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The Missing Link in the Medium of Instruction Controversy: Voices of Pupils and Teachers

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Abstract

This paper revisits the controversial issue of language in education. It is based on a study that was carried out at David Livingstone Primary School in Harare. The study unveils the perceptions of pupils and teachers on the impact of the medium of instruction on academic achievement, which the researchers felt was the missing link in this debate. Whilst teachers and some pupils prefer the use of indigenous languages as communicative tools, they are crippled in a system that emphasizes and promotes English; therefore, their resort to the use of English is not by choice but designed by the policy makers. From the findings, it is the submission of this paper that learners learn better and benefit more from the education system if the medium of instruction is the same language they use at home. In a bid to accommodate students from various linguistic backgrounds and consequently improve results, the study recommends the adoption of a model that fosters multilingual competencies and boosts learning achievement, that is, a strong additive bilingual model.

Introduction

Colonialism left an ineradicable impression on the African socio-political landscape. Half a century after colonial structures have been unshackled, African cultures are still regarded as inferior to the imposed cultures of colonial masters. African states have continued to sacrifice their dignity and identity on the altars of global cultural universalism. This is especially evident in the continued use of foreign languages of former colonial masters in all spheres. In the

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field of education the linguistic controversy centres on which language should be used as a medium of instruction. The debate pits "pragmatic" linguists who call for the continued use of foreign languages and the "patriotic" linguists who root for the indigenous languages. The former attribute the continued use of European languages to purely practical and functional purposes and the latter focusing more on socio- political factors (Bambgose, 1991).

The African language dilemma

Britain, France and Portugal were the main colonisers of Africa and as a result English, French and Portuguese were placed "…at the apex of linguistic hierarchy and vernaculars at the bottom" (Philipson 1972: 41). European languages were imposed on Africans in a bid to dissolve the African identity. Religion and education became instruments of changing the African way of life. Indigenous languages were by and large, gradually relegated to second class status. In Zimbabwe, English became the medium of looking at the world, it became equivalent to knowledge. At schools and tertiary institutions Shona and Ndebele were taught as subjects but were not used as media of instruction in schools, and their status was regarded as inferior to English. English thus, prestigiously grounded itself as the official language, medium of instruction in schools, a compulsory subject and also a requirement in all school certificates. It effectively became a tool of colonising the indigenous African mind so that the 'native' African would embrace and be subservient to his colonial master's culture. This foreign domination and language of power created situations in which attempts were made to suppress the indigenous languages altogether or at least relocate them to the confines of the informal sector (Chimhundu, 1993).

When Zimbabwe attained her independence in 1980, significant and laudable changes were made to the curriculum in an attempt for it to be in tandem with the new political and social order. The content of such subjects as history and geography was overhauled to make it relevant to the Zimbabwean situation. Sadly, the same cannot be said with respect to changes in language policy save for some cosmetic

attempts that were made through the 1987 Education Act. English still lords over the indigenous languages, it continues to be the official language while Shona and Ndebele are relegated to national languages. What particularly raises the ire of some educationists is the fact that English continues to be the language of instruction.

The reason given for the retention of the language of the colonial master is that most African countries are multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual. Zimbabwe, for example, has a total of 23 languages, African and non-African languages (Magwa, 2010). Instead of being celebrated, this multilingualism tends to be regarded as divisive and, therefore, it is shunned. The issue of language planning, thus, becomes a sensitive and highly explosive one, since choosing one language may be regarded as rejecting the others. Consequently, most African countries strive to build national unity through the adoption of one language, usually a foreign one.

