

LOCAL LANGUAGES AS A RESOURCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: WAY FORWARD FOR IMPLEMENTING LOCAL LANGUAGE TEACHING IN BOTSWANA¹

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Abstract

The decision to develop languages in education policy to implement Botswana local languages in education marks a big milestone in the incorporation of languages in education in Botswana. Hitherto, only Setswana and English were the only school languages. However, at the beginning of 2023 some of the other indigenous languages have started being used in schools, and the phased introduction of remaining ones will be done after necessary developments are undertaken to resource and capacitate them. This paper reports on the languages in education policy and its bearing on the introduction of local languages in Botswana schools. It discusses some technical and strategic issues that need to be considered for the implementation to fully succeed. The paper takes the view that allowing other languages in school provides a learning resource that will efficiently facilitate the learning processes, ensuring inclusivity, equity, democratization of the curriculum and the fulfilment of the ideal of education for all.

Keywords: Botswana; languages in education policy; language as a resource. primary school

1.0 Introduction

Botswana is a multilingual nation (Chebanne, 2022; Anderson & Janson, 1997). However, until January 2023 only Setswana and English featured uniquely in the education system (Chebanne & Mogara, 2022; Janson & Tsonope, 1991). It is generally acknowledged that teaching children in their home language at the formative stages creates a crucial foundation for their cognitive and affective development (Chebanne & Moumakwa, 2017). A home language is the language which the child acquired and mastered at home before school. This may or may not be the mother tongue of the parents, who may not use their original language at home. Young learner

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who go through home language education usually grasp concepts and skills in depth and develop high analytical and critical thinking due to the use of a systematically acquired and well mastered language (Jotia & Jankie, 2015). Moreover, they normally develop high confidence and proactive approaches to life. In this case the home language becomes not only the first language of the child but also the primary language which associates the child with its home environment, culture, and first linguistic skills. Once such a language is well mastered, it becomes easy for the child to transfer relevant language skills and competence to other languages that the child will learn (Kamwendo et al., 2009).

Thus, a UNESCO report published in 1953 known as *UNESCO's Report on the Use of the Vernacular Languages in Education*, highlights the importance of the child's first language as a crucial factor for a healthy educational process. Most developed countries have thus used their own home languages throughout the educational echelon and have thus deepened their conceptual and cognitive skills. Most underdeveloped nations have however tended to use foreign languages as their official languages and have thus grappled with alienated concepts and skills. Most African countries, including Botswana, are in this category, where English, French, Portuguese, German, etc., are used as languages of education from formative years. The use of foreign or ex-colonial languages often alienates the young learners from their home environment in terms of linguistic background, cultural set-up, and social practices. Many children tend to remain silent when asked questions in an unfamiliar language but respond confidently and resourcefully when asked the same question in their home language. Many studies carried out in Botswana have revealed that children from minority languages, particularly the San, abandon school at early age or perform unsatisfactorily in class. This is due to the shock that they experience at school in terms of linguistic, cultural, and social alienation. Also, many children feel comfortable in a class taught in a language and cultural environment in which they are familiar than in a non-familiar language and cultural set-up. The introduction of local languages in pre-primary and early primary schools can be a very significant step in Botswana's educational system as it will allow in-depth cognitive and affective development in children and thus create a solid base for subsequent education at the higher levels. Moreover, this move will provide equal opportunities for all Botswana children as it will level out the ground, thus enhancing equality and democracy in the educational system.

2.0 Theoretical framework

The dilemma that the Botswana languages situation exhibits is that equality guaranteed by the Constitution does not guarantee equity in education (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004; Bagwasi, 2016). This equity has to do with equal opportunities in learning, especially at lower levels of education. The continued absence of other languages in education has resulted in an undeclared discrimination of ethnic linguistic minorities by the law and in practice, and indeed an unrestrained linguistic imperialism (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2002). The National Cultural Council (Botswana Government, 2001) and the Botswana National Cultural Council: Strategic Plan 2005 – 2008 (Botswana Government, 2005) view culture as performing arts (dances and songs) and as the engine for cultural expression. Quite alarmingly, it seems that the recognition and promotion of

local languages is seen as being outside of this factor (Chebanne & Moumakwa, 2017). The Botswana National Cultural Council: Strategic Plan 2005 – 2008 (Botswana Government, 2005) cannot be used to respond to the critical question of promoting and managing multilingualism in the country.

