument, therefore, the use of Tonga as the only media of instruction from Grade One to Three would seriously disadvantage pupils in Grade Seven and subsequent Shona examinations as they would have started learning the languages late. Le Page (1964: 22) further argues that, "Until adolescence, children find it very easy to acquire new languages provided that nothing happens to arouse their hostility." On the basis of this argument, Tonga-speaking children would not be disadvantaged by being taught in Shona.

The paucity of teachers trained to teach in the minority languages, especially in Third World countries facing serious resource constraints is another argument raised by linguists against the use of the minority language as a the medium of instruction especially in the delicate years of early education. As Fasold (1987:297) argues, it is practically impossible "... to provide every child in the world with initial education in his or her mother tongue as it would entail developing materials and training teachers in scores or hundreds of languages." To drive the point home he gives the example of India which has two hundred languages. For Zimbabwe with sixteen indigenous languages it can also still be a mammoth task in light of the fact that educationists complain about the inadequacy of teaching materials in just Shona and Ndebele languages.

There are therefore, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and economic arguments for the use of Shona as a medium of instruction from Grade One to Grade Three in a Tonga-speaking community.

Arguments Against the use of Shona (a second language) as the medium of instruction from Grade 1 to Grade 3 at the selected schools

The view of most linguists is that children's learning is made much easier if the medium of instruction is their first language. According to Fasold (1987: 293) the UNESCO Committee of experts concluded at their 1951 conference that, "It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue." According to Le Page (1964:19) most educationists are agreed that, "... a child's primary education at least, must be in its native language." One of the reasons proffered for this argument is a psycholinguistic one according to which children taught in their mother tongue do not struggle with conceptualising whatever they are being taught as it will have been expressed in a language which they are already familiar with.

Research in some parts of the world has also established that a bilingual education can have a negative effect on children's cognitive development. For example,

Cummins and Swain (1986: 3) cite research by scholars such as Darcy (1953), Peal and Lambert (1962) and Macnamara (1966) which established that "... bilingual education will necessarily have a negative effect on cognitive development because having, for example, two labels of each concept will be confusing and result in retarded conceptual development." Roy-Campbell and Gwete (1998:137) also say, "Some children can develop limited bilingualism as a result of being forced to learn through a second language before fully mastering their first language." In addition, Hudson (1985:104) also suggests that it is reasonable to "... expect language to be responsible for some differences in people's concepts".

The other argument for the use of children's mother tongue as a language of instruction, especially in the lower grades is that language is a carrier of any people's culture—their values and norms. Use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction at this level, it is argued, engenders an appreciation of their cultural values more than is the case when they are taught about the world around them in another language. As Beardsmore (1986: 63) points out, "Each linguistic community observes reality in terms of categories which are peculiar to the culture borne by the community's language." This is premised on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which, according to Loveday (1982: 35), basically posits that "... different languages embody different models of the world." Use of a second language as a language of instruction might, on the basis of this argument, therefore, limit the terms available to the learner's conception of the world around him or her as the second language might lack the terms to describe some physical and conceptual aspects of his/her world.

The other argument against the use of a second language as a medium of instruction is that it creates negative attitudes towards the first language and its speakers. This argument is based on the behaviourist view of language attitudes which, according to Fasold (1987:146), posits that, "Attitudes toward language are often a reflection of attitudes towards members of various ethnic groups." Lambert in Pride and Holmes (eds) (1984) also raises the question of social and often emotional adjustments needed in bilingual education because of the attendant conflicts of values and allegiances which go beyond mere possession of certain set of linguistic aptitudes needed for successful learning. Using Shona as a medium of instruction in the first three grades for children in a Tonga-speaking community might, according to this argument, for example, make the children develop a low opinion of Tonga, their mother tongue and of the Tonga as a people. Such inferiority complexes would not augur well for the socio-economic development of the Tonga people.

With these two divergent arguments for and against the second language as a medium of instruction in the first three grades of school, the researchers thought

it a good idea to find out how the people in a predominantly Tonga speaking area feel about their infant children being taught in Shona, a second language to them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data were collected mainly using interviews. In addition, document analysis and observation were also used.

Interviews

The interview was mainly used because it is a direct way of getting research participants' views on a particular issue. The interview also gives the researcher an opportunity to probe and observe non-verbal cues and this usually provides the researcher with further insights into the participants' view of the issue being researched on.