Zimbabwe's language policy as given in the 2006 Amendment of the Education Act has English as the official language and the medium of instruction (like most African countries), while, Ndebele, Shona and the minority languages may only be used as media of instruction at primary school level. However, this cannot be effectively enforced since the examinations are in English. Only Ndebele and Shona are examined in those languages. The minority languages have never been examined at any level with the exception of Tonga which was first written at Grade 7 level in 2011. This is because the policy originally allowed these languages to be taught up to Grade 3 only (Phiri, Kaguda and Mabhena, 2013). It follows, therefore, that the interpretation and implementation of such provisions in the education system is half-hearted in respect to both the national and the official minority languages. Therefore, the Act is just rhetoric. Mkanganwi (1992) echoes the same sentiments when he notes that Zimbabwe is only constitutionally a trilingual state but not at implementation level. The question then is, are pupils not being short-changed by such policies?

The language in education question

It is perhaps instructive to briefly examine the issue of language in

education. Which language should be used in education? UNESCO (1953) asserts that the best medium for teaching a child is the mother tongue through which children understand better and express themselves freely. Herbert (1992) echoes the same sentiments when he points out that the mother tongue should be used as a medium of instruction because it has the learner's experiences. It is the most appropriate means for effective teaching because the learners know the language well and can use it to form sentences and express hemselves.

Chandra (as cited in Ndamba, 2008) notes that in a learning situation where a second language is used as a medium of instruction, learners face problems because their task is threefold, first, the pupil has to make sense of the instructional tasks which are presented in the second language, then he has to attain linguistic competence which is required for effective learning to take place. Finally, the pupil is faced with the problem of mastering the content itself. This is aptly captured by a Tanzanian student in a paper by Roy-Campbell (1996: 16):

> …the feeling of incompetence and loss of confidence as a result of a poor or hardly any grasp of English. I know of classmates who stayed dumb in the classroom rather than embarrass themselves in a language they were not even sure they understand.

Pupils learn more quickly in their mother tongue because they easily identify with it than a foreign language. The mother tongue also allows for proper social integration in schools and therefore helps avoid maladjustment in children. In a maze of unfamiliar things, the child would have at least the familiar mother tongue to hold on to. Furthermore, the acquisition of the European medium of instruction is rendered very difficult because of the lack of reinforcement outside the classroom situation, since most pupils revert to their mother tongue once they are out of the classroom.

It has been proved many a times that children learn best only when they are highly proficient in the medium of instruction. Phiri et al. (2013) cite a number of studies that were dedicated to this issue. The

first being the Tanzanian study where it is reported that most students' performance in subjects taught in English is quite appalling but many pass the two subjects taught in Swahili, that is KiSwahili and Siasa (political education) (Ngara, 1987). This is the case with most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In a reading literacy test, done by Warwick (1992) in 32 countries including Zimbabwe, students whose home language was that of a school had an easier transition into reading than those who had to learn a new language while they learn to read. Non-native speaking groups scored lower levels on reading literacy tests which were presented in the official language. In South Africa, Luckett (1995) reports that the Threshold Project of 1990 has shown that many black pupils could not explain in English what they already knew in their first languages; nor could they transfer into their first languages the new knowledge that they had learnt through English. As a result, most of the South African black children are failing to achieve academic excellence.

Finally, the Namibian situation is also of interest. The country, soon after independence, chose English as the new official language (a shift from Afrikaans). The country's first examinations in the new era were written in 1993. The results of the first public examinations to be written in English at the end of Grade 10 were devastating; only 15% of the learners passed (Kotza, 1994). Parents were shocked and could not understand why their children who had never repeated any grade had failed, teachers of course were blamed. But the language specialists realized that the medium of instruction was the main cause of this tragedy (Phiri, et al., 2013). This goes to show that the mother tongue is the best medium to use in instructing students if they are to reach their full potential. What is perplexing, therefore, is that despite these glaring disadvantages of using foreign languages as media of instruction, Zimbabwe and other African countries still stick to these languages. Foreign domination continues to suppress the growth of indigenous languages, thus, the independent Zimbabwe changed its name but assimilated a racial education system, the typical 'Fanonian black skin white mask'.

