

**PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE USE OF ENGLISH
AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION AT LOWER BASIC LEVEL IN LIVINGSTONE
AND NAMWALA DISTRICTS OF SOUTHERN PROVINCE, ZAMBIA**

THESIS
ALCA
KAV
2009

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**A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS.**



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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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APPROVAL

This dissertation of Sunwell Kavwaya is approved as fulfilling part of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education in Applied Linguistics.

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ABSTRACT

This study set out to investigate the attitude of both parents and teachers towards the use of English as medium of instruction at lower basic level in Livingstone and Namwala districts of Southern Province. Secondly, the study sought to establish whether parents and teachers were in any way consulted when either deciding or making adjustments to the language policy in education. Additionally, the study investigated the possible reasons why Zambia has continued to use English as medium of instruction since 1966. A descriptive survey design was used for this particular study and the study sample of 160 respondents was selected. These included 40 parents and 40 teachers from each of the responding districts to ensure a fair and representative distribution. The study employed two sampling techniques. These were stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Stratified random sampling was used to select responding schools and communities in each of the selected districts based on their geographical location. Additionally, stratified sampling ensured a representative and fair distribution in areas such as age, gender and location. Purposive sampling, on the other hand, guided the researcher to concentrate only on those teachers and parents who had relevant information for the study. A multi – method approach in data collection was used in this research. This was achieved through the use of questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in analyzing the data. Qualitative data were analyzed through the coding and categorization of themes while quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

The findings of the study were that both the teachers and parents had a negative attitude towards the use of English as medium of instruction at lower basic level. It was revealed that there was a communication gap between the teachers and the pupils since most children at lower basic level did not understand English. Therefore, they felt that both English and a dominant local language should be used as medium of instruction. The teachers also disclosed that they were never consulted when the government made

adjustments to the language – in education policy. The study also revealed that colonial legacy and multilingualism were the main reasons why Zambia had continued to use English as the sole official medium of instruction at all levels of education. Recommendations made include the need to adjust the language in education policy so that it accommodates a dominant local language to be used with English as media of instruction. The study further recommends that where possible, lower basic classes should be given to local teachers in order to facilitate bilingual instruction in the classroom situation. It was also recommended that where possible, a local language should be used exclusively as medium of instruction in the first two years of education. Additionally, the study recommended that parents and teachers should be fully involved in the choice of the language of instruction at all levels of education. Finally, the study recommended that a further study that will involve pupils should be conducted of English as medium of instruction especially at lower level of education.

DEDICATION

Let this dissertation be my way of remembering my young son, **Milumbo**, who was prematurely claimed by the cold hand of death during the course of this study.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation has come to be, not through my ideas alone but because of many other people who offered their time, ideas, talent and academic supervision. I , therefore, wish to record my profound gratitude to Dr. P.C. Manchishi, my Supervisor, for his love, patience, Scholarly guidance and indeed critical evaluation of this dissertation.

Also to Mubanga .E. Kashoki, Professor of African languages at the Institution of Economic and Social Research of the University of Zambia, do I owe gratitude for his professional guidance and critical comments, especially at the proposal stage of this study. I am further indebted to professor Kashoki for the literature he rendered to me on the history of medium of instruction in Zambia.

My profound indebtedness also goes to Ms. Malambo Ng'andu, Secretary at Rusangu Secondary School, for spending her precious time to professionally type this dissertation. To you madam, I say only God can reward you appropriately.

I am also indebted to Mr. J.H Siwingwa, the Provincial Education Officer for Sothern Province, and Mr. S. Lapaana, the District Education Board Secretary for Namwala District, for taking time out of their busy schedule in order to avail themselves for a face to face interview.

I am forever grateful to the teachers and parents from the responding districts for their willingness to participate in the focus group discussions and the completion of questionnaires.

Lastly, my debt goes deep to my wife, Florence, for her encouragement and patience with me when I was preoccupied with writing. My mother, Christina .M.S Kavwaya, also deserves special recognition for her significant contribution towards my academic success.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Overview

This Chapter focuses mainly on the historical development of medium of instruction from the missionary period to the post independence era. The Chapter outlines the medium of instruction that was preferred by the missionaries, who were the architects of the education system in Zambia, the British South Africa Company (BSA) and the Colonial government.

The Chapter also highlights the point in history at which Zambia shifted from the missionary and colonial way of doing things as far as medium of instruction, especially at lower level of education, was concerned. Specific reference is made to 1966 when Chapter 234 of the laws of Zambia, popularly known as the Education Act of 1966, was enacted. This Act formally adopted the use of English as medium of instruction in all schools in Zambia from Grade 1.

