



The Role of Language Attitudes in the Learning of English as a Second Language in Zambian Secondary Schools

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Abstract- English functions as the official language of instruction in Zambia and plays a central role in academic success and social mobility. However, students in many secondary schools learn English as a second language while maintaining strong connections to local languages. Language attitudes—beliefs, feelings, and perceptions about a language—can significantly influence how students approach learning English. Despite the importance of English in education, some learners demonstrate mixed or negative attitudes toward its use in academic environments. This paper examines the role of language attitudes in shaping the learning of English as a second language in Zambian secondary schools. Drawing on existing literature and examples from multilingual educational contexts, the article explores how attitudes toward English and local languages affect motivation, classroom participation, and language proficiency. The study proposes a practical framework for improving language attitudes through inclusive language policies, teacher support, and culturally responsive teaching strategies. Strengthening positive language attitudes can enhance English proficiency while also respecting Zambia’s multilingual identity. The findings highlight that balanced language practices and supportive learning environments can improve educational outcomes and promote more effective English language acquisition among secondary school learners.

Keywords- Language attitudes, English as a Second Language, Zambia, Secondary Education, Multilingual Education, Language Policy, Student Motivation

I. Introduction

English is the official language of Zambia and serves as the primary medium of instruction in secondary schools. As a result, proficiency in English is essential for students’ academic achievement, access to higher education, and participation in national and global opportunities. However, most Zambian learners grow up speaking one or more indigenous languages at home before encountering English formally in school. This multilingual environment creates both opportunities and challenges for language learning.



Language attitudes refer to individuals' beliefs, perceptions, and feelings toward a particular language. In educational contexts, these attitudes influence students' motivation, confidence, and willingness to use a language in communication and academic tasks. Positive attitudes toward English often encourage active participation in classroom activities, while negative attitudes may lead to reduced engagement and lower achievement.

In Zambia, the relationship between English and local languages can shape how students perceive the value and identity associated with language use. Some learners view English as a language of prestige and opportunity, while others may feel that its dominance undermines local languages and cultural identity. These perceptions may influence learning outcomes in secondary school classrooms.

This article explores the role of language attitudes in the learning of English as a second language in Zambian secondary schools. By reviewing existing research and examining the Zambian context, the paper proposes strategies that educators and policymakers can use to promote positive language attitudes and improve English language learning.

II. Literature Review

Studies in second language acquisition consistently show that language attitudes play a significant role in language learning outcomes. According to Gardner (1985), motivation and attitudes toward a language community influence learners' willingness to acquire a second language. Positive attitudes often lead to increased effort, persistence, and confidence in language learning.

Research in African multilingual contexts also highlights the complex relationship between English and indigenous languages in education. Brock-Utne (2007) argues that the dominance of colonial languages such as English in African education systems can create barriers to learning when students have limited exposure to the language outside the classroom. Similarly, Trudell (2016) emphasizes the importance of recognizing local languages in education to support effective learning.

In Zambia, several studies have examined the role of language policy and classroom practices in shaping language learning experiences. Banda and Mwanza (2017) note that many students rely on code-switching between English and local languages to understand academic content. While some educators discourage this practice, others view it as a useful strategy for bridging language gaps.

Further research suggests that students' attitudes toward English are influenced by social factors such as family background, teacher attitudes, peer influence, and perceived economic benefits. When English is associated with academic success and employment opportunities, learners are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward learning it.



Despite these findings, there is still limited research focusing specifically on how language attitudes affect English learning in Zambian secondary schools. This paper contributes to the discussion by highlighting practical approaches that can improve language attitudes and strengthen English language education.

III. Role of Language Attitudes in ESL Learning

Language attitudes affect several aspects of English language learning in secondary schools. Key areas include:

1. Student Motivation

Students who believe that English is valuable for their future are more motivated to practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

2. Classroom Participation

Positive attitudes toward English encourage learners to participate in discussions, presentations, and group work activities.

3. Confidence in Communication

Students with supportive learning environments are more confident when expressing themselves in English.

4. Relationship Between English and Local Languages

Recognizing the role of local languages can reduce fear and anxiety in language learning. Strategic code-switching can help clarify complex concepts.

5. Teacher Influence

Teachers' attitudes toward English and local languages significantly shape students' perceptions and language use in the classroom.

IV. Proposed Language Attitude Support Framework

To improve language attitudes toward English in Zambian secondary schools, this paper proposes a Language Attitude Support Framework consisting of the following strategies:

1. Inclusive Language Practices

Teachers should acknowledge the role of local languages while encouraging gradual improvement in English communication.

2. Teacher Training and Support

Professional development programs can equip teachers with strategies for teaching English effectively in multilingual classrooms.



3. Positive Language Environment

Schools should promote an environment where students feel comfortable using English without fear of embarrassment or punishment.

4. Integration of Culture and Context

Teaching materials should include local examples and culturally relevant content to make English learning more meaningful.

5. Encouraging Reading and Communication

Debates, reading clubs, storytelling, and drama activities can help students practice English in engaging ways.

V. Impact on Education in Zambia

Improving language attitudes can have several positive impacts on education in Zambia. First, students with positive attitudes toward English are more likely to achieve higher academic performance across subjects. Second, improved language proficiency strengthens communication skills needed for tertiary education and employment.

Additionally, balanced language practices that respect both English and indigenous languages help preserve cultural identity while supporting academic development. This approach aligns with Zambia's broader educational goals of inclusive and equitable learning.

By creating supportive environments that encourage positive attitudes toward English learning, secondary schools can improve language outcomes and enhance students' confidence in using English for academic and professional purposes.

VI. Conclusion

Language attitudes play a crucial role in shaping the learning of English as a second language in Zambian secondary schools. Students' perceptions of English influence their motivation, participation, and confidence in the classroom. While English remains essential for academic success, the multilingual realities of Zambia require teaching approaches that respect both English and local languages.

This paper highlighted how language attitudes affect English learning and proposed a framework for improving attitudes through inclusive language practices, teacher support, and culturally responsive teaching strategies. Strengthening positive attitudes toward English while valuing Zambia's linguistic diversity can significantly improve learning outcomes.



Future research should explore classroom-based interventions and policy strategies that support effective English language teaching in multilingual environments.

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