

Terminological Dilemma on Familiar Language Based Instruction: A focus on the usage of terms in Zambia's Initial literacy Policy Documents

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Abstract

There have been several terms which have been used in Zambia's national policy documents to refer to first and familiar language as well as English language. This terminological controversy on the medium of initial literacy instruction in Zambia has been there before and after Zambia's independence in 1964. The dilemma was at two levels: the first was choice of the medium of instruction (English or local languages) and the second was on terminology use. The terminological dilemma was worse when it came to indigenous local languages as different policy documents had so far used various terms. For instance, literature of 1880s showed that common terms used were chosen language, native language and vernacular language. In the 1990s, common terms used were mother tongue based instruction, first language, local language, indigenous languages, familiar language and local Zambian Languages. Some of these terms have been cited to be used in several policy documents including the 1977 Educational Reform, 1992 Focus on Learning document, 1996 Educating

Our Future, the 2000 Primary Reading Programme (PRP), the 2013 Primary Literacy Programme and the 2015 Zambia Education Curriculum Framework. These terminologies have always been discussed in contrast to English language, English Literacy instruction and second language in particular. The paper on one hand, wanted to establish the source of these terminologies and on the other hand establish the factors that led to the choice terms used associated with medium of instruction for language and literacy education in Zambia.

Introduction

Before and after Zambia's independence in 1964, the policy documents on language in education for teaching initial literacy shows several different terminologies used. Some of these terms have similar meanings while others have different meanings. The paper examines the use of some of the terminologies that were used in selected policy documents in education before and after independence. The paper also discusses whether these terminologies are the same or not. The paper concludes by making some recommendations to the Ministry of General Education officials, on the need for consistency in using terms associated with certain concepts in policy documents.

Contextual usage of Terminologies on language in Education Policies

The terminological dilemma in the collection, description and presentation of terms associated with the language of literacy instruction in Zambia's policy documents is a source of concern for many academics, policy makers and the public. There is no consistency in the manner terms are used from one policy

document to another both before and after Zambia's independence in 1964. What can be stated without much contradiction is that the terms were loosely used in policy documents without paying much attention to the meaning that those terms had in practices. For instance, the 1977 Ministry of Education Policy Reform used mother tongue instruction, African languages and local languages to refer to the medium of instruction for literacy education. These terms were introduced in the earlier policy documents which have been resonated in the historical discussion in this paper.

The use of local languages in policy documents started with the missionaries in the late 1880s to early 1900s, who taught Rhodesian children in schools using local languages in the early years of primary education. The missionaries that time maintained English as the official language for administration and communication with the wider community. This view is supported by Simwiinga (2003) who contended that, during the British South African Company (BSAC) period, English was introduced as an official language and medium of instruction in missionary schools at upper level of education in order to facilitate administration and to meet other communication needs. On the other hand, Africans in some mission schools and non-mission schools were taught in local languages as medium of instruction. Later, all mission schools started by teaching in a local language in the first four years of primary education and switched to English language when students had acquired the basics of reading and writing skills.

Furthermore, the missionaries also translated grammar books, dictionaries, bibles and other text books into local languages to facilitate the education system. This statement is further supported by Manchishi (2004:1-2) who observed that:

During the colonial period, missionaries came and settled in different parts of the country. They opened churches, hospitals and schools. What one can state without any fear of contradiction is that the drive for evangelisation proved extremely successful because the missionaries used local languages. The bible and other literature were translated into local languages... The medium of instruction in schools were local languages at least up to the 4th grade... In mission schools, local languages were taught as subjects and also used as medium of instruction especially in lower primary school (Sub-standard A to standard four). English language was used in the upper primary level.

It is important to note that the terms associated with medium of instruction as reported in the cited policy extracts are local languages and English language.

In 1927, the annual report on Native Education under the British colonial government introduced another term ‘native language’ in policy statement. This is reflected on page 12 of the report when they were recommending which local languages were to be used as medium of instruction. This is what was reported:

The advisory board on native education has agreed to the adoption of four principle native languages in this territory for school purposes namely: Sikololo (Lozi) for Barotseland. Chitonga-chila for the rest of Northwestern Rhodesia, Chibemba for North-eastern Rhodesia... and Chinyanja for Eastern Rhodesia (Native Education Annual Report, 1927:12).

Historically, this declaration constituted a landmark in language policy formulation for the territory as it gave legal status to and

acknowledgement of the role of indigenous languages in education and in development (Simwinga, 2003:3).

Terminologies such as African languages and second language were introduced by the Phelps-Stokes recommendations in 1925. Their recommendation on language was that there was need to teach both African languages and a second language as medium of instruction in schools. The local languages were to be used for preservation of national values and self-identity for an African child while the second language was for wider communication with the world (Snelson, 1974).