Arguments for the retention of European languages - The 'pragmatic' linguist versus the 'patriotic' linguist

The language in education debate as aforementioned pits "pragmatic" linguists who call for the continued use of foreign languages for purely practical and functional purposes and the "patriotic" linguists who root for the indigenous languages because of socio-political purposes (Bambgose, 1991). According to Phillipson (1992) the arguments used to promote English can be classified into three sets relating to capacities:

i) English intrinsic arguments or what English is, resources

ii) English extrinsic arguments or what English has, and uses

iii) English functional arguments, or what English does.

Of interest here is that these arguments are very convincing and are articulated in political and academic discourse. They draw nourishment from 'common sense' that typifies hegemonic beliefs and practices such that Africans have internalised them and now believe English is 'the' language.

English intrinsic arguments describe English as rich, varied, noble and well adapted for change and development, while African languages are identified as not being endowed with equivalent qualities. They are not sufficiently developed or modernized to deal with the fast pace of development in the global village and cannot express the intricacies of modern science. However, linguists argue that languages can fulfil any function, hence not intrinsically superior or inferior to any other language. Ouane and Glanz (2010) point out that "...a universal principle of language development is that language develops in use". For that reason, every language can be used for any purpose. African languages can actually be used as languages of education right up to tertiary level. Through adoption, adaption and loaning, the incorporation of modern science would not be as difficult as the English-intrinsic arguments claim. This is quite possible as some professors in the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Zimbabwe have proven when they translated advanced science books from English to Ndebele which is a

Zimbabwean indigenous language (Mnkandla, 2000). Ouane and Glanz (2010) also cite the example of one committed Mali professor who teaches physics and Chemistry in Bamana (a Malian indigenous language).

English at some point was once regarded as a language of barbarians not good enough to express civilized ideas during Greek and Latin times, but today it is 'the' universal language. It, therefore, follows that with enough commitment and will the indigenous languages can be developed. African languages may indeed have a simpler structure, morphological, syntactic or phonetic but arguably this makes them even easier to learn. English is, therefore, in no way a God given decree.

The other argument is that teaching in African languages is not possible because of the lack of teaching materials and trained African cadres. These problems, it is argued, can be obviated by adopting English as a medium of instruction. On the other hand, it is a well known fact that English has both material resources, (teaching materials, literature, dictionaries, publishers and so on), and immaterial resources (knowledge and skills). Makanda (2009) argues that most textbooks, literature and reading materials are mainly available in English and English covers a wider spectrum of terms in science and medical field. It would, therefore, require a lot of resources to have all the relevant materials translated into indigenous languages. Thus, English is seen as a universal and inclusive language. These are English extrinsic arguments which on the surface seem to be quite sound and foolproof. But the implementation of local languages as media of instruction can be done in a restricted or gradual manner while the material for the indigenous languages is being developed and the staff trained.

Globally, multilingualism has been long seen as a threat to nation states' cohesion and economic development Ouane and Glanz (2010). National unity calls for official monolingualism as the use of several mother tongues accentuates inter-ethnic conflict. To stifle such conflict, use must be made of a 'trans-ethnic and non- tribal language'. English-functional arguments, thus, credit English with

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the capacity to unite people within a country and across nations, or with furthering of international understanding. It is seen as the 'trans-ethnic and non- tribal language'. The multiplicity of languages renders the ideals of mother tongue medium impracticable. Many African countries are multilingual in varying degrees ranging from a few languages in Somalia to about 286 in Cameroon, and 400 in Nigeria (Mkandawire, 2005). A choice of one language as a medium of instruction may be seen as the rejection of another, this might destroy the "…delicate national unity" (Kotey and Der-Houssikian, 1977:40). Therefore, to avoid the danger of divisiveness associated with the selection of a national language, the African policy makers have opted for the Europeanisation of the media of instruction.