Finally, the Chapter is concluded by presenting at the problem statement, the purpose, the objectives, the research questions and the significance of the study.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Language policy before Independence

The history of education in present day Zambia dates back to 1883 when the first school was opened at Limulunga by the pioneer brethren missionary, Frederick Arnot. It can be argued, therefore, that missionaries were the earliest architects of Zambia's education system. Not only did these missionaries set up schools but churches and hospitals also. It must be noted at the very outset that "one of the first tasks undertaken by virtually every

missionary group which entered the country was to commit to writing the vernacular language of the area in which they had opened their mission station.” (Snelson 1974:4). This suggests that all the missionary activities, including the medium of instruction in schools, were to be carried out in the dominant local language. There is a further development of this point by Manchishi (2004:1)

What one can state without any fear of contradiction is that the drive for evangelism proved extremely successful because missionaries used local languages. The bible and other Christian literature were translated into the local languages. People chanted hymns in the language they understood best i.e. their own local languages and even in the schools the medium of instruction was in their own local language at least up to the fourth grade.

Therefore, one can confidently concluded with unequivocal consistency, that missionaries resolved to use local languages as medium of instruction in the lower level of education.

Subsequent to the arrival of missionaries, the British South Africa Company (BSAC) administered the territories of North Western and North Eastern Rhodesia during the 1890s. The territories were amalgamated in 1911 into Northern Rhodesia. The company administered the territory until March 31, 1924 when it became a British protectorate. Manchishi (2004) observes that during the company's reign, Barotse National School was established at Kanyonyo in 1907 following an agreement between the then chief of Barotseland and the company. He further reports that the company adopted the missionaries' policy of using the local language, Silozi, as medium of instruction from sub A to standard four. This clearly shows that both the missionaries and the colonialists were committed to using local languages as media of instruction especially in the lower primary classes.

Immediately the British government took over the administration of Northern Rhodesia from the B.S.A Company in 1924, the British Colonial office in London set up the Phelps- Stokes Commission whose aim was to examine the educational system in its colonies. The commission was particularly visiting East and Central Africa and the following were its specific objectives: "to investigate the educational needs of the people in the light of their religious, social, hygienic and economic conditions; to ascertain the extent to which their needs were being met; and to assist in the formation of plans to meet the educational needs of the native races." (Snelson 1974:138).

The Phelps- Stokes Commission had much to say with regard to the language question, both to colonial Africa in general and to the government of Northern Rhodesia in particular. The commission unequivocally recommended the use of vernacular languages in the lower primary years of school. "This recommendation was made both in its general and in a summary prepared subsequent to a tour of East and Central Africa when its members held consultations in Kafue in 1924." (Shana 1980:4).

In the report of the Advisory Committee, the British government also stressed the importance of vernacular instruction. It stated,

The study of the educational use of the vernacular is of primary importance. The committee suggests co-operation among scholars, with aid from government and missionary Societies, in the preparation of vernacular text books. (Advisory Committee, Native Education, 1924P. 5.)

In 1925, the Advisory Board on Native Education had been created in Northern Rhodesia. Its establishment received the endorsement of the members of the Phelps-Stokes Commission.

Shana (1980:5) reports that "the Board proposed that four vernacular languages, Tonga, Bemba, Lozi and Nyanja, be taught in schools for Africans." Shana further reports that by 1930 the Advisory Board had noticed that there was no single vernacular in Northern Rhodesia which could be used as a lingua franca for Africans. Therefore, it was recommended that "Mother tongue-instruction would be used to teach the mechanics of reading and writing and that English instruction would replace the use of the mother tongue thereafter." (Northern Rhodesia 1930:3). One can, therefore, clearly argue that mother tongue instruction, during the first two or four years of primary education, was upheld throughout the seventy years of British rule. This is because of the benefits associated with mother tongue instruction. Shana (1980:6) observes that international groups continued to emphasize the importance of local language instruction. Among these international groups is the International Institute of African Language and Culture which argued that the advantages of teaching a child in the vernacular outweighed the administrative disadvantages of having to produce materials for many dialects in the process. Stressing the above argument, the institute wrote:

It is a universally acknowledged principle in modern education that a child should receive instruction both in and through his mother tongue, and this privilege should not be withheld from the African child. (International Institute of African Language and Culture, 1930)

In 1943, the British government was engaged in another debate on language. The debate particularly compared mother tongue instruction to instruction in the colonial language. The main argument in support of the teaching of English was that African parents wanted their children to learn the language and African languages were not sufficiently complex to be used as media of instruction beyond the first few years of school. "Nevertheless, the final recommendation in the

government's report on the subject was that English be introduced as a subject in the fourth year and as a medium in selected subjects thereafter." (Shana 1980:6). Manchishi (2004:2) underscores the above observation by reporting that in 1943, the British government recommended that the child should be taught in the dominant vernacular during the first few years of learning while "English was to be taught as a subject in the fourth year in the primary school and be used as a medium of instruction in some subjects thereafter." Therefore, by the 1950s, the mother tongue was to be used in African schools for the first two primary years, a dominant vernacular up to standard V and English thereafter. (Ministry of Education 1975:3).

