

Implementation of the 2006 Education Amendment Act on Indigenous Languages in Zimbabwe: A Case of the Shangaan Medium in Cluster 2 Primary Schools in the Chiredzi District

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Abstract. This research investigated the extent to which the 2006 Education Amendment Act was being implemented in selected Zimbabwean schools. The amendments were intended to usher into education most of the formerly neglected indigenous languages with the hope of propping up learner performance in schools. The research sought to establish the attitudes of teachers, school heads, pupils and parents towards the use of Shangaan as the medium of instruction in schools where the language is commonly used as L1 in the community. Attitudes of language users were seen to be a significant factor in education language innovation. The research recognizes that there is a gap between policy enactment and policy implementation. Policy implementation will either succeed or fail depending on the attitudes of implementers and the user community.

Keywords: Shangaan, Shona, indigenous, attitudes, user community, Zimbabwe.

Background

Like most of the African states, Zimbabwe is a multilingual country. As such, choice of language for use in the promotion of literacy and basic education for citizens has been debated for quite some time. This has been due to the view that the learner should be educated for his/her own benefit and ultimately for the benefit of the society (McNab 1989). Therefore, in an attempt to strike a balance between these two ends, Zimbabwe embarked on language policy innovation in 2006 (Education Amendment Act 2006). After independence in 1980, Zimbabwe had fashioned its first Education Act in 1987 meant to address the perceived (by some) negative dominance of the English Language where only Shona and Ndebele (the two main indigenous languages) were allocated inferior status

with the rest of the indigenous languages having no recognised role in education (Chimhundu 1984). Chimhundu (in Roy-Campbell & Gwete 2000; see also Royneland 1997) sadly notes that in the 1987 Education Act, the Zimbabwean government had failed to honour the proposal presented by the Minority Languages Committee in 1985 that in areas where there were dominant, specified indigenous languages, these should be taught in addition to Shona and Ndebele. The proposal was in response to debates and experiments on suitability of L1/L2 as medium of instruction in schools. The debate had been exacerbated by the UNESCO (1953) claim that L1 is the best medium for infant education.

Owing to heightened debate and accusatory complaints to the effect that poor performance in schools were partly a result of the use of an L2 as medium of instruction in education, the Zimbabwean government embarked on language innovation that culminated in the 2006 Education Amendment Act. In the amendments, a new section on language use replaced the old Section 62, Chapter 25:4. Part of the new section reads;

1. *Subject to this section, all the three main languages of Zimbabwe, namely, Shona, Ndebele and English shall be taught on an equal time basis in all schools up to Form Two level,*
2. *In areas where indigenous languages other than those mentioned in Section (1) are spoken, the Minister may authorise the teaching of such languages in schools in addition to those specified in Section (1),*
3. *The Minister may authorize the teaching of foreign languages in schools,*
4. *Prior to Form One, any of the languages referred to in Sections (1) & (2) may be used as the medium of instruction, depending upon which language is more commonly spoken or better understood by the pupils.*

One can note that pronouncing policy in education is one thing but implementing that policy is another. In spite of good intentions in policy formulation, there can be various factors that may affect the implementation of the said policy. One of such factors is language attitudes. As such, these researchers got inspired to investigate attitudes of language users towards the implementation of the language policy amendments in the sampled school communities. Attitudes have the capacity to affect policy implementation (Kadodo et al 2012). Research elsewhere shows that language choice for individuals tends to be influenced by culture, politics and economics (Diamond 1993). Language attitudes raises the question of what language users prefer when confronted by an array of competing interests ranging from social to economic? Choices are arrived at after serious balancing acts for individual users be it learners, parents, teachers, school managers or education managers. The dilemma implied here makes it necessary to investigate and ascertain language users' choices and the reasons they attach for such language choices. The implementation of the language policy as directed by the 2006 Education Amendment Act in Zimbabwe is subject to users' attitudes.

Research Question

What are the language attitudes of pupils, parents, teachers and school heads at

Nandi, Mwenje and Nyahanga primary schools towards the use of Shangaan as medium of instruction as provided for in the 2006 Language Amendment Act?