If these arguments are correct, then one fails to see how they apply to almost linguistically homogeneous nations such as Lesotho and Swaziland where multilingualism is not widespread but where English, instead of SeSotho and SiSwati, remains the medium of instruction. Bambgose (1991) notes that some of the real causes of divisiveness in African countries have nothing to do with language. Otheguy (1982) further argues that the history of war suggests that economic, political and religious differences are prominent as causes. Language is seldom the cause of conflict. Religious crusades and *jihads*, rivalries between different political parties and economic aggression tend to be the instigators of strife. In most cases, exploitation by the elites in order to gain political and economic advantage divides the people. Recognising cultural identities has resolved conflicts instead of creating them. At the heart of multilingualism is belonging. Human beings always have several identities (gender, religion, profession, ethnic group, etc). They share the values of a variety of social groups; hence, the recognition of diversity does not compete with the unity of a state because identification with the state will always be one of many identities of individuals (Ouane & Glanz, 2010). Unfortunately, Africans have internalised and accepted these English functional arguments wholeheartedly.

What's more, the cost of providing education in so many languages is considered prohibitive. An increase in the number of languages

used in education leads to an almost exponential rise in costs, teaching materials, translation, publication and circulation in those languages and teachers who are proficient in the languages. But, a gradual approach would be cost effective in the long run. First of all, mother tongue education may begin with a few selected languages based on demographic considerations or on consideration of standardization, (i.e., languages already committed to writing) for example Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe, subsequently the policy can be gradually extended to other languages as resources permit. This is quite possible given that, a full Tonga primary course was developed gradually and after a few years of concerted effort, in 2011, the first ever Tonga Grade 7 exam was written. Furthermore, UNESCO (2007) points out that studies in the field of language economics analysing the cost of language related public policies, have found that mother language education programmes have a very reasonable cost especially given the long term benefits. According to Grin (2005) evaluations that have been made on the added expenditure entailed by moving to multilingual education, point in the direction of 3-4 percent range. Surely, is this not a reasonable cost and a small price to pay for an education system that has a very low failure rate and subsequently the development of a country?

In this regard, it recognised that outside funders are hesitant to finance the development and teaching of indigenous languages as compared to their own. The teaching of newly arrived foreign languages like Mandarin Chinese, for example, is making headway given the financial backing they receive. It is our submission in line with that of Brock-Utne (2002) that there is need to develop and use African and local languages since forms of knowledge that could empower the underprivileged and advance social justice would have to be built on African culture and delivered in African languages. Brock-Utne (2002) also contends that "...donor pressure, as well as the impact of the capital-led market economy, often called globalisation, work towards the retention of European languages", (Brock-Utne, 2002:3).

Finally, English is internationally used as a medium of communication and it offers wider opportunities for success. It is

used widely in literature, the internet and other forms of media so much that it is the 'de facto official' language of all former British colonies hence the strong biases towards it (Makanda, 2009) .Thus, the position of English is justified because of its international significance. Therefore, it is argued that universal and dominant use of the mother tongue carries the danger of isolation. It is seen as an interference in the promotion of international language, leading to inadequate proficiency and to linguistic wastefulness, since any time that is devoted to learning mother tongues is to the detriment of the widely spoken languages, especially the international ones (Ouane & Glanz, 2010). While it is reasonable that English is essential in Africa for maintaining international communication and exchange, there is increasing awareness among some African scholars and intellectuals that limiting African intellectual, academic, technical and scientific discourse to English is inadequate and in fact counterproductive.

It is against this background that the researchers went into the field with the aim of finding out the perceptions of the pupils and teachers on the impact of the medium of instruction on student performance at primary school level. All these arguments are at boardroom level, where the linguists, the educationists, the policy makers and the reality definers fight it out. However, the researchers felt that there is need to hear the views of the people (teachers and pupils) on the ground since they are the ones who have to live with, are faced or are steeped in this linguistic dilemma. Their perceptions, it is hoped, will give a comprehensive picture to the linguistic controversy which may at the end of the day be essential for the future policy maker.