The principle received further authoritative official endorsement from the United Nations Educational and Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1953 when following a meeting of specialists in 1951 who had deliberated on the role of vernacular languages and official second languages in education, it published a report entitled; The use of vernacular Languages in Education. In this report, the specialists came out in favour of mother tongue instruction by stating the following:

Every effort should be made to promote education in the mother tongue. On educational grounds, we recommend that the use of mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible (UNESCO, 1953)

It is paradoxical, though, to note that while independent international agencies remained in favour of vernacular instruction, there were signs that educationalists in Northern Rhodesia were beginning to favor English instruction at lower primary stage. A new primary syllabus was published in 1956. In which the proportion of English instruction increased and varied inversely to

local languages from the third grade until by grade 6 English was taught nine periods per week." (Shana 1980:7).

This new development, however, did not succeed in challenging the principle that the mother tongue was the ideal logical vehicle through which children may most effectively learn during the primary stages of formal education. This is reiterated in the 1961 UNESCO Conference report which was published following a UNESCO sponsored meeting in Addis Ababa. As reported by Shana (1980:7), "Up to and including the time of this conference, UNESCO had been giving unwavering support to the principle of vernacular instruction." (Shana 1980:7)

It should be noted, however, that at the same time that UNESCO held a conference in Addis Ababa, a commonwealth conference was also being held in Makerere, Uganda. Interestingly, this conference recommended just the reverse of UNESCO meetings. "Members concluded that wherever English is recognized as a second language, children should be introduced to it in schools as early as possible." (Shana 1980:7). The recommendation by the Commonwealth to introduce English as early as possible in the child's education came as a surprise. This is principally because the earlier British Advisory bodies had recommended the concentrated use of the vernacular instruction in the lower primary school.

Due to the fact that there were pockets of resistance to the introduction of English instruction in the lower primary school sector, the issue was to be debated in the Legislative Council of the government of Northern Rhodesia. Unfortunately, the Legislative Council never reached consensus. The proponents of English medium in African schools were vehemently opposed by those who wanted to uphold the mother tongue medium. Their main argument against the English

medium was that "it would cause a traumatic break in the continuity between home and school, the break which had caused enough insecurity already." At the same meeting, the Ministry of State for Native Affairs reminded the members that "Children would only learn a second language like English if it were used regularly in their environment." (Shana 1980:7).

It is therefore clear, from the forgoing paragraphs that, despite attempts to introduce English as the main medium of instruction at lower primary level in the early 60s, the principle that the mother tongue was the best medium through which children can effectively learn stood unchallenged. Mother tongue remained the sole medium of instruction at lower primary level up to the time Zambia attained her political independence in 1964. It is now important to look at the historical account of subsequent developments after 1964.

1.1.2 Language Policy after Independence

The post independence period is of particular significance to the historical development of language in education policy in Zambia. Notable about this period was the radical departure from the manner of doing things that had prevailed throughout the colonial era with regard to language in education policy and practice. The shift was, of course, premised on the recommendations of the UNESCO planning mission and the Hardman Report which had recommended that English should be the universal medium of instruction from the beginning of primary schooling. (UNESCO 1963:16).

Citing the report of the UNESCO planning mission and using the recommendations of the Hardman Report, Mr. J.M. Mwanakatwe, Minister of Education in 1965, brought the issue of English as medium of instruction before cabinet and strongly recommended its adoption:

I recommend to cabinet that English be adopted in all schools from grade 1 ----- I would emphasize that the decision is one to make learning easier. There is no fear that the traditions, customs and culture of our people which are learnt through the medium of language will be lost. (Zambia, Ministry of Education File No. ME/A/15/ 1, paper CAB (65), dated May 1965)

The above recommendation is a clear demonstration of the radical departure from the colonial legacy that supported mother tongue instruction at lower primary. The departure is further represented by the enactment in 1966 of Chapter 234 of the Laws of Zambia, also known as the Education Act of 1966. "On the basis of this decision, the ministry of Education instituted the English medium centre in Lusaka which later became known as the Curriculum Development Centre (Chishimba 1979:3).

The decision to endorse English as the sole medium of instruction from grade 1 after gaining political independence was quite ironical. This is principally because one would have expected Zambia to take advantage of her political independence to decolonize herself linguistically. Commenting on the ironic nature of the decision, Chanda (1998:13) as quoted in Simwinga (2006:59) states that "instead of using her political freedom to achieve linguistic independence from Britain, Zambia not only retained English as the sole official language but also decided in 1966, that English should be the sole medium of instruction from the first year of education upwards to the highest level except for the teaching of Zambian languages."