The interviews were held with the headmasters and selected teachers at the four schools as well as some parents in the community where the schools are found. The headmasters were selected because as leaders in the education system their views would be largely representative of those of many practitioners in the field. Teachers were selected to participate in the research because they are the ones who, on a daily basis, deal with the problem of bilingualism in education. Representative parents were also selected because they are key stakeholders in the education system. Their views are sometimes taken into consideration in the formulation of educational policies. Where this has not happened before, this might also provide them with an opportunity to be heard by educational policy makers. The Interview Guide in Table 1 below is a summary of how the interviews were conducted.

Table 1: Interview Guide

INTERVIEWEE	DATE	NO. OF PREPARED QUESTIONS	DURATION OF INTERVIEW
Head-Siakobvu	20-07-05	12	45 minutes
Teachers- Siakobvu	20-07-05	12	30 minutes
1		12	30 minutes
2		12	30 minutes
Parents -Siakobvu	21/07/05		25 minutes
1		6	20 minutes
2		6	30 minutes
3		6	

INTERVIEWEE	DATE	NO. OF PREPARED QUESTIONS	DURATION OF INTERVIEW
Head–Negande	23-07-05		45 minutes
Teachers –Negande	22-07-05		30 minutes
1		12	30 minutes
2		12	30 minutes
3		12	
Parents –Negande	23-07-05		15 minutes
1		6	20 minutes
2		6	25 minutes
3		6	
Head–Mola	23-07-05		30 minutes
Teachers–Mola123	24-07-05		35 minutes
		12	30 minutes
		12	40 minutes
		12	
Parents–Mola	25-07-05		20 minutes
1		6	25 minutes
2		6	15 minutes
3		6	
Head–Marembere	26-07-05		30 minutes
Teachers–Marembere	26-07-05		40 minutes
1		12	35 minutes
2		12	30 minutes
3		12	
Parents—Marembere	27-07-05		25 minutes
1		6	20 minutes
2		6	15 minutes
3		6	

Observations

At each of the schools visited, one lesson was observed. The researchers were mainly interested in observing the teaching methods employed by the teachers as well as the materials used in teaching. The reason behind the observation was to get an insight into how teachers view the use of the Shona as a medium

of instruction in a Tonga-speaking community. This is premised on the argument that the methods and materials used by a teacher, are a reflection of the teacher's view of the material he or she is teaching, for example, with respect to the difficulties that learners may experience in learning the material.

Table 2 below shows how the lesson observations were carried out at the selected schools

Table 2: Lesson Observation at the Schools

SCHOOL	GRADE OBSERVED	SUBJECT BEING TAUGHT	DATE
SIAKOBVU	3	Environmental Science	20-07-05
NEGANDE	2	Religious and Moral Education	22-07-05
MAREMBERA	3	Environmental Science	27-07-05
MOLA	1	Art	23-07-05

Document Analysis

The documents analysed included the Shona text-books in use in the first three grades at the selected schools, the syllabi for the subjects being taught and the audio-visual aids being used by the teachers. These documents were analysed because they are a pointer to a teacher's perception of a learner's ability to cope with the subject being taught. Some teachers' perceptions may, however, not be a conscious product of what they consider to be the learner's ability to cope with a subject. They may simply be borrowing from practice or guided by policy dictates in the field but the fact that they continue to use such material is, to some extent, an indication of their faith in the usefulness of the materials.

FINDINGS

At all the four schools visited the researchers found out that the medium of instruction in the first three grades is Shona. This is contrary to the requirement in the Education Act that the medium of instruction in the first three grades should be the majority of the pupils' first language. However, alongside Shona, English is also taught and at two of the schools, Negande and Mola, Tonga is being taught as a subject. In all cases the teachers teaching Tonga themselves have Tonga as a first language. Sadly though, the majority of them has not received formal teacher training.

Interviews with Headmasters

Of the four headmasters interviewed, one had been a headmaster for six years, two for four years and one for two years. The researchers, thus, concluded that the information from this group of respondents could be relied upon as largely accurate because the average number of headship experience would enable the headmasters to have well-informed judgments of the situation in their schools with respect to the use of Shona as a medium of instruction in their schools. Of the headmaster interviewed, only the head of Negande Primary School had Tonga as a first language. There was, however, a high degree of congruence of perceptions between him and the other three headmasters regarding the use of Shona as a medium of instruction in the first three grades.