Methodology

This study was basically qualitative in nature; thus allowing for a holistic and contextual analysis of the problem. A case study design was adopted to ensure an in-depth study of the perceptions on the impact of the medium of instruction on the pupils' academic achievement. The research was carried out at David Livingstone Primary School, a school situated in Harare. The study focused on seven Grade 6 classes. In these classes the learners are streamed

according to their ability, with Grade 6A being the best and 6G the below average performers.

The researchers used three data collection tools so as to triangulate data gathered. Interviews were used to gather initial information on how teachers interpret the country's language policy, to find out the learners' and teachers' first languages, to establish the medium of instruction the teachers used to teach. They were also used to gather the teacher's views on the impact of the medium of instruction on pupils. Questionnaires were distributed to ten purposively sampled pupils from each of the Grade 6 classes to make a sample size of sixty. The questionnaires were designed to gather data pertaining to the pupils' home language and their preferences as far as the medium of instruction is concerned was gathered.

The researchers also observed lessons in progress to see how teachers really teach, and how learners learn. For lesson observation, this study focused mainly on Grade 6A and Grade 6H learners and their teachers. Only two classes were used to enable the researchers to carry out the in-depth study they set out to conduct. The observation of two classes whose learners have extreme abilities, that is, the polar ends also enabled the researchers to gather different data to try and understand and explain the phenomenon under study. Lesson observations were carried out because it is through them that the researchers could get first hand information about what is really happening in the classroom. These also enabled the researchers to learn about some aspects of the lesson that the participants may be unaware of, or that they are unwilling or unable to discuss in an interview. In essence, lesson observations provided the researchers with accurate descriptions of the actual situation on the ground. The researchers made use of non-participant observation.

Results

Through interviews and lesson observations, the researchers were able to establish that although English is the main medium of instruction, both teachers and learners often resort to Shona. While sometimes this switch from one code to another is done unconsciously, at other times they actually make a conscious effort to

switch from English to Shona. The learners often switch or mix codes when they lack enough of the English language to express themselves adequately. The teachers, on the other hand, code switch or code mix to emphasize pertinent points, or to give instructions to the learners. At other times they do this in order to explain difficult concepts to the learners. They say that doing this aides the learning process as learners understand better when concepts are explained in their own first language. They readily admit that more effective learning takes place when the medium of instruction is one that the learners are very familiar with, preferably their mother tongue. On the whole, the teachers felt that their pupils, especially the below average performers would learn better if Shona was used, however, they were slightly apprehensive about the fact that this medium may disadvantage them in the job market. This view is supported by Mparutsa, Thondlana and Crawhall (1990) who point out that most first language indigenous language speakers find themselves in a position of preferring their first language for communicative purposes yet functioning in an educational, social and economic system that emphasises the importance, even dominance of English.

On the other hand, the researchers also learnt that use of the mother tongue does not always aid learning .especially in a multilingual setting. Students who had English or other languages as their first language and Shona as their L2 said they often struggled to follow the lesson when the teacher and the rest of the class switch from English to Shona. Perhaps, even more interestingly, the researchers discovered that code switching and code mixing are not limited to lessons that are taught in English. It emerged that even during Shona lessons the learners and their teachers often switch from Shona to English. The teachers justified this unexpected turn of events by saying that while Shona is indeed the mother tongue of the majority of their students, their Shona is deeply influenced by the English language which permeates into every aspect of the students' lives. The Shona language often borrows words from the English language, and sometimes the learners are not even aware that the words they speak are not even Shona, but are borrowed, from English. For instance, students are more likely to say 'rice' as

opposed to '*mupunga*', which is the correct term in Shona, or '*bhazi*' instead of '*dutavanhu*' '*madomasi*' instead of '*mapuno*'. Likewise, during a Shona lesson, if the teacher talks about '*mupunga*', '*dutavanhu*' or '*mapuno*', he/she is more likely to be met with blank stares. The learners would not know what it is that the teacher is talking about because pupils are more familiar with 'rice' 'bus' and 'tomatoes' than they are with '*mupunga*''*dutavanhu*' or '*mapuno*'.