Conceptual framework

1. Language and education

Language is one of the most essential asserts gifted to humans, indeed a miracle that defines their existence (Aitchinson 2008). Being a key to communication, language can bring human beings together as much as it can set them apart. One primary cause of division among communities is differentiation of languages roles in education. Defining language, Finocchiaro (in Brown 1987:5) says that it is "a system of arbitrary ... symbols which permit ... people in a given culture, or other people who have learnt the system of that culture, to communicate or to interact". Thus, apart from both the vocal and visual, "a language has a dual character... [as] a means of communication and a carrier of culture" (Roy-Campbell & Gwete 2000:7). Durckheim (in Blackledge & Hunt 1985) defines education as an influence exercised by a generation on those not yet ready for social life [or those who wield power over those without]. In other words, communicating through language is one of the channels through which particular norms and values of a society can be transmitted from one generation to the next. Undermining the language of a people, therefore, devalues their dignity and leads to, unfortunately, a painfully slow death of such languages (Open Space 2008; waThiongo 1993). As McNab (1989:11) notes, "education is perceived as the terrain for excellence where language related inequalities and discrimination are manifested". In other words, education must navigate through this terrain of language use to ensure that all cultural groups are catered for. Language is one of the significant factors in education that may lead to either the educability or miss-educability of learners. It can have a telling effect on the achievement of learners defining the quality of (or lack of) learning and teaching in educational institutions. It is on this basis that some researchers advocate for mother-tongue education seen as more effective for mastery of educational concepts (See Open Space 2008; Adegbija 1994; Bamgbose 1991; Mupande 2006; Brock-Utne 1993).

This research argues that every language is (or can be) an effective and efficient tool for its users in education so long those users have firm control of that language. Firm control of language implies speaker capacity in both the linguistic and social nuances of the given language. The negation and relegation of a language from an education system in a country is tantamount to excluding the speaker community from national and developmental activities. For this reason, the United Nations propagated the universal declaration of linguistic rights (Open Space 2008) as paragon for the existence of even the so called minority communities. Language is a kaleidoscope that unlocks various meanings of existence for its users. Where learners, participants or community members are in firm control of the means of engagement (language as one key), they are able to display their abilities and contributions. Undermining a people's language is equally undermining their confidence, ability and contributions. Use of unfamiliar language leads to bad results (Prah 2000). This research was guided by these beliefs regarding the intricate relationship between language

and education, thus seeking to find out to what extent the 2006 Language Amendment Act was being implemented in selected schools. One can note that language users' attitudes are key to the implementation of language innovation (Kadodo et al 2012). This research sought to examine language attitudes of pupils, parents, teachers and school heads at Nandi, Mwenje and Nyahanga primary schools towards the use of Shangaan as medium of instruction as stated in the 2006 Language Amendment Act.

2. Attitudes to policy

An attitude is "an organized predisposition to think, feel, perceive, and behave toward referent or cognitive object ... an enduring structure of beliefs that predisposes the individual to behave selectively toward attitude referent" (Taylor et al., 1997: 130; Ajzen, 1988:4; Kerlinger, 1986: 453; Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2006: 738). In fact, attitudes are the "very general evaluations that people hold of themselves, other people, objects and issues" (Tesser, 1995: 196). Beyond the basic functions of language, the roles that we subtly assign to various languages at our disposal reflect what attitudes we hold of each of these languages (Adler & Rodman 2001). The undertones in this move are the transfer, in dosages, of the said attitudes (positive or negative) to the unsuspecting language users. This is done through subtle insinuations that learning through language A leads to employment and better life whilst learning through language B may lead to lack of this and that. This method is borrowed from most colonised worlds where it has been successfully used to shape oppressed people's preferences. What we think about a language (cognitive attitude), what we feel about it (affective attitude) and what we actually do with that language (behavioural attitude) (Taylor et al 1997; Child 1993) are clear attitudinal demonstrations of the values we attach to each of the languages that are at our disposal. Consequently, the said attitudes will shape how we use language in the various activities of our lives. In the same manner, this also has visible influence regarding whether language policy innovation will or will not be successfully implemented.

