



An Assessment of the effectiveness of Familiar local Languages in Primary School Colleges of Zambia.

A Case of Colleges of Education in Central Province of Zambia.

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Abstract *The recent revision to the Zambian national curriculum mandates that pupils in grades 1-4 learn in a familiar local language while English is introduced as a subject in the second grade. This study sought to investigate the effectiveness of teacher training colleges in the teaching of Zambian languages. The study revealed that most of the teachers who are deployed to these primary schools lack communicative competency in local familiar languages, as a result, they resort to teaching in English. This study revealed that teacher training institutions do not prepare these teachers adequately in the communicative competencies in local languages. A survey was carried out in five colleges of education in Central Province and ten primary schools in the same province of Zambia. The study made a number of recommendations to both ministry of education and teacher training institutions so as to consider teaching pre-service teachers communicative competencies in familiar local languages.*

Key words: Medium of instruction, teacher training institutions, communicative competence, familiar local languages.

Introduction

Zambia is a multiethnic and multilingual nation in which many languages and dialects are spoken. Selection of appropriate language of instruction in

lower primary schools has been the point of debate by both policy makers and academicians. In order to meet this diversity, Zambia has developed an educational language policy with regional official languages as the medium of instruction (MOI) from grade one to four in public primary schools. According to the 2013 curriculum framework, English is taught as a subject at lower primary section and used as medium of instruction from the fifth grade to tertiary level while Zambian languages are introduced as subjects. However, in private owned primary schools, English has continued to be used as medium of instruction at lower primary level despite the new policy. However, both the public and private school systems view the other's medium of instruction as an obstacle to the child's learning process. It has been noted without doubt that one major advantage of using English as medium of instruction in schools is the availability of teachers to efficiently and effectively teach in primary schools. On the other hand, this policy of promoting the use of familiar local languages as media of instruction in lower primary schools is facing a challenge of acute shortage of teachers who speak or have communicative ability to teach children in familiar local languages. Despite the declaration of this language policy, a good number of primary schools, especially in urban areas, still use English as medium of instruction in lower primary sections.

According to the ministry of education policy briefs (2015), there is a danger of uncoordinated and unguided teaching approaches in private teacher training institutions with grave implications for the education system. This report reveals that most of the teachers who graduate from these mushrooming private colleges are ill prepared to teach in lower primary schools. Even in public teacher training institutions, pedagogical approaches to teaching literacy does not help pre-service teachers acquire competences in teaching these local languages.

This study seeks to assess the effectiveness of the training of teachers in colleges of education and what role these institutions can play to alleviate and mitigate the challenges faced by schools in the implementation of the familiar local languages medium of instruction policy in lower primary schools.

2. Literature Review

Globally, there are 50-75 million 'marginalized' children who are not enrolled in school. Children whose primary language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out of school or fail in early grades. Research has shown that children's first language is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout primary school (UNESCO, 2008a). Arnold et al (2006) points out that in spite of growing evidence and parent demand, many educational systems around the world insist on exclusive use of one or sometimes several privileged languages. This means excluding other languages and with them the children who speak them. Barcu et al (2004) report that abandoning children's mother tongue within the educational environment does not only affect the vitality of the home language but puts the children's cultural identity at the risk of extinction as well.

3. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess the effectiveness of the training of teachers and what role colleges of education can play in the implementation of the use of familiar local languages as media of instruction in lower primary schools.

4. Objectives

1. To establish whether teacher training institutions take into account the local language proficiency of applicants before admission
2. To establish whether or not posting of teachers to various regions takes into account the local language proficiency of those teachers before posting them.
3. To establish the availability of the recommended and prescribed reading materials in the various zonal languages used as language of instruction in colleges.
4. To establish whether or not teacher training institutions teach language competences in those zonal or regional languages.

5. Methodology

(i) Research Design

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse data. This concept of combining methods is used bearing in mind that any method used on its own has limitations and bias which could be reduced by using many approaches.

(ii) Site Selection and Target Population

This study was conducted in five teacher training institutions and ten primary schools in Central Province of Zambia. The target population was 10 lecturers, 20 students training as primary school teachers five human resources officers from the District Education Board (DEB) offices and 20 primary school teachers from selected schools within the Province.