Another terminology that was introduced in some policy documents during the colonial era was on the use of vernacular language when teaching. According to the National Archive (1943, ED/8/1) document indicated that the British Government during the colonial era recommended that the first few years of a child's learning should be occupied by vernacular teaching. On whether local Zambian languages are vernaculars is another subject matter to be exhausted for discussion in this paper.

In 1950, another policy document was released that introduced a few terms namely; 'Mother Tongue' local community language and regional official language as medium of instruction in schools. These terminologies were introduced in the context that they would be used as medium of instruction in schools and some of them are still used in a few policy documents in the present-day Zambia. There was no attempt to explain whether local languages were the same as vernacular and mother tongue terminologies or not. Based on the context in which these terms were used, they were referring to the same languages playing the same roles as medium of instruction in schools.

The most comprehensive educational policy document in Zambia

that came after independence with language policy statements in education was published in 1977. There were several issues raised against the use of second language as medium of instruction in education as noted by Shay Linehan who stated that:

Although there was broad agreement that learning through the medium of English was detrimental to educational achievement, educational principles were subordinated to the pragmatic considerations of political harmony (Linehan, 2004:2).

Such comments were made against the use of English language as medium of instruction for early grades and they were amongst the submissions which the people of Zambia made in the draft policy document. People's recommendations were that local languages be used as medium of instruction but the final report of the 'Educational Reform: Proposals and Recommendations' had this to say:

Acknowledging that it is generally accepted by educationists that learning is best done in the mother tongue, it is decided that, this situation is found to be impracticable in multi-lingual societies, such as the Zambian society' (MOE, 1977: 32).

In addition to the above statement, the reform further stated that teachers were allowed to explain some concepts that might otherwise not be understood by pupils through the medium of English, in one of the seven official local languages, provided the majority of pupils in a class could understand that vernacular language. In other words, in the 1977 Ministry of Education Reform preferred the use of mother tongue instruction, African languages and local languages which were already used in a few policy documents before independence and the context in which these terms were used

in the policy documents were like the earlier versions.

The ‘Focus on Learning’ policy document of 1992 which replaced the 1977 education reform also used the concept of ‘local languages’ as mentioned in the earlier policy documents. The focus on learning policy document recommended that local languages be used for consideration on entry to grade eight.

In 1996, the Ministry of Education published another policy document tagged “Educating our Future” which repealed the ‘Focus on Learning’ document. In this document, it recommended that all the pupils will be given an opportunity to learn basic reading and writing skills in local languages, whereas English will continue to be the official medium of instruction.

The Primary Reading Programme (PRP) which was launched in 1999 also emphasized the use of a mother tongue, familiar language and local language for literacy instruction in the early years of primary education. In practice, children used a regional language as medium of instruction only in grade one. The other years were dominated by English language as medium of instruction. These terms were equally used in the same way as in the other earlier policy documents.

The National Literacy Framework of 2013 for Zambia used terms like familiar language and local languages to refer to language used for initial literacy instruction. This information is found in the following extract from the policy document:

to support early literacy and later, English literacy instruction, Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) will introduce instruction in a familiar language so as to build learners’ arsenal for learning to read in other languages as well as learning content subjects.

Furthermore, the following table depicts the proposed language of instruction strategy in Zambia:

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Content Subjects and Literacy</i>	<i>Language of instruction</i>
1	All learning areas	Local languages
2	All learning areas	Local Languages
	Content subjects and Literacy in ZL	Local Languages
	English Language and Oral Literacy	English Language
3	Content subjects and Literacy in ZL	Local Language
	English Language and Literacy	English Language
4	Content subjects and Literacy in ZL	Local Language
	English Language and Literacy	English language
5 - 7	Content subjects	English Language
	English	English Language
	Zambian Languages	Local Languages

Source: National Literacy Framework (2013:14)

This information provided on the table above blends well with the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (2015:vi) which used three terms; Community language, Familiar Zambian language and Foreign Language. These terminologies were equally used in the context that they would serve as medium of instruction in schools in certain contexts or situations.

It should be noted that there were a several terminologies noted from policy documents before and after Zambia’s independence in 1964. These terminologies included Familiar Zambian Language, Native language, vernacular language, local language, African language, second language, Foreign language, English language, community language and regional official language. Some of these terminologies were used in similar contexts implying that they carry

similar meanings. If that is the case, there is a dilemma in deciding which terminology to use to refer to local languages as medium of instruction in primary schools for early literacy education.

Possible sources of Dilemma in Terminology Usage in Zambia's Policy Documents

There are several factors that could be considered as possible reasons for using several terminologies in policy documents to refer to the language of instruction in class. Among these include misapplication of terms that were used in one context but meant another thing. For instance, a familiar language is not the same as regional language. The policy says children will learn in their familiar language from grades 1 to 4 but the schools teach children in one of the regional official Zambian languages namely Bemba, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja and Tonga. Materials by the ministry have been produced in the same languages. Based on practice, the policy documents of 1996 to date should have been using regional official languages than familiar languages.

