



Challenges Teachers Face in Teaching Icibemba in The Secondary Schools in Zambia. A Case Study of Five Selected Public Secondary Schools in Senga Hill Disrtrict of Northern Province of Zambia

Mbalamweshi Bupe

DMI - St.Eugene University.

Abstract- This study investigates the challenges teachers face in teaching Icibemba in secondary schools in Zambia, focusing on five selected public secondary schools in Senga Hill District of Northern Province. The study was motivated by concerns over the declining effectiveness of local language instruction despite its importance in promoting cultural identity and enhancing learners' comprehension. A qualitative case study design was employed, using interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations to collect data from teachers and learners. The findings revealed several challenges, including inadequate teaching and learning materials, lack of specialized teacher training, negative attitudes towards local languages, limited time allocation, large class sizes, and difficulties arising from dialectal variations of Icibemba. Additionally, inconsistencies in language policy implementation and limited professional development opportunities further hinder effective teaching. The study concludes that these challenges significantly affect both teaching quality and learner performance in Icibemba. It recommends increased provision of instructional materials, targeted teacher training, curriculum review, and policy reinforcement to enhance the teaching and learning of Icibemba in secondary schools.

Keywords- Icibemba, local languages, secondary education, teaching challenges, Zambia, language policy, teacher training, Senga Hill District.

I. Introduction

This chapter begins with a background presentation of the problem that will be investigated, purpose of the study, the objectives and research questions through which the objectives were addressed, the significance of the study, limitations, the scope and delimitation of the study, the theoretical framework, reflection of ethical issues and finally the operational definitions of terms as employed in the study. Zambia is a culturally and linguistically diverse nation, home to 73 ethnic groups, each with its own language or dialect. English serves as the official language, predominantly used in governmental, business, and educational contexts (Banda and Mwanza, 2017).

Additionally, seven Zambian languages namely Icibemba, Silozi, Kiikaonde, Luvale, Cinyanja, Lunda, and Chitonga have been designated as regional official languages (MOE, 2013). These regional languages are employed as mediums of instruction from grades one to four, based on their prevalence in specific regions. For instance, Bemba is used in the Northern, Copperbelt, Luapula, and parts of Central and Muchinga Provinces, while Silozi predominates in the Western Province. Similarly,



Chitonga is employed in the Southern Province, Cinyanja in Eastern and Lusaka Provinces, and Lunda, Luvale, and Kiikaonde in the North-Western Province (Banda, 2008 and Nyimbili, 2021). Addressing literacy pedagogical challenges requires targeted professional development and training programs that equip teachers with the skills necessary to teach effectively in multilingual settings. Research highlights the effectiveness of such programs in improving learner outcomes.

For instance, Mumba, Banda, and Chabalengula (2015) demonstrated that Zambian teachers who received specialized training in managing multilingual classrooms significantly improved their students' reading performance. These programs emphasise strategies such as differentiated instruction, culturally relevant teaching, and interactive learning, enabling teachers to navigate the complexities of multilingual education more effectively. Darling-Hammond (2000) and Goldhaber (2002) further affirm that well-prepared teachers are among the most critical school-related factors influencing student achievement. In multilingual settings, where linguistic diversity creates additional complexities, the importance of teacher competence is even more pronounced. Lungu (2019) conducted a study to establish the effects of the use of Cinyanja as a medium of classroom instruction in selected primary schools in multilingual Chilanga district. The study employed a qualitative research design and Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to come up with 26 respondents. Data was collected through, interviews, document analysis, focus group discussions and classroom observations of literacy lessons. The study found that low reading levels were attributed to many other variables which include difficulties in the techniques used in the new literacy policy,

Theoretical Framework

The use of the child's language as a language of learning and language of reading, according to (ADEA 2012: 7), accelerates learning and allows the pupil to develop skills and knowledge that will enhance his or her potential for lifelong learning.

Teacher must construct meaning and meaning systems employed in learning and teaching materials to ensure that pupils learnt to learn as they learn. As such, materials should have content which is related to what is known to learners. The use of these materials must be planned in such a way that they actively involve the learner since learning is an active process. Furthermore, the teacher should bear in mind that the materials should be socially relevant to the learners and engage him/her mentally.

II. Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter focused on revealing the overview of early literacy, its relationship between early literacy and conventional literacy, the language policy in Zambia for early literacy, home literacy environment, effective literacy instruction, early literacy learning and teaching materials and summary of the reviewed literacy.

Overview of Early Literacy

Early literacy refers to the knowledge, skills and attitudes that children develop from birth to around eight years that lay foundation for reading and writing. It begins long before formal schooling and grows through everyday interactions with language, print



and meaningful communication. Early literacy includes the emerging literacy knowledge and skills that infants and toddlers develop at home, in daycare and preschools. These skills form the basis for formal school learning and determine professional and economic prospects throughout life. Early literacy is a crucial aspect of a child's development that lays the foundation for reading and writing skills.