The common feeling amongst the heads was that Tonga should be used as the medium of instruction in the first three grades since it is the first language of the majority of the pupils. Negande Primary School head said,

Instead of the current situation where Tonga is taught only as a subject at the few schools that are teaching it in the district, it should be used as the medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school. This is the only way in which Tonga-speaking pupils can appreciate the value of their own mother tongue.

In response to the question as to the viability of this proposal given the professional and economic constraints, he said the problem was only one of lack of political will because the same resources that are being channelled towards Shona could be channelled towards Tonga. He continued,

To address one of the major professional constraints, the lack of teachers trained to teach the language, teachers' colleges could introduce a quota system for first language speakers of Tonga. We have quite a number of school leavers in the district who satisfy all the other admission requirements of the teachers' colleges.

In addition, he said, with time, it would be easy to set Tonga examinations at Grade Seven and even Ordinary Level.

The major challenge in the use of Shona as a medium of instruction, especially in Grade One, according to all the headmasters interviewed, was that a large number of the pupils come to school completely unable to speak Shona. The first days at school can be completely traumatising to some of the children as a result, when they come into contact with the language for the first time. According to the headmaster of Siakobvu Primary School,

Use of Tonga as the medium of instruction would ensure continuation of linguistic experiences that children are already exposed to at home, thus, making their acquisition of knowledge an easier task than is the case when such knowledge is delivered in Shona, a second language.

Under the current system in the Zimbabwean education system, where Shona and Ndebele are the only indigenous languages examined at Grade Seven, all the headmasters interviewed would not support a situation where Shona is not taught at all in the first three grades or primary school. All of them would, however, be happier with a situation where Shona is taught as a subject and Tonga used as the medium of instruction with respect to all the other subjects. While the headmasters of Siakobvu, Negande and Marembera Primary School foresaw a situation where Tonga would be used as the medium of instruction given the benefits that most educators are agreed would be realised from such a move, Mola Primary School headmaster was sceptical about the possibility of this happening any time in the near future. He commented,

“We do not seem to be making much progress in that regard. If anything, we have lost the momentum of the late nineties when donor organisations like Save the Children UK committed a lot of resources to the production of materials in Tonga for use in our primary schools.

The four headmasters were generally agreed that the pupils' attitudes towards the use of Shona as a medium of instruction was difficult to measure. This was attributed to the difficulties associated with measuring attitudes in general and language attitudes in young children in particular. According to one headmaster, teachers' attitudes towards the use of Shona as a medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school differed from individual to individual. He added,

Those teachers who, themselves, are Shona first language speakers are understandably happy with the status quo. There is, however, frustration on the part of those of us with Tonga as a first language.

Interviews with the Teachers

Each of the teachers interviewed had teaching experience of at least one year and a term at their current schools. Useful insights could, therefore, be drawn from their perceptions of the use of Shona as a medium of instruction in the first three grades in a Tonga-speaking community. Only four of the teachers interviewed were first language speakers of Tonga. This group of teachers was actually involved in the Tonga teaching programme under which Tonga is being taught as a subject from Grade One to Grade Three in Nyaminyami district. These teachers were generally disappointed with the use of Shona as a medium

of instruction in the first three grades in a Tonga speaking community. One of the teachers from Mola Primary school said,

Exposing children at so tender an age to three languages, Shona, English and Tonga is to place an unenviable burden on their shoulders as a result of which at least one of the three is likely to be disadvantaged. The children's first language should take precedence over the other two and be used as the medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school.

The teachers concurred with the headmasters that the major challenge in the use of Shona as the medium of instruction especially at Grade One level is that the majority of the pupils will be coming into contact with the language for the first time. It is, therefore, not easy to get them to grasp certain concepts. The teachers were generally agreed that while it would be desirable to use Tonga as the medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school in a community where the majority of the pupils' first language is Tonga, another major challenge is that most of the qualified teachers at the selected schools have either Shona or Ndebele as a first language. One Mola Primary School teacher noted,

Pedagogically, most of the teachers are caught between a rock and a hard place as they can neither speak nor write in Tonga. It would, therefore, be asking for the impossible to expect them to use Tonga as a medium of instruction.