The majority of the learners (80%) would rather maintain the status quo and continue with English as the sole medium of instruction. Their answers range from their wish to learn the language to a desire to be proficient in it. For example, one response was "*I choos this language becaus I dont now how to spick the language tharts way I choos it*" and "*because I love to take in English and be good speak English.*"

Others cite the status of English as the language for wider communication, "*I choose this linguage because I am a Shona when some people can not speak which I ca not speak so I can tolk to them*" and "*I chose this languag because some people like to speak that language that I chose that language.*" and "*I choose this English becose when I speak to people I most want to speak English.*"

Some of the students stated that they find English to be simpler, easier to understand, and more interesting than any other language. For example, two of them had this to say, "*I choose this language because it is easy to speak.*" and "*I chose this language because I am able to write it and I am able to speak it.*" Two others advocating for the continued use of English as the medium of instruction wrote, "*It's simple to understand.*" and "*I choose this language because English is very interesting and understandable.*" Obviously, this one meant to say English is easy to understand instead of the not so English "*understandable*".

Some of the students' choice of English over all the other languages was influenced by their desire to communicate with the rest of the world. They perceived English as the lingua franca of the world. Consequently, they had this to say, "*I choose this language because it is used in all the countries in the world*" and "*I would choose to learn*

in English because it is the most spoken language in many parts of the world." Yet another one wrote *"I chosed English because it is the most common langueges in the whole world and all countries learn it."* Barring their grammatical incompetence, it is clear that they consider English as the world's most popular language.

Some of the learners want to be part of the global village, and they figure proficiency in this language will be of great advantage. For instance, one of them had this to say, *"I choose English because if you go to another country and you do not know the language you can use English."* Another one wrote, *"I chose this language because it is used in many countries and is common in many countries in the world and it will be easy to communicate in other countries."* And yet another one wrote, *"I chose this language because if you go to work in other countries you can then communicate with other people".*

Others are of the opinion that since English is the country's official language; it should also be the medium of instruction. Examples of their responses include, *"I chose this language because English is our official language"* and *"I choose this language because it is the official language."*

Another group of students who selected English were influenced by the fact that it is their home language, and thus they are more comfortable using it than any other language. For example two of them wrote, *"I chose this language because it is easy to speak and it is the one that I speak at home"* and *"I choose this language because it is interesting and it is our main language at home."*

The last group of students who chose English as their preferred choice of medium of instruction cited the fact that it is the language that the school uses the most in all its communications. These students stated things like, *"I choose this language because English is our main language at school."* and *"I choose this language because it is the language I always use at school".*

Only one student admitted that she/he would rather have both Shona and English because then they would benefit more from the education system. In the respondent's own words, *"I chose Shona*

and English because Shona is part of our culture and English is a international language." Another student opted for Shona saying, "*I choose this language because it is easy to speak and it is the one that I speak at home.*"

The 12% that chose Ndebele as their preferred medium of instruction justified it with reasons like a desire to communicate with friends and relatives, "*I chose this language so that I will be able to speak with someone who speaks Ndebele*" and "*I choose to learn Ndebele because it sounds intresting and most of my friends are Ndebeles.*" Another chose it simply because it is not offered on their school curriculum, "*I have choose this language because at our school we do not learn Ndebele*". Yet another cited communicative convenience in South Africa saying, "*I have chosen to learn Ndebele because when I will be going to other countries like South Africa I will communicate with them freely*". A few more said they would rather learn in Ndebele, as it would enable them to follow their favourite soaps on television which includes *Generations, Isidingo* and *Rhythm City*, which are aired in Zulu, the parent language of the Ndebele language.