The 1966 Education Act received further endorsement eleven years later in what is popularly known as the 1977 Education reform. The endorsement reads in part as follows:

The present policy whereby English is a medium of instruction from grade 1, should continue but, if a teacher finds that there are concepts which cannot be easily understood, he may explain these concepts in one of the seven official Zambian languages, provided the majority of the pupils in that class understand the language. (GRZ, 1977:33)

Additionally, the 1977 policy document disapproved the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. The paper stated that "Although it is generally accepted by educationist that learning is best done in the mother tongue, this situation has been found to be impracticable in the case of every child in multilingual societies such as the Zambia Society." (Republic of Zambia 1977:32)

This position was upheld until 1992 when a reversal of the existing policy was enunciated in a new policy document on education known as Focus on learning (1992). In this document, the official government policy with regard to language was that the main local language would become the basic language of instruction in grades one (1) through four (4).

The current official language-in-education policy is the one contained in the 1996 policy document titled Educating Our Future: National Policy on Education. As regards medium of instruction, the current language-in-education policy is very clear and it lays down the following guiding principles:

Basic reading and writing will initially be learned in a local language, whereas officially English will remain as the medium of instruction. By providing for the use of a local language for initial literacy acquisition, children's learning of essential reading and writing skills should be better assured.

By providing for the use of English as the official language of instruction for other content areas, children's preparations for the use of this language in school and subsequent life will be facilitated, while the implementation problems of changing over to other languages will be avoided (GRZ 1996)

It is clear from the foregoing paragraphs that since the 1966 Education Act, when Zambia from the missionary and colonial language-in-education policy, English has dominated the as medium of instruction at lower basic level. What is not certain, though, is whether the teachers and the parents have equally endorsed the use of English as medium of instruction at lower basic level. The proposed study, therefore, is significant for it sought to establish the attitude of parents and teachers towards the use of English as a medium of instruction at lower basic level. It must be known, however, that there is currently an initial literacy policy which demands that children be taught language and literacy through a local language. This is popularly known as the New Break Through to literacy (NBTL) and it is being practiced in all the basic schools in Zambia.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Given the historical background of the language – in- education policy from the missionary period to the present situation where English has been endorsed as the sole medium of instruction from grade one, the question that would arise is whether the teachers and the parents have equally supported the idea. But as at now, we do not know their attitude.

1.3 Purpose of the Study.

The study was to investigate the (attitude) of parents and teachers towards the use of English as medium of instruction at lower basic level.

1.4 Objectives.

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- i) To establish the attitude of both parents and teachers towards the use of English as a medium of instruction at lower basic level;
- ii) To determine the extent to which parents and teachers are involved in the choice of the medium of instruction; and
- iii) To establish the reasons why Zambia has continued using English as the medium of instruction from grade one (1) to tertiary level of education since the enactment of the 1966 Education Act.

1.5 Research Questions.

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- i) What are the teachers' and parents' attitude towards the use of English as medium of instruction at lower basic level?
- ii) To what extent are the teachers and parents involved in the choice of the medium of instruction?
- iii) Why has the government of the Republic of Zambia continued using English as the medium of instruction from grade one (1) to tertiary level of education since 1966?

1.6 Significance of the Study.

The study that was undertaken is of significance for it sought to generate information on the attitude of both teachers and parents towards the use of English as medium of instruction at lower basic level. The findings of the study therefore, are expected to mirror the challenges that lower basic school teachers might be facing in explaining concepts across all subject areas in a language that is not familiar to the learners. Furthermore, the

information generated might help the policy makers in the Ministry of Education to either recommend the use of a mother tongue as medium of instruction at lower basic level or maintain the status quo.

1.7 Operational Definitions

- i) **Medium of instruction** – This is the language that is used to teach other subjects.
- ii) **Attitude** – refers to a way of feeling or thinking about an issue.
- iii) **First language** – This is the language that is native to the speaker. In other words, it is a language that one is exposed to first and in which he / she is most proficient. This may not necessarily be one's mother tongue.
- iv) **Second language** – This is the language that one learns second after the first language. A second language can either be local or foreign.
- v) **Foreign language** – This is the language that comes from outside one's community. For example, English in Zambia is a foreign language.
- vi) **Language** – in – education policy – This is the policy that stipulates the language to use as medium of instruction at different levels of education in a country.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The study was limited in that it did not include the pupils to whom English is used as medium of instruction.

1.9 **Summary**

This chapter has focused on the historical development of medium of instruction from the missionary period to the post independence era. The chapter has also highlighted the point in history at which Zambia departed from the use of local languages to the use of English as medium of instruction at lower basic level.

Finally, the chapter has been concluded by presenting the problem statement, the purpose, the objectives, the research questions and the significance of the study.