The teachers, while acknowledging the efforts being made to teach Tonga as a subject in the first three grades at the selected primary schools, also agreed that the amount of written material in Tonga is not enough for it to replace Shona as the medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school at the selected schools. In their view, there would have to be concerted effort by government, through the Curriculum Development Unit and other stakeholders, to produce teaching materials in Tonga and to train teachers to teach the language before it can be adopted as a medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school. This meant that for now, it would be better to continue with the use of Shona as the medium of instruction despite the psycho- and socio-linguistic disadvantages pupils are likely to suffer.

Interview with Parents

Eighty-eight percent of the parents who were interviewed had Tonga as a first language. Nine percent had Shona and the other 3% were Ndebele first language speakers. About 60% of the parents who had Tonga as a first language strongly objected to the use of Shona as the medium of instruction for their children in the

first three grades of primary school. One lady teacher parent with children learning at Negande Primary School said,

It's unfortunate that we are not consulted when education policies are formulated. We are also not part of the monitoring system. We, however, feel that it is very unfair for our children to be taught in a language, which, in the majority of cases is not spoken at their homes. This creates the impression that their own first language is inferior to Shona.

The parents who were of the view that Tonga and not Shona should be used as the language of instruction in the first three grades agreed with the teachers' view that there is need for the production of enough teaching materials and training of teachers to teach Tonga if this goal is to be fully realised. However, those parents who had Tonga as a first language who felt that Shona should continue to be used as a the medium of instruction in the first three grades said that while it would be desirable to have Tonga used as the medium of instruction, the situation on the ground did not make this a realistic proposal. They pointed out that the use of Shona as the medium of instruction in the first three grades will prepare the children for the Grade Seven and subsequently, the O'Level examinations. They also said when their children finish school they go to look for jobs in urban areas such as Kariba, Karoi and even Harare where Shona is the predominant indigenous language. Preparation for integration into these communities should, therefore, start as early as possible. They went on to cite the paucity of teaching/learning materials and teachers trained to teach the language.

On the need to have teachers trained to teach in the language, a local councillor said, "It is one thing to be able to speak a language and quite another to be able to effectively teach in it."

The parents who had Shona as a first language did not see any problem in the use of Shona as a first language. According to them, their children were at an advantage as linguistically the school was an extension of the home experiences. One of them, however, expressed sympathy with Tonga first language children whom he said were being disadvantaged by being taught in a language that was not their mother tongue.

Lessons Observed

From the lessons that were observed a disparity was noted between the apparent sympathy that the teachers had for Tonga first language speaking children, and the methods that they employed in using Shona as a medium of instruction. There was not much of a difference between the methods that they employed

and those that the researchers have observed being used by teachers in communities where pupils have Shona as a first language. A teacher at Marembera Primary School explained,

We are fully cognizant of the need to consider that these children's first language is Tonga and not Shona. However, our college training does not seem to have adequately prepared us for the situation that we find ourselves in. Yes, we were taught how to teach a second language but this was mainly in respect of English. Perhaps staff development workshops on teaching Shona as a second language would help. To merely assume that teachers will be able to transfer their skills in teaching English as a second language to teaching Shona as a second language is to clearly miss the point as the two languages are clearly different from each other.

The documents analysed such as Shona textbooks and syllabi in use and the audio-visual aids prepared by the teachers also did not indicate any slant towards accommodating the special needs of Tonga-speaking children as second language speakers of Shona. Most of the teachers interviewed said that while they would have liked to use Shona textbooks more accommodative of the needs of Tonga-speaking children, such textbooks are simply not there. Other teachers, however, felt that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with the teaching/learning materials currently in use as evidenced by the fact that the pupils at the selected schools, over the years, have gone on to produce Grade Seven results which are comparable to any other rural primary schools. In their view, there was no evidence to support the assertion that the Shona teaching/learning materials currently in use in the schools disadvantaged the learners in the first three grades of primary school or beyond.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the interviews carried out with the parents, headmasters and teachers the researchers concluded that, to a large extent, from psycho-and socio-linguistic viewpoints Shona should not be used as a medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school in a Tonga-speaking community. The arguments for the use of Tonga, the children's first language, seemed to outweigh those in favour of the use of Shona. The major argument for the use of Tonga as the medium of instruction in a Tonga-speaking area is supported by Chimhundu et al (1997: 36) who suggest, "Use of indigenous/local languages should be mandatory in schools, firstly as subjects and later as the medium of instruction. All indigenous languages should be taught from pre-school up to Grade 7 and be examinable subjects." The researchers would, therefore, on the basis of the psycho and socio-linguistic arguments proffered, also advocate the use of Tonga

as the medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school in a Tonga-speaking community.