Some students indicated that given a choice, they would choose other languages as the medium of instruction. One said she would rather have French as the medium of instruction wrote, "*I am choosing this language because French is language used in most of the countries and I wish to go to France because that is where most of my relatives are*". The other one opted for Afrikaans stating, "*I choose this language because it is the one I like most*".

From the analysis above, it is clear that while most of the learners might prefer to learn in English, there is quite a sizeable number who would rather learn in other languages, namely, Ndebele, French and Afrikaans. Surprisingly, and the researchers must say disappointingly, only one student chose Shona (the mother tongue of the majority of pupils) as the preferred medium of instruction. However, the researchers must say they were greatly impressed by the learner who opted for both Shona and English, and as already

stated above, the reasons given were just as impressive.

However, one of the students raised a very valid point, that of family pressure. The student gave his/her reason as *"I choose this language because my mother speak in English. She telled me to speak in English."* This response tallies with the researchers' beliefs that the choice of English as the medium of instruction in most African countries is often influenced by societal attitudes. English is often viewed as superior to indigenous languages. Children often have it drilled into them that they should excel in English, which is frequently viewed as a gateway to success. Thus, from very early on in life, even as early as nursery school, pre-school or kinder garten, children are often forced to learn English, even to the detriment of their development, in a bid to prepare them for life in the global village. This is substantiated by Kamwendo in Mutasa (2004:120) who notes that "…English is synonymous with sound education whilst education through African languages is given second class rating." However, as can be clearly evidenced by some of the learners' responses, their grasp of the language is very poor. Their grammar is appalling, their spelling is atrocious and they cannot even punctuate properly. The influence of colonialism is reflected in the attitude of the pupils towards indigenous languages.

All in all, the researchers found that the use of English as the sole medium of instruction is a disadvantage to those learners whose English is not good. Switching codes to accommodate these learners then disadvantages learners to whom Shona is a second language. It also impacts negatively even on Shona L1 speakers whose English is not good as they have to translate the new knowledge into English as they are required to write their work in English. In the end the learners fail to do well not because they do not know the answers, but because they have not yet mastered enough of the English language with which to express themselves.

The 'language in education question' revisited

The results as noted brought an interesting twist to the debate, while it is true that the majority of the students do well when their mother tongue is used, i.e. Shona, there is a small number of students who are

disadvantaged by the use of Shona, firstly those who use English at home and those who use other languages like Ndebele or minority languages at home. The question, therefore, becomes what happens to these few students if Shona in Mashonaland or Ndebele in Matabeleland is to be used as the sole medium of instruction? Can these few students be the sacrificial lambs for the greater good? It is definitely not ethical.

If mother tongue based education is to be successful, a carefully thought out model should be adopted. Instead of relying on a sole medium of instruction, a model that fosters multilingual competencies and boosts learning achievement should be adopted. Baker (2006) refers to such models as the strong additive bilingual models; these aim for a high proficiency in both the first and the second languages (and perhaps more languages). Currently Zimbabwe uses subtractive bilingualism, where the mother tongue is used together with English as a medium of instruction only up to Grade 3, after which English becomes the sole medium of instruction. The 2006 Amendment of the Education Act tries to address this problem by allowing the bilingual medium of instruction up to Grade 7. But this is not enough because the Grade 7 exams are still in English with the exception of the local languages exams.

Additive bilingualism should be the way to go for Zimbabweans, where mother tongue education is offered throughout primary and secondary school. Here learners are taught throughout the curriculum in the mother tongue and learn additional languages from specialized language teachers. Heugh (2006) gives an example of Afrikaans speakers in South Africa who attend only one lesson a day in English and have become very proficient in English. Closer to home, Magwa (2010) advocates for an Integrated Trilingual Education Model (ITEM) that could be adopted to enable the country's citizens to actually participate in national development. He proposes a language policy framework that could make it possible for Zimbabweans to use all their local languages as essential tools of communication in education for the purposes of economic and social development. This model would require pupils to learn their

immediate home language, secondly, a national language and, finally, an international European language, hence trilingualism. In that regard, an average Zimbabwean pupil would be functionally competent in spoken and written discourse in at least three languages, the mother tongue, the national language and an international language.