It involves the ability to understand, use, evaluate, and reflect orally and in writing using visual, audio, and digital materials across various disciplines and context. Early literacy activities often referred to as 'preliteracy,' focus on oral language as a foundation for reading. Conversations, storytelling, and exposure to a rich vocabulary help children recognize sounds, sentence structures, and meanings long before they start formal schooling. Evidence-based teaching practices, such as phonics and interactive reading, support early literacy development. National initiatives like Buchstart in Hamburg, Germany, and the Neuvola program in Finland encourage early literacy by providing resources and support for families and teachers. Early literacy is essential for children's educational and professional futures, as it fosters foundational skills that prepare them for formal learning and determines their professional and economic prospects throughout life.

Language Policy in Zambia for Early Literacy

The Primary Literacy Program is based on the National Literacy Framework. The National Literacy Framework focuses on preparing learners to read and write by exposing them to skills building activities that promote good literacy habits and these habits are related to reading, writing, speaking and listening. Reading is an essential skill and the foundation for all other academic learning. Learning to read does not happen naturally. As a complex skill, it requires careful instruction to support learners through to the ultimate goal of comprehension. As a teacher, you are key to this process.

They are methods which help early learning and before we explore further, let's define method. The Word method simply means, the way in which a person can deliver something with less challenges to others. However, there are so many methods that can be used to teach local languages to learners. The United Nations Educational, Scientific Organization (UNESCO) defines methods as, "The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying context. Learning involves

a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his/her goals, to develop his/her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in the wider society (UNESCO, 2005).

It is all the activities involved in speaking, listening, reading, writing and appreciating both spoken and written language. A local language, therefore, according to the Annual Edition (2005/06: 103), needs knowledge, skills and dispositions that proceeded by a teacher in learning to read and write at junior secondary. It is what children know about reading and writing before they actually read or write.

Learning and teaching materials or instructional resources that promote early reading includes a variety of print materials such as big books, easy-to-read picture books and books of different types and genres (Snow et al., 1998). Other examples of classroom



reading materials are: magazines, alphabet posters, maps. Library cards, note books, variety of paper, children's dictionary, paint brushes, labels, rhyme posters. Such materials do not enough to guide learners through learning of essential reading and writing skills, they also provide them with a critical link between skills acquisition and meaningful use of literacy throughout the learner's life (ADEA, 2012).

Allington (2001) emphasizes the need for appropriate reading materials. He calls for extensive use of text books that learners are able to read with accuracy, fluency, and good comprehension. He says, "lots of easy reading is absolutely critical to reading development" (p.44) with improved learning resulting from low error rates in reading. Allington suggests determining reading level of materials to match books to learners. An effective classroom should have access to a large number of books that range in difficulty and genre, including magazines, series of books, or other reading materials of interest to the learners.

Research findings in similar studies done in Zambia revealed that the low reading levels of Ibibemba are attributed to learning and teaching materials being inadequate, large number of pupils in a classrooms, inadequate time allocation for teaching, some teachers lack knowledge and skill to teach Ibibemba, poor classroom management; teachers not perceiving early literacy as the foundation for conventional literacy development (Lupele, 2012; Rukundo, 2013; and Zimba, 2011). This study tried to evaluate the use of Ibibemba in Learning and teaching by teachers of local languages is not so enough when teaching grade eights.

Teachers were facing a lot of challenges in emerging set of relationships between reading and writing of Ibibemba. These relationships are situated in a broader communication network of speaking and listening, whose components work together to help children negotiate the world and make sense of experience (Thelen & Smith 1995; Lewis 2000; Siegler 2000 cited in the Annual Edition for 2005/06). Children need 'writing to help them learn about reading, they need reading to help them learn about writing; and they need oral language to help them learn both.'

Waldfogel (2012:42), adds to say, "The quality and nature of experiences in education, lay the groundwork for better understanding which should be done in Ibibemba as a local language in Senga district.

Home literacy environment

Home literacy environment (HLE) refers to literacy activities or the availability of literacy resources at home which can be used to facilitate children's literacy development (Puglisi, Hulme, Hamilton, & Snowling, 2017). HLE plays a vital role in children's complex cognitive and academic performance development (Ciping, Silinskas, Wei, & Georgiou, 2015). Past studies confirm the importance of HLE to the cultivation of children's reading abilities (e.g., Liu, Georgiou, & Manolitsis, 2018; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014; Van Bergen et al., 2017). In addition, empirical research shows that four key HLE factors contribute to children's reading development. These are: parental literacy beliefs (PLB), also referring to parental expectations of children's performance, parental education years at school (PEY), also called parental education level, and parental literacy involvement in their children's activities (PLI); and (iv)



home literacy resources (HLR; Duursma et al., 2007; Inoue, Georgiou, Parrila, & Kirby, 2018; Leseman & Jong, 1998; Puglisi et al., 2017; Sénéchal, 2006; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). However, the majority of studies that examined HLE effects on children's reading comprehension development focused on specific HLE only, included a range of grade levels, or used various types of parental activity measures (e.g., Howard et al., 2014; Skwarchuk, Sowinski, & LeFevre, 2014; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016; Yeung & King, 2016).