These researchers note that issues of language use are always bounded in power struggles as demonstrated during the colonial processes in various parts of the world. In the then Rhodesia (Zimbabwe now), there was incessant tutelage that English was 'the language' whilst the local ones were of no consequence. As Diamonds (1993) at <http://www.pre.org> (accessed 20/08/2011) notes, "when a people have been told for many years that their cultures [*so their languages too – our emphasis*] are worthless, they come to believe it". Consequently, this created positive attitudes (in most colonised people) towards colonisers' languages whilst conversely creating negative ones for indigenous languages that had been disempowered by lack of economic rewards for them (Kadodo et al 2012). Ironically, at independence, there has been unequal empowerment of indigenous languages in Zimbabwe. The 1987 Education Act tended to raise some languages (notably Shona and Ndebele) to national languages at the exclusion of the rest of other local languages. Regrettable to say is that the same power struggles hitherto stated regarding the colonial times came to haunt the language use in an independent state. Linguistic imperialism, hence likewise

cultural oppression, can be practiced even in democracies with the pretext of national unity which can be used to impose some languages over others. This, in our view, is no different from the ways used by former colonisers. Clearly, this explains how Shangaan, like other indigenous languages, was left in the cold for a number of years in an independent Zimbabwe without any meaningful role in education. It was not until the 'noise' was getting louder and louder for recognition of other indigenous languages that the 2006 Education Amendment Act was gazetted. However, it is one thing to gazette policy but quite another to implement it. It was the intention of this research to establish the extent to which the Shangaan medium was being used (2006 Education Amendment Act) in selected schools in a Shangaan speaking community given the long history of linguistic and cultural oppression both in the pre and post independent Zimbabwe. The question begging answer is, 'what measures were put in place to incentivise its use for users to have embarked on counter-attitudinal processes?'

Factors that may raise or impede language policy implementation

Successful implementation of language policy is dependent on various factors which explain why some policies fail but others succeeding. Policy without stringent implementation measures has slim chances of succeeding. In short, for policy to succeed, the operating environment must be permissive and supportive creating a 'want' in the users to see that policy working.

One key factor for language policy to work is the job market that should act as an incentive for the said policy to be favourable to the user community (Open Space 2008). Unless there are promises for the products of that policy being employable, then that policy may not be supported by the user community. Whatever language is economically incentivised will tend to attract positive attitudes from the user community. In close proximity is the role of media (both print and electronic) which can play a supportive role or become the devil's advocate (Ndinde & Kadodo 2014). Media is key in shaping people's attitudes by the way how it will campaign for or against a view or language. For instance, the nature of programmes and the language employed to air them could have an influence on people's language preferences. The points noted above are, in turn, dependent on the commitment of the leadership of a country (Roy-Campbell & Gwete 2000). A language policy gazetted by leadership not politic enough will hardly succeed. The policy itself must be outlined in succinct language leaving no room for speculation or debate as to the meaning of statements. In other words, tentative and speculative language must be avoided so that each instruction is understood for what it is. An astute leadership will first ensure that relevant teaching staff and appropriate teaching materials are in place prior to gazetting education policy. It is no point pronouncing an education policy when appropriate preparations have not been done because that is tantamount to pronouncing its failure before implementation starts. Banda's 1968 Chewa only medium in Malawi and Ratsiraka's 1972 Malagachisation in Madagasca are cases in point. In short, it is important to look at both facilitating and debilitating factors within the operating environment so as to take corrective measures for policy implementation to succeed.