Multilingualism and multiculturalism situation of Botswana needs proper planning by law to respond to ethnic and linguistic rights (Batibo, 2015a; Jotia & Jankie, 2015; Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004). Ruiz (1984) discusses language planning models where languages can be viewed as a problem or right (resource). When a language is viewed as a problem, state policies adopt a minimalist models where fewer manageable languages are used, and the rest of languages are ignored. In minimalist models it is hoped that speakers of other languages would adopt languages that are officially put in use. This model is viewed by Ruiz (1984) as encouraging assimilation of speakers of marginalized languages into the mainline language speakers. The ultimate aim of such a language policy approach is to engender social and linguistic homogeneity.

According to Batibo (2011), most of African countries grapple with the following questions:

With regards to the language policy, which formulation would be the most apposite? What are the modalities for the optimum use of languages? Should the question of minority languages be a concern? How should one manage the problems of ethnicity which are perpetuated by linguistic diversity? What language or languages should be used in education? (pp.13)

Batibo (2015a) reports that African governments deal with multilingualism by opting for four types of language use: a) the colonial language, b) the nationally dominant languages, c) provincially dominant languages, and d) local languages. Botswana is among countries that opted not to have any clear language policy but left language use types a) and b) to operate. A few theoretical frameworks can be cited to account for the current language policy and language situation of minority speech communities in Botswana.

Fishman (1974) highlights six types of language policy, namely status quo, exclusive, partially exclusive, inclusive, hierarchical, and isolating. As the term entails, the inclusive language use policy considers all indigenous languages to be used in all domains such as education, administration, media, etc., (Batibo, 2015a; Tsonope, 1995). The partially inclusive policy considers major indigenous languages for elevation to national level to be used in administration, education, media, etc. The exclusive language use policy limits how many languages can be used and may take a dominant indigenous language and treats it as a national language to be used in all public communication domains (education, media, administration, etc.). The hierarchical language use policy presents languages use from official, national, and regional (district) with allocated functions (education, administration, media, etc.) at these levels. Higher functions such as the

judiciary, higher education and national affairs are allocated to the dominant top language (Batibo 2015a). The status quo language use policy is where the colonial language policy is adopted for use as official, national, and all the indigenous languages are neglected (Tsonope, 1995). The isolation language use policy is whereby national languages are put above international or colonial languages and a policy of subtractive bilingualism is applied. In this situation nationals can choose which foreign language to learn for a specific purpose that may include getting contact or dealings with international or foreign partners.

The current national language policy practice in Botswana is exclusive as it limits languages for official and national use and this is why other indigenous languages are marginalized in Botswana. Contrary to this exclusive language use policy dispensation are the inclusive language policy (in which all languages are put on board, as national languages) as well as the hierarchical language policy (in which the major languages have more (national) functions and the smaller languages are recognised and given some functions (with smaller/localised public functions). Ruiz (1984) presents language planning by reorienting language planning as a resource, and as confirmed in Botswana by Batibo (2015a) and Nyati-Ramahobo (2004) is helpful in accounting and planning for languages in Botswana.

3.0 Recognition of the importance of local languages in education

Botswana has long recognized the importance of local languages in education. In a Government Report published in 1994 known as Revised National Policy on Education it was recommended under Rec. 32. 3(iii), that:

with respect to the Junior Certificate Curriculum, in addition to core subjects, each student should select (...) three optional subjects (...), at least, one (...) should be from (...) general studies (with a choice of) a Third Language” (RNPE, 1994, p. 4).

It was envisaged or thought that the ‘third language’ was one of the Botswana local languages. This was a significant move for Botswana in recognizing the importance of local languages, other than Setswana and English, in the educational system. In order to realize this Third Language Teaching Project, the then Ministry of Education appointed a team of language experts to conduct a country-wide survey to establish the following: The number of languages spoken in Botswana, the number of speakers of each of these languages, the level of development of each of these languages in terms of writing systems, degree of literacy in the language among the speakers, how much material has been published in each of these languages, especially teaching materials, and the number of people who speak, write and can teach the language. The objectives of the survey included the following: a) to collect, process and analyse data on the status of Botswana local languages, b) to recommend the way forward in planning and implementing the Third Language curriculum for Junior Community Secondary schools in Botswana, and c) to

answer the question of how the development of local languages would enhance literacy and improve the quality of life of the communities and the nation at large.