This model, if adopted, will undoubtedly go a long way in improving the students' results and in turn this will contribute to the development of the nation. An education system that respects and promotes multilingualism is critical for the maintenance of a tolerant and peace-loving nation.

However, the stumbling block in the adoption of this model, as has been noted before, is not lack of resources or any other commonly cited reasons, but the major challenge lies in Africa's history of triple jeopardy in the cast of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. This degree of plunder cannot be exorcised overnight. The colonial mentality is the worst enemy. This was also reflected in most of the pupils' responses who felt that English is the best medium of instruction despite the fact that they were obviously failing to express themselves clearly in English. They see English as a means of climbing the academic, social and economic ladder. This is logical because these pupils have been socialised into believing that their languages are inferior to the European language. Most parents would emphatically reject the idea of their children using the local languages for learning. The disheartening fact is that African policy makers also suffer from this mentality. Most leaders are not interested in local languages; this is reflected in the policies that favour European languages.

The other problem is that Africans lack linguistic nationalism. Most Africans, according to Mazrui and Mazrui (1998) in Phiri et. al., (2013) are nationalistic about their race and often their land but nationalism about African languages is relatively weak as compared with India, the Middle East or France. Africans have escaped some of the bonds of colonialism but they are not compelled to fight for their languages. They attribute this lack of nationalism to lack of written

literature that can be classified as "sacred" scripture. Linguistic nationalism among the Arabs was influenced by the Holy Book, the Qur'an as well as by the Great Arab Books of the past.

There is, need, therefore, to conscietise the masses on the importance of the local languages and 'decolonize the mind' if the local languages are to be used as media of instruction or else this will remain a pipe dream. For educationists, the key people to conscietise are their pupils, who will in turn be ambassadors of the indigenous languages. But one has to note that this cannot be an overnight achievement but will take time and a lot of commitment. The key factor is for the masses to understand that their languages are in no way inferior to the European languages. The introduction of the indigenous languages should also be gradual to allow for development of materials as noted earlier. This road to linguistic freedom would, undoubtedly, be smoothened by a strong will and determination from the government to implement a multi-lingual policy that places indigenous languages at the centre of the education system which is culturally oriented.

Conclusion

This paper explores the issue of language in education which is quite controversial in most African countries. The choice of the medium of instruction poses a dilemma to the policy makers, especially in a multilingual state like Zimbabwe. The study unveils the perceptions of pupils and teachers on the impact of the medium of instruction on academic achievement. It is the submission of this paper that pupils learn better through the mother tongue medium. Whilst teachers and some pupils prefer the use of indigenous languages as communicative tools they are crippled in a system that emphasizes and promotes English, therefore, their resort to the use of English is not by choice but designed by the policy makers. The paper also warns that there is a new crop of Zimbabwean pupils who seem to have been ignored in the medium of instruction controversy, those pupils who now use English as a first language at home despite having Shona (by origin) parents.

Furthermore, there are pupils whose L1 is neither Shona nor English,

those from the Ndebele and other minority language speaking groups. In a bid to accommodate students from various linguistic backgrounds and consequently improve results, the study recommends the adoption of a model that fosters multilingual competencies and boosts learning achievement, that is, a strong additive bilingual model. However, the paper cautions that this kind of model may face a lot of resistance from both the policy makers and the masses owing to Africa's greatest enemy, that is, the colonial mentality. Since education is a basic human right, and the second of the eight United Nations Millennium Development goals, it would, thus, be unfair that in this day and age, if most or some of the country's learners are excluded from attaining greater educational heights on the basis that they have not been able to grasp enough of the medium of instruction with which to express themselves in an examination.

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