Methodology

The research was guided by the descriptive survey design in an effort to understand the attitudes of pupils, teachers, headmasters and parents at the three selected schools towards implementation of the 2006 language innovation. The descriptive survey was seen as suitable for measuring user's attitudes (Chikoko & Mhloyi 1985) regarding the implementation of the 2006 language innovation. This research employed mixed methods (Maree 2010) where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Use of the mixed methods helped in the triangulation to increase reliability. Questionnaire, interview and observation data collection methods were employed. These collection methods were chosen for their versatility in data collection of users' language preferences. The questionnaire is a self-report instrument that guarantees anonymity of research participants (Best & Khan 1993) thus increasing chances for participants to reveal their deep-seated feelings regarding attitude referent. On the other hand, face-to-face interviews increased rapport with participants allowing elicitation (Brenner 2006) of information. These researchers also felt they needed to observe a couple of lessons at the research site to ascertain visible reactions of learners when what language (or combination of languages) was/were used. This was a useful method for learning learner behaviours (Sapsford & Jupp 2006) that betrayed learners' language preferences.

Selection of participants

Purposive and random sampling techniques were used in sample selection. Whereas the three school heads (of the three schools) were purposively selected, ninety pupils, thirty teachers (from the three schools) and ninety parents (of learners at the three schools) were randomly selected using the lottery method.

Data collection procedures

Four sets of short questionnaires were designed (heads', teachers', pupils' & parents') and these were distributed and collected by the researchers. Participants were allowed ample time to complete these each on his/her own. Interviews were also organised and carried out by these researchers (the three school heads, ten teachers and ten parents) whereupon the data was recorded in field notes. Six lesson observations were done by the researchers to get a close feel of what was happening at classroom level. Data was also collected in form of field notes on what transpired. The data collected was organised into contingent tables for analysis with interview data thematically factored into the discussion.

Results and discussion

Table 1: Participants' language choices

Question theme	Language choice	Heads	Teachers	Pupils	Parents	Summaries of reasons
Preferred medium for education	English	3(100%)	18(60%)	63(70%)	52(58%)	-pass exams; -most books are in English
	Shona	-	10(33%)	15(17%)	18(20%)	-cannot understand English
	Shangaan	-	2(7%)	12(13%)	20(22%)	-understand Shangaan
Best medium for education	Shona	-	6(20%)	15(17%)	12(13%)	-teachers & learners understand it
	English	3(100%)	14(47%)	63(70%)	70(78%)	-language used in exams & for employment
	Shangaan	-	10(33%)	12(13%)	8(9%)	-we can understand it
Learners' favourite language	Shangaan English Shona			16(18%) 45(50%) 29(32%)		
Language used by teachers to explain concepts	English		8(27%)			-it is the language of examinations
	Shangaan		6(20%)			-pupils offer correct answers
	Shona		16(53%)			-pupils participate
Learners' L1	English Shona Shangaan			1(1%) 40(44%) 49(55%)		

The 'global' picture of results from the presented data in Table 1 above and Table 2 below reveal the respondents' attitudes to the three languages that are at their disposal. In Table 1, 100% of participating school heads, 60% of teachers, 70% of learners and 58% of parents preferred that English continue to be the

medium of instruction in their schools. Key to their decisions as revealed in their reasons are issues to do with the current situation where examinations for all content subjects are in English as well as employment opportunities that still use the English Language as gate-keeper. After all, English remains the granary for key information and technology that teachers and learners require for their teaching/learning activities in content subjects. For that reason, it becomes logical for them to prefer a language medium that they perceive as giving learners better life opportunities and that language in their view is English. In spite the fact that 55% were L1 Shangaan and 44% were Shona L1 speakers, the majority of learners were very pragmatic thus, preferred English because in their view it promises employment opportunities.

There were other issues that were cited by teachers during interviews where they felt that Shangaan as an education medium did not have the terminology range to adequately convey the scientific and commercial 'worlds'. In conjunction with this perceived problem is the non-availability of reading materials even for Shangaan itself as a subject, let alone reading materials written in Shangaan for content areas. These researchers, however, note that languages can grow depending on what range of uses we assign them. Likewise, Shangaan can develop to cover the range that the users so desire it to cover so long we avoid the pitfalls of purism where we want languages to be what they were centuries ago. Regarding materials and manpower development, these are issues that can be resolved say in phases provided the policy-makers, implementers and user communities are all agreed on the necessity for such move. Simply put, policy development should not be conceived in the top-down form which, more than often, leads to tissue rejection (Obanya 1987). There is need for extensive positive consultations.