The survey was carried out throughout the country between 2002 and 2003 and at the end of the study a 293-page report titled *A Study of the Third Language Teaching in Botswana* was produced (Batibo et al., 2003). The findings of the survey were far-reaching in that they provided resourceful information on the state of the local (third) languages, spoken in Botswana, other than English and Setswana. The main findings included the following:

- (a) The number of languages spoken in Botswana and the locations where they are found: (27 languages, excluding Setswana, English and the Sign Language)
- (b) Their role and degree of vibrancy: official (1), national (1), regional (3), localized, but vibrant (6), localized, but endangered (16)
- (c) Estimates of the number of mother-tongue speakers of each of these languages (including Setswana and English): Over one million (1), between 150,000 and 200,000 (1), between 30,000 and 149,000 (2), between 10,000 and 29,000 (6), between 5,000 and 9,000 (7), between 1,000 and 4,000 (9), between 500 and 900 (1), below 400 speakers (2)
- (d) The levels of description, including availability of teaching materials: Those with considerable description (12), those with some description (6), those with hardly any description (9)
- (e) The language families to which the languages belonged: Bantu languages (14), Khoisan languages (12), Indo-European languages (2)
- (f) Existence of standard orthography: Those with established orthography (10), those in the process of developing one (5), those without any orthography (12)
- (g) Presence of reading texts in the respective language: Those with abundant reading texts (8), those with limited reading texts (5), those with hardly any texts (14)
- (h) Existence of reference materials: Those with substantial reference materials (8), those with limited reference materials (6), those with practically no reference materials (13)
- (i) Existence of materials on the history and culture of the language: Considerable historical and cultural material (7), limited historical and cultural material (5), no or little historical and cultural material (15)
- (j) Teachers from the respective languages ready to teach those languages: Many available (4), few available (7), non-avoidable (8), no data available (8)
- (k) Preferred mode of delivery: Monolingual education (i.e., use of local language only): (41.4%), bilingual education (i.e., code-mixing with Setswana: (58.6%)).

As a rule, languages, which are spoken across the border in countries with strong local language education, like Namibia, Zambia, and South Africa, are considerably developed in terms of teaching and learning materials, reading texts and availability of teachers (Kamwendo, 2009).

Also, languages which were taught in schools during the colonial period, mainly by missionaries, tend to have books which were used at that time and people who are still literate in these languages. Moreover, languages which are demographically very small usually do not have much literature, as not much description has been carried out. Furthermore, such languages are usually endangered since the young people who belong to the ethnic group tend to shift linguistically to larger languages spoken in their neighbourhood (Batibo et al., 2003; Chebanne, 2020).

4.0 Recent decision to introduce local languages in pre-primary and early primary schools

Subsequent to the approval of the Education and Teaching Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP) by Cabinet in 2015, the education sector has since started the implementation of the recommendations stated in the Plan. One of the major recommendations is the introduction of local languages in the basic education curriculum to foster social justice, pedagogical inclusivity, cultural diversity, and curriculum enrichment. The need to include other languages in the curriculum was further outlined in November 2019 by Government, and the Ministry of Basic Education (MoBE) was tasked with spearheading and coordinating this initiative in collaboration with identified key players. The Faculty of Humanities was approached by MoBE in early January 2020 to advise Government on issues of planning and implementing the project.

5.0 Implementation strategy of the project

In order to make a systematic implementation of the local languages in school project, there is a need to identify the key players, their roles and the processes involved (Chebanne & Mogara, 2022). There are several players in the running of a project such as this Local Languages in Education Policy. The MoBE should be responsible for policy framework, budgetary sources, liaison with pre-primary and early primary schools, identification of teachers, identification of schools in which all or most of the learners belong to one local language, implementation logistics and coordination of the planning and implementation strategy. The other crucial player is the Department of African Languages and Literature (ALL) at the University of Botswana (UB). The Department has experts in linguistics who can be responsible for the provision of information on the language situation in Botswana, levels of language description, development or availability of teaching and learning materials. The Faculty of Education at UB should be mandated to train teachers in teaching methods, conducting in-service teacher workshops and seminars, and design and prepare teaching/learning materials. The Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation should be responsible for designing syllabi, identifying teaching and learning materials, and preparing lesson plans. The other stakeholder is the Department of Information and Broadcasting that should be responsible for providing materials which have been collected on local languages so they could be used in schools (e.g., songs, music, dances, performances, works of art, etc.). Another stakeholder is the Department of Wildlife and Tourism that should provide materials which have been collected on local performances and artifacts, etc., to be used in schools (e.g., songs, dances, performances, works of art, animal names and pictures, and human-animals co-existence.).