There is also a possibility that some policy makers that recklessly used these terms lacked knowledge in understanding the meaning of the terms. For instance, , challenges in identifying the term's equivalent, mistranslation of terms and misapplication of terms. For instance, a Native language is not the same as a mother tongue or African language. These terms have been explained in the next section.

Meaning of the terminologies noted in Zambia's Policy Documents

In the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (2015:vi), a Familiar Zambian Language refers to a local language that is commonly used by children in a particular locality. It could be a zone or community

language. While this is the definition, in practice, this issue is not followed as the languages used for initial literacy instruction are the seven regional official languages. The same document on the same page defined community language as a language which is widely used in a particular area by adults and young people, and may be a mother tongue for the majority of people in that area. In principle, this suggest that a community language may not be the same as a mother tongue. A mother tongue is a language of the mother equivalent to the first language that a child acquires from mother home environment. It should be noted that a mother tongue is not the same as first language in some cases. A native language is many time treated the same as first language an individual learns while a vernacular language is similar to the community language but spoken mostly by an illiterate community. This suggests that the terms used by the policy documents are similar but different in some way. This is the case for many other terms mentioned and discussed in this paper. There is need for policy makers to be consistent in the terms they use in the policy documents.

The significance of Zambian Languages and its related terminologies to education and national development

Like other languages, Zambian languages and its related terminologies are very important not only in education but in different sectors of the society. Some of the reasons why a Zambian should be promoting Zambian languages and their consistent usage are discussed below.

- (i) Benzies (1940) noted that using a language that is not known

to a learner in education cripples and destroys the child's productive and mental processes in education. This implies that a child cannot develop his or her thinking powers. Teaching in local languages empower the child in every way possible.

- (ii) Zambian languages empower the local people for mass mobilisation and active participation in the democratic and development of the country. In other words, local languages empower citizens to participate effectively in economic, cultural, social and political matters of the country as they will be free to express themselves.
- (iii) A country is nothing without its culture and local indigenous languages are a vehicle for its transmission. Consider the following examples:
 - (a) Families tell their children different stories in local languages. Those stories constitute proverbs, riddles, myths, taboos and narratives of social conduct, morals and great heroes of their tradition. If these stories are told in English, they will lose touch and umbilical meaning.
 - (b) In Zambian cultures, only men marry and not women. Consider this question for example, how do you say "Jane married Andrew" in a local languages? You will realise that the way you say it in a local language is different from English.
 - (c) In terms of family relations in traditional societies, a young brother or a friend to your father is your father, but this is not the case in English Language.
 - (d) When greeting in local languages, there is much usage

of paralinguistic features that are different from those in English language. For instance, Silozi uses special body language that is accompanied with words to show respect.

- (iv) Local languages promote and develop a sense of belonging among citizens as there will be a feeling of closeness with one language, one tongue and one country.
- (v) Teaching a child in unknown language burdens the child with two unknowns: The language itself and the subject matter to be learnt (James, 1996:249).
- (vi) Local languages facilitate easy access to information for all Zambians and people can defend themselves in courts.
- (vii) Promoting local languages at national level will provide opportunities for generations to learn Zambian local languages and see the value attached to them at different levels.
- (viii) Promotion of local languages will help citizens to have a reasonable critical consciousness in national affairs and their lives. This is because most citizens will be able to reason at fairly a desirable level such as handling their social welfare and making country decisions such as electing leaders.
- (ix) Promoting local languages will promote more employment or jobs for Zambians because more books would be needed to be written in local languages with available markets and media stations would need more people to translate various information.
- (x) Allowing pupils to learn in the local languages they use when playing allows them to actively participate in class.
- (xi) Learning in local languages that children use when playing will allow them to focus on what they need to learn without burdening them with two unknowns; the language they use to teach and what to learn.

- (xii) Multilingualism should not be seen as a problem but as an asset as it helps people to look at a problem or issues from different perspectives.
- (xiii) In education especially at primary level, some teachers are more comfortable to teach using local languages. In other primary school classrooms, there are some teachers who prefer to code switch when teaching so that they can help children from different language backgrounds understand their topics. This shows that local languages and their related terms are an asset to the Zambian community.

Conclusion

The article discussed aspects of language in education policy with particular focus on the terminologies that have been used to denote Zambian Languages and English language as medium of instruction. It was noted that a few terms used in the different policy documents were related in the manner and context in which they were used. Some terminologies had similar meanings while others had different ones but used in similar contexts. In the latest policies, they used a familiar language as a medium of instruction for teaching literacy in early grades. While this is the case in policies, there is a different situation in practice as teaching and learning materials were produced exclusively in the seven regional official languages. In other words, the term familiar language was loosely used in policies as the practice in schools was completely different confined to the seven regional languages. It is important that policy makers use terminologies concisely and appropriately to guide readers and the nation.

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