Achievement of this goal will, however, not be an easy task. The major constraint seems to be lack of government commitment despite legislation in favour of the use of children's first languages as the medium of instruction, especially in the first three grades. Kangira (quoted in an article by Tsiko, 2005: 9) laments, "There is simply no political will. People have made submissions regarding the status of minority languages. Legislators simply occupy themselves with other business." There is, therefore, need for practical implementation of the provision in the current Education Act for use of the children's mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the first three grades. Government needs to commit more resources than it currently does to this goal through for, example, allocating funds to the Curriculum Development Unit specifically for the production of teaching/learning materials in minority languages.

In the case of Tonga, Save the Children UK, a Non-Government Organisation, has done a lot to assist in the production of these materials. In conjunction with the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture they produced such textbooks as the Chijaana 1 and 2 series for Grades 1 to 3 and the Enda 1 and 2 series also for Grades 1 to 3. In addition, a syllabus for Grades 5 to 7 was drawn in the late nineties. However, it is sad to note that with all such earlier effort, nothing tangible is taking place in the actual classroom. There is need for more commitment on the part of stakeholders that should result in the language being used as the medium of instruction in the first three grades in schools in the Tonga-speaking parts of the district. This should lead to the language being taught as an examinable subject, initially at Grade 7 level and ultimately at O'Level. Nyaminyami District, like Binga the other district where Tonga is spoken in the country and where great strides have been made to teach the language as a subject in schools, is fortunately very close to Zambia. In Zambia the language is more widely taught than it is in Zimbabwe, so as has happened in the past, materials could be sourced from there and workshops on teaching of the language could be organised for Zimbabwean teachers to benefit from their Zambian counterparts. These short-term measures would help to equip teachers with the skills to teach the language as a subject and possibly use it as a medium of instruction.

In the medium-to-long-term period, it is critical that attention be paid to the training of teachers to teach the language at local teachers' colleges. As Chimhundu et al (1998: 38) suggest, "The quota system used at the United College of Education to enrol Kalanga, Tonga and Venda student teachers in order to provide qualified teachers for these languages should be extended to other colleges where such training is required." However, the researchers found out that despite official

pronouncements of the existence of this quota system, Nyaminyami district had not benefited from it according to the headmaster of Negande Primary School. He said, "We have only heard about it but nothing has been done to this district to find out how many school leavers who meet all the entry requirements of the teachers' colleges we have [sic]." The next pertinent question to consider is whether those school leavers are interested in taking up the teaching of Tonga as a career.

Nevertheless, there definitely seems to be a disparity between the official position and the reality concerning the pronouncements on local languages as media of instruction in the first three grades. *Certainly it needs to be corrected if minority languages are to be developed.* Implementation of the quota system on a regional basis, that is, depending on the geographical proximity of a community to an area where a minority language is spoken to a teachers' college as suggested by Chimhundu et al (1998), should be possible given that there are ten primary teachers' colleges and only sixteen minority languages in Zimbabwe.

The arguments for the continued use of Shona in the first three grades of primary school in a Tonga-speaking community include the paucity of teaching/learning materials in Tonga and that of teachers trained to teach the language. As we have seen, however, these are issues that can be addressed in the short-to-long term as long as there is commitment on the part of all the stakeholders.

Another issue that was raised in favour of the continued use of Shona as a medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school in a Tonga-speaking community is the integrative function of Shona which is spoken by about 75% of the Zimbabwean population. In the view of the researchers, this can still be achieved through teaching Shona as a subject without necessarily using it as a medium of instruction, especially in the critical early years of children's education. Besides, it also needs to be remembered that language is only but one of those factors that bring about political unity. We should, therefore, not sacrifice the effective teaching of children for political expediency, especially on the basis of such a questionable claim as the integrative function of language. The teaching of minority languages such as Tonga and their use as media of instruction instead of the dominant indigenous languages such as Shona and Ndebele, needs to be more vibrant and go beyond the current feeble efforts whose only aim seems to be a prevention of the extinction of those minority languages.

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