The implementation of local languages in education should determine the schools where local languages (other than Setswana) will be taught. The main determining factors are places (mainly small or remote villages) where most of the learners belong to one local language. In such schools, the commonly used local language will be the medium of teaching and learning together with Setswana. A systematic and more directed survey should be conducted in the relevant schools to ascertain if most or all the learners have reasonable proficiency or are motivated enough to learn or use the local language in class, including the introduction of literacy and knowledge about their language.

Chebanne and Mogara (2022) suggest that one critical consideration in the implementation process is the pedagogy, that is, the mode of teaching and learning these local languages. Preferably a bilingual approach with Setswana would be more practical as many learners will already have been exposed to some Setswana and want Setswana as an important medium for future advancement. The predominant teaching and learning medium in the Pre-primary schools will usually be the local language, with explanation of the concepts given also in Setswana to facilitate transition. Then, in the early primary school, Setswana will take over gradually and progressively, so that, at the end of Standard 2, the learner will be ready to transfer his/her learning process to Setswana and English. The time and modality in which Setswana is introduced will depend on the class situation in terms of learner familiarity with Setswana and the rate of transmission.

In regard to the preparation of class materials, where possible, it is important to avoid using established publishers who tend to be expensive and profit minded, and modest materials and modalities, such as spiral binding, typing by secretarial services, cheap photocopying facilities, and using institutions for editorials, proof-reading and typesetting for produced materials could be considered.

The teaching of languages in mixed schools and its pedagogical implication was raised by Chebanne and Mogara (2022) who argued that in cities, towns, and large villages where schools are usually linguistically heterogeneous, that is, where learners come from different linguistic and ethnic background, existing school languages, Setswana, or English, should be used. However, even in these schools, the teachers should be conscious of the multilingual and multicultural background of the learners (Chebanne, 2022). Teachers should therefore understand and acknowledge the heterogeneity of the learners' background and should also make effort to be familiar with each learner's general linguistic and cultural peculiarities. Furthermore, teachers should occasionally introduce various cultural and artistic expressions of some of the ethnic languages, such as songs, dances, performances, translated stories, proverbs, puzzles, or works of art. This will motivate the learners and bring inclusivity and variety in the learning process (Chebanne & Moumakwa, 2017). This entails multiculturalism and training in literacy materials preparations for teachers and by the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation. The

ultimate gain is inclusivity and the ideal of the democratization of the curriculum. A familiar language also infuses important cultural values that are necessary for the child to feel welcome in the school environment (Chebanne, 2015a).

6.0 Categories of languages in the implementation phase

Since the levels of development and preparedness are different for the languages, there is a need to categorize them accordingly. The categories of the languages to be implemented under the Languages Policy in education are as follows:

Category 1: Languages which have substantial materials and teachers

Languages in this category could be taught or used at Pre-primary and early Primary since they have the requisite qualified teachers, relevant teaching and learning materials, appropriate reference materials and well-motivated children and parents. Available materials include primers for Reception, Standard 1 and Standard 2. They also include community resources such as Bible hymn books, and language association texts. Primers were developed in partnership with the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation using community orthographies. Also, such languages are found in places where all or most of the learners speak only the area language as their first and primary language. These languages include Setswana (already in Botswana curriculum), iKalanga (was taught in the past, some materials still available), Afrikaans (materials available in South Africa and Namibia), Shekgalagari (some materials have been developed by missionaries recently), Nama (was taught in the past and some materials still available, also some materials in Namibia), Naro (materials have been developed by missionaries in D'Kar), Chiikuhane (Sesubiya) (some materials in Zambia), Thimbukushu (materials in Namibia), Jul'hoan (materials in Namibia), Silozi (materials in Zambia and Namibia), IsiNdebele, and Chishona (materials mainly found in Zimbabwe).