Home Literacy Environment and Reading Comprehension Parental literacy belief refers to parents' wishes, goals or desires which enhance their children's reading comprehension performance through literacy knowledge acquisition.

III. Summary

Introudction

This chapter presents the summary research findings and discussion on the objectives of the study which was to analyze the challenges teachers face in teaching Ibibemba in Senga District.

Summary

The research findings have already shown that the challenges teachers are facing in Ibibemba language in Senga District and in Zambia at large. While some researches findings have shown that competence of Ibibemba language made learning easy. Students who were incompetent in Ibibemba language took long hours to understand what they had been taught rather others.

A number of challenges have been said by both teachers and learners that were influential to Ibibemba language in most of secondary schools in Zambia, like Inadequacy of teaching materials, Shortage of competent teachers, In conducive classrooms in schools, learners' attitude towards Ibibemba language, Background and influence of Languages, and Lack of motivation.

On the other hand, together teachers and students had suggested the following measures equivalently to the challenges teachers are facing in teaching Ibibemba could be solved. Improvement of learning environment, Availability of competent Ibibemba teachers, adequate number of materials, debates, and other more programs for Ibibemba.

Recoommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions, several recommendations are proposed:

1. The government should change its education policies in the public Secondary schools where Ibibemba language should start to be taught as a subject in standard one up to college (official language).
2. Teachers should improve the quality of teaching by using participatory methods which enable them to interact well with their learners during the teaching and learning processes.
3. The whole society should know the importance of local languages and work hand in hand with the teachers to help learners reach their goals.



4. The head teachers should ensure that lower grades are allocated to teachers who are familiar with Ibibemba which is the medium of instruction and ibimabwe which is the learners' familiar language for effective communication between teachers and learners.
5. The District Education Office should come with a deliberate policy where newly deployed teachers should be taught the medium of instruction and the children's familiar language for a period of at least six months in school after deployment.
6. The Government of the Republic of Zambia should increase on the number of official recognized regional languages by adopting Ibibemabwe as a medium of instruction in Senga District.
7. School Head teachers should sensitise parents in the community on the benefits of their involvement in the education of their children. Parents should assist their children with homework as homework is a policy requirement by the Ministry of Education.
8. The District Education Board Secretaries and Head teachers should spearhead the introduction of Adult literacy classes so that parents can learn to read and write as well as understand the importance of education in general.

IV. Conclusion

The study provided an insight of the challenges teachers were facing when teaching Ibibemba language. The research revealed a lot of challenges that were contributing to challenges affecting the proper implementation of Ibibemba in school of Zambia at secondary level and those de-motivating challenges of Ibibemba as language were related to: teachers' uninteresting teaching styles and ineffective teaching methods; the lack of programs in Schools for Ibibemba; teachers' limited skills and large class sizes; unequal learners' abilities; inadequate investment for lesson preparation by teachers; teachers' limited use of teaching aids and technology; and pupils' lack of confidence.

The study has also shown that learners and teachers faced different types of challenges while parents had negative perceptions on the teaching and learning of Ibibemba as a medium of instruction. The challenges that were being faced were phonological, morphological and semantic. The challenges encountered caused learners to mispronounce Ibibemba words as well as misinterpret Ibibemba words which were similar to Ibibemabwe words. Learners also failed to understand explanations given by teachers in Ibibemba. Pupils lacked proficiency in Ibibemba while teachers lacked proficiency in the learner's language and in some cases in Ibibemba

The study also confirmed that there was no mutual intelligibility between Bemba and Mambwe mainly because of the different places of origin. As a result, there was a big difference between Bemba and Mambwe vocabulary. Mambwe speaking learners found it very difficult to learn in Bemba. Learners did not participate actively during lessons due to lack of competence in the language of instruction. Some teachers also lacked competence in the language of instruction as well as the learners' language which made teaching very challenging. Teachers ended up using lecture method when teaching in order to avoid misunderstanding with learners. Learner involvement in lessons was very minimal. Parents failed to help their children with homework because



of not being competent with the medium of instruction and also because of high levels of illiteracy among the parents and therefore, children did not have a role model.

References

1. Chibesakunda, M., & Mulenga, I. M. (2019). Challenges of using Ibibemba in the learning of initial literacy in selected primary schools in Serenje District of Zambia. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Sciences Education*.
2. Kalumba, M. (2024). Promotion of culture through the teaching of local languages: A case of Ibibemba in selected primary schools in Mansa District, Zambia. University of Zambia.
3. Ministry of General Education. (2013). Zambia education curriculum framework. Lusaka: Curriculum Development Centre.
4. Mwamba, R. (2018). Factors affecting the teaching of local languages in Zambian schools. *Journal of African Education Studies*, 5(2), 45–60.
5. Sampa, F. (2020). Teacher preparedness in the implementation of local language instruction in Zambia. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 8(4), 112–125.