As implied above, respondents also noted that none of the teachers on the ground at the time of data gathering was ever trained to teach in Shangaan. This was seen to be a handicap to the implementation of the 2006 policy. This, coupled with the reality of lack of materials on the ground, questions the sincerity of policy-makers in gazetting the 2006 Education Amendment Act. The ground surely was not 'flattened' for indigenous languages to be used as media of instruction in schools. Scales have always, and sadly remains so, in favour of the English Language. There has not been any attempt to incentivise the indigenous languages as a measure for users to commit counter-attitudinal processes and develop positive attitudes towards them.

Table 2 below give results of observations made by these researchers when they attended some of the lessons in the research schools.

Table 2: Observed effects of language use in 6 lessons

Lesson No	Areas & behaviours noted				
	Subject taught	Language used	Code switching /mixing	Pupil's visual expression	Participation level
1	Religious & Moral Ed.	More English than Shona	Low	Look-warm mostly	Moderate
2	Mathematics	English	None	Indifferent	Very low
3	Mathematics	More Shona & Shangaan than English	High	Enthusiastic & confident	Very high for Shangaan, high for Shona & lower for English
4	Social Studies	English but with more Shona & Shangaan	High	Enthusiastic & excited	Very high in either Shona or Shangaan than English
5	Mathematics	English & a little bit of Shona	Low	Look-warm mostly	Low
6	Environmental Science	English & a little bit of Shangaan	Moderate	Look-warm	Moderate

Lesson observations, as shown in Table 2, allowed these researchers a small window to observe language use and learner responsiveness in language ecology. The researchers note that overall teachers maintained English Language as the focal but with varying degrees of permissibility of Shangaan and Shona. Apart from Lesson 2 as shown in the table where the teacher enforced all English, the other 5 lessons had varying degrees of code switching/mixing. The pattern emerging from the lessons seemed to drive to a conclusion that the more permissible the teacher was to code switching/mixing (Lessons 3 & 4 in Table 2) the more the classroom activities were liberated allowing learner hype and participation (Freire 1972). As Freire notes, such environment leads to the traditional teachers' and learners' roles mutating allowing the teacher and learner each to be both an educator and learner at the same time. This would create classroom partnerships where learners are carefully and subtly moulded into mature critical learners. On the contrary, the teaching/learning environment in Lesson 2 presented a contrast to Lessons 3 and 4. It is not unreasonable, in the case of Lesson 2, to be worried that the teacher may be tempted to 'tell' the learners his/her own knowledge than creating enabling environment for learners to engage issues leading to their own learning. Else

how are these learners engaging issues in this handicapped and ominously quiet environment? Based on the observations above, we conclude that the question of what language of instruction in education matters.

Looking at the sets of findings in this research one notices some internal contradictions. Significant to note is that learners seem to enjoy, and possibly learn more meaningfully when they are in control of the language of education. This should, supposedly, see them opt for their L1 as medium of instruction. However, when learners consciously make a choice they still opt for a language they may not have efficiency in. The matrix in the maze is that their conscious choice of language is driven by what they yearn for in their future lives, more of a wish-driven choice. This is what holds sway to their language attitudes. Unfortunately, a number of education systems today have become so mechanistic and examination-driven that teachers can just coach learners in their quiet environments to pass the national examinations in spite of their low proficiency. Is this not possibly the reason why the industry sector is perennially complaining of raw graduates from some of our institutions?

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this research one concludes that choice of language of education is not always a rational process but is more often emotional. Notwithstanding that learners may not be efficient in a language they may still opt for that language as medium of instruction owing to their perceived life opportunities. For that reason, before legislating any language policy there is need to ascertain users' language attitudes. If these are not in tandem with the proposed language we would rather incentivise the intended language for users and implementers to prefer such language. This research also concludes that contingent planning should precede gazetting of any education policy. This is possible in situations where there are open and well-intended consultations. The fact that this was not meaningfully done as precursor to gazetting of the 2006 Education Amendment Act in Zimbabwe, the innovation has not been embraced by the user community and therefore has not succeeded.

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