It was in view of this reality of the available materials that the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation decided to develop suitable primer materials from Reception, Standard 1 and Standard 2 classes. These developed materials are based on the existing curriculum and pedagogy for literacy classes (Chebanne, 2022a; Chebanne & Mogara, 2022). There is, however, a need to verify whether there are teachers in the field and homogenous or near homogenous classes where the language is predominant. In this case, the teaching and learning process will include orthography of the languages, writing skills, reading skills, literacy in the language, history and cultural features of the language, artistic expressions in the language (songs, dances, performances, proverbs, works of art, etc.), and any other relevant topics.

Category 2 languages: Languages that are under-researched or under-documented.

These are languages which cannot currently be included in the implementation of languages in education policy plan. They need more development in one or more of the following areas: 1) orthographies are currently not well developed or standardized and must be finalized for

implementation, 2) teaching and learning materials must be developed and made adequate for literacy, 3) teachers or trained youth need to be prepared for literacy of these languages, 4) some of these speech communities are not motivated towards their language being used in education and advocacy by language associations need to be undertaken, and 5) no schools have been identified yet in which the speakers of the language are the majority or the only ones; progress need to be made towards this.

Languages in this category include: Rugciriku (Rumanyo), Sebirwa, Shua, Nambya (Nandzwa), Khwedam (lAni, Buga, Khwe, lAnda), G|wi, G|lana, and !Xóõ (Taa). Even where these languages lack one or several of the above, the learners in pre-primary and early primary schools could still be introduced to their local language by ex-form 5 youths who are familiar with the languages. This could be done in the following ways: a highlight of the history and culture of the language, narrative on their origin and identity of the speakers, artistic expressions in the language (songs, poems, works of art, etc.), and stories, puzzles, proverbs, etc. All effort should therefore be made to ensure that these languages are well developed to be taught or used in formative levels of education when the times come. This could be done by training teachers, preparing learning materials and creating favourable and conducive school environment.

Category 3: Languages without schools where speakers are sole learners

The languages in this category are not only demographically small but also not developed enough in terms of teaching and learning materials, reference materials or availability of teachers. Usually, such languages are used by adults and elders only as younger people tend to use other languages. Hence there are no schools in which the speakers of these languages are the sole learners. Moreover, the children are usually not excited to learn their languages or use their languages in education. Often the children and their parents have negative attitudes towards these local languages. They usually speak one of the major languages in the area, such as Setswana, iKalanga, Shekgalagari, or Naro. These languages include Tshwa, Kua, Sasi and the variant #Hua/Hoan, Setswapong, #Kx'au//ein (Jul'hoasi (Kaukau)). As mentioned in Batibo et al. (2003), it would not be useful to develop teaching or learning materials for teaching these languages, except for documentation and preservation purposes. However, useful data or documents could be gathered or prepared on these languages and used in classes (such as the picture book on Sasi by Collins and Welstood (nd)). Such works could include highlight of the history and culture of the language, narrative on their origin and identity as told by old people, artistic expressions in the language (songs, poems, performances, works of art, etc.), and stories, puzzles, proverbs, etc.

7.0 Need for benchmarking in the region

There is a need to benchmark with countries where local language teaching and learning in formative years of education has been practiced for a long time. This would provide Botswana with experience, lessons, and caution, as the implementation process moves along. The country in which such policy and practice have existed for a long time is Namibia (Jotia & Jankie, 2015)

which has 26 languages, at least 16 of which are used in pre-primary and primary education. It would be useful to take note on the preparation of materials, course structure, orthography design, teacher training, teaching methods, children motivation, etc in Namibia. The centre which has propelled local language education in Namibia is the Okahandja Educational Centre. It would be useful to visit this Centre and some Namibian schools where local languages are taught. The Ministry of Education and Skills Development could arrange for some teacher experts to visit Namibia or some other country in the SADC region such as Zambia, Mozambique, and Angola.

8.0 Conclusion

The decision to teach local languages in pre-primary and early primary schools is highly significant not only for democratic reasons but also for pedagogical excellence, as the children will now be able to develop solid cognitive and affective attributes. The use of local languages in which children are knowledgeable will create a child friendly class environment and fulfil the ideals of education for all. This inclusivity is also desirable at policy level as it will contribute to improved performance and confidence in learning. Moreover, the rampant drop-out of children from some minorities such as the San could be significantly lowered. However, systematic, and well-coordinated planning needs to be done in order to implement the project effectively. Some retired experts may need to be re-called on short-term basis in order to assist in the implementation phase.

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