Random sampling was used to select the 20 students and 20 primary school teachers for the study. Purposive sampling was used to select primary college lecturers and Human resources officers from DEBS. Purposive sampling is the method of sampling based on the judgment of the researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample from the population.

(iii) Data Collection

The study used the questionnaires, interviews, and observations as research instruments. The questionnaires were distributed to students and serving teachers while interviews were carried out on lecturers and Human resources officers. The researcher also observed the use of medium of instruction in lower primary school lessons.

(iv) Data Analysis

Processing of the interview and questionnaire data included descriptive analysis and categorizing similar items into themes and sub-headings.

6. Findings and Discussions

The following are the findings of the study:

(i) Pedagogical approach to language and literacy during teacher training.

When asked whether student teachers are taught language competencies in specific familiar local languages at colleges, all the 20 students indicated that oral communicative and other competences in zonal languages are not taught in primary school colleges but general linguistic aspects and methodology. They pointed out that only examples in individual local languages are done during literacy lessons. They also felt that methodology without practical use and knowledge of the language is not adequate. Some lecturers interviewed suggested that local languages should be taught the same way French is taught in colleges and university where students are taught both language methodology and oral competencies in the language. Teachers in schools also responded that they were not effectively taught local language contents during training, therefore, could not effectively teach in the familiar local languages. They also suggested that primary school teachers' training institutions should make sure that language lecturers should be able to speak and teach at least two or three regional or zonal languages at college. As revealed by the study, colleges of education can play a vital role in facilitating the effective use of local familiar languages in primary schools. Let primary teachers training institutions allow each student to use any of the familiar languages during literacy lectures. Every primary school student teacher should be assessed in at least one familiar

language communicative competence so as to effectively teach in lower primary school sections.

(ii) Lack of language communicative competency consideration during teacher deployment

The study revealed that there is no familiar language competency consideration by the ministry of education during the deployment of primary school teachers. Responding to this question, all the District human resource officers stated that language proficiency is not a factor during recruitment and deployment of primary school teachers to schools. Human resource officers in all the districts indicated that deployment of teachers is dependent and based on the need and vacancies available in schools. New teachers can be posted to any school regardless of the local language used in the region or district. As such teachers may not teach effectively because they may not be competent to teach in the language used to teach in that region. They suggested that teacher training institutions can help the ministry by indicating the familiar local language studied on the students' statement of results so as to post the student teacher to the regions and schools where the studied language is spoken.

This problem of teachers failing to effectively teach in familiar local languages in primary schools is a serious crisis. District Education Boards should consider local language proficiency in student teachers when deploying them. As suggested by respondents, colleges should indicate the local language proficiency on the statement of result or testimonials in order to enable the DEBS deploy teachers to schools where individual teachers' familiar languages are used.

(iii) Availability of teaching and learning materials in the familiar languages

When asked about the availability of the recommended and prescribed learning and teaching materials in zonal languages, lecturers in public colleges stated that they have recommended books in various regional languages while those in private teacher training institutions revealed that they don't have adequate local languages books. However, students reported that books in all the zonal

languages are available but are used for reference by students who are speakers of respective regional languages. The problem which students faced is lack lecturers who can fluently read and guide students in certain local languages.

As revealed by the study, private colleges of education lack recommended and prescribed books in various local familiar languages. This situation has perpetuated the failure by some teachers to teach in familiar languages in primary schools. The Provincial standards officers should strictly monitor mushrooming teacher training institutions in order to ensure that they have and use prescribed local language books.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

More research is needed to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the language policy of using familiar local languages as media of instruction in primary schools and make strong proposal on how Zambian languages should be taught in colleges.

The ministry should in collaboration with colleges, consider teachers' local languages proficiency when deploying them to schools. To implement this, teacher training institutions should indicate on student teachers statement of results or testimonials the local language the teacher is familiar with.

This study has revealed that the training of primary school teachers in colleges does not take into account the communicative competence of trainee teachers in familiar languages used as media of instruction in lower primary schools. It has also been revealed that private teacher training institutions do not have adequate recommended books in various local familiar languages.

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