

ZIMBABWE'S LANGUAGE POLICY IN EDUCATION AND THE 'SILENCED VOICES': A CASE STUDY OF NYANJA/CHEWA SPEAKING PUPILS FROM PORTA AND KINTYRE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ZVIMBA, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings of the perceptions of pupils from Nyanja/Chewa speaking background regarding the status of their mother tongue in the education system. The study is informed by post modern theoretical perspective which celebrates diversity in society. The study adopted the case study design within the qualitative paradigm. A sample of twenty pupils (N=20), ten from each of the two participating schools was used. Simple random and stratified sampling techniques were utilised. For data collection, the interview and focus group discussion were used. It was found out that Nyanja/ Chewa as an indigenous language is not taught as a subject at Porta and Kintyre Primary Schools. It came to light that Shona is the indigenous language being taught in these commercial farming schools thus neglecting the indigenous language, a situation which the participants labelled unfortunate. The study recommends that the Education Ministry seriously considers that Nyanja/ Chewa be taught in commercial farming and mining areas so as to benefit pupils who are predominantly Nyanja/Chewa speaking. Teachers' colleges are being called upon to train teachers who will be deployed to teach in schools in farming and mining areas.

Keywords: Language, culture, mother tongue, indigenous language

INTRODUCTION

Many countries in Africa are characterised by linguistic diversity which makes these countries multilingual nations. Africa's linguistic diversity presents problems concerning which language (s) are to be considered official and national languages. At the same time, the issue of indigenous languages to be taught in the education system is yet another contentious issue. The question of which language (s) to use for teaching and learning is a crucial one in bilingual and multilingual contexts (Thondhlana, 2002; Sa 2007). These problems have their roots in the colonial era where the colonisers paid little attention to the role of indigenous languages in teaching and learning in the education system. Throughout the colonial era, African languages and culture were denigrated (Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training, 1999). In most if not in all cases, the language of the colonising country was unilaterally imposed as the official language as well as the medium of instruction in the education system.

In Zimbabwe the Doke Report of the 1930s set the stage for a colonial language policy in education where English was declared the official language and medium of instruction in the education system. Shona and Ndebele became the only indigenous languages taught in the education system. Other indigenous languages such as Tonga, Kalanga, Venda, Shangaan and others suffered calculated neglect. With the attainment of independence in 1980 there have been some curriculum reform initiatives that have sought to address the country's linguistic diversity. The 1987 Education Act enhanced the status of local languages while recognising English as the language of business, administration and international relations (Report of the

Presidential Commission of inquiry into Education and Training, 1999). This has resulted in a situation where some indigenous languages are being taught in primary schools particularly Shona, IsiNdebele and Tonga among others. However, these curriculum reforms appear not to have addressed fully the linguistic concerns of pupils from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This appears to be the case for those pupils whose mother tongue is not taught in the education system even on a transitional model for example, Nyanja/ Chewa. Such pupils are therefore the 'silenced voices' due to lack of an opportunity to be taught in the mother tongue in the early grades in line with the transitional model currently in use in Zimbabwe. Unlike other pupils in Zimbabwean primary schools, they do not only experience subtractive bilingualism but they also experience transitional submersion. This study seeks to explore the perceptions of pupils from a Nyanja speaking background, regarding the status of their mother tongue in the education system, from a sociological point of view.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by the post modernism theoretical perspective. Post modernism is a theoretical perspective that celebrates diversity in society (Marchand and Parpart, 1995; Punch, 2004). In the context of post modernism there is a compelling need to accommodate linguistic diversity in education and society in general. Failure to accommodate this diversity creates a situation where speakers of some indigenous languages are 'silenced' and marginalised. Hence Lyotard in Marchand and Parpart (1995) argues that a search has begun for previously silenced voices, for the specificity and power of language (s) and their relation to knowledge, context and loyalty. Society's inability to accommodate diversity in education results in the creation of the 'other' who is usually not only seen as different but also inferior. Post modernism therefore sees the world as pluralistic with an emphasis on diversity and the celebration of difference (Punch, 2004). Therefore, every effort has to be made in a pluralistic multilingual society to accommodate society's pluralistic character as well as linguistic diversity.

ZIMBABWE'S LANGUAGE POLICY IN EDUCATION

Zimbabwe's language policy in education is enshrined in the 1987 Education Act. This noble piece of legislation is a departure from the language policy pursued in the colonial era. The Judges Commission which had been tasked to look into the African Education System had recommended that children should learn to write and read English from the first day of grade one. Shona and Ndebele therefore had been used as media of instruction until 1962 (Ndamba, 2010). After independence the government realised the role played by the mother tongue in learning, thus an educational policy raised the status of indigenous languages (Ndamba, 2008). For the first time the place of indigenous minority languages in the education system was acknowledged.

In terms of the 1987 Education Act, indigenous minority languages such as Tonga, Venda, Kalanga and Shangaan are to be taught up to grade three levels in those areas where they are commonly spoken and understood. It follows that these languages are also the media of instruction up to grade three in these same areas. From grade four, pupils revert to either Shona or Ndebele as the case may be. In addition English remains the official language as well as the medium of instruction in education. Zimbabwe's official education language policy for grades 1 to 3 falls under the transitional and delayed immersion programme (Ndamba, 2008). This is so as English as a language is introduced later after pupils have received instruction in the mother tongue.

Although the Education Act of 1987 has been described as a noble attempt to address the country's linguistic diversity, it results in subtractive bilingualism for all the pupils coming

from indigenous language backgrounds. Subtractive bilingualism occurs when the acquisition of a second language and culture takes place at the expense of the first language, which according to Cummins has been associated with disabling educational settings for minority language speakers (Molosiwa, 2009).

There is also need to consider those pupils whose mother tongue is not used as a medium of instruction up to grade three levels. Such pupils whose mother tongue is not taught and recognised in the education system in terms of the 1987 Education Act do not benefit from instruction in the mother tongue. In addition to subtractive bilingualism, such pupils also experience transitional submersion. For children from minority groups it is a transitional submersion programme in that their L1 is not used at all (Adeyemi, 2008). As a result, pupil's educational experiences are negatively affected. Freire in Goduka (1998) argues that negating the native language and its potential benefits in the development of student's voice is a form of psychological violence and functions to perpetuate control over subordinate language groups through various linguistic forms and 'cultural invasion'.

However, it is heartening to note that subsection 4 of the same Act empowers the Minister to authorise the teaching of minority languages in addition to those specified in subsections 1, 2 and 3 of the same Act. Thus the 1987 Education Act creates an environment for the teaching of indigenous languages for the benefit of all pupils in the country. This enables society to celebrate diversity in languages. What is required is the political will to bring about such positive changes. This paper is concerned with the status of Nyanja/ Chewa, a language that is widely spoken in mining and farming communities in Zimbabwe but is not taught in primary schools in terms of the 1987 Education Act.

There have been further developments in terms of language policy since the 1987 Education Act as the Secretary's Circular Minute Number 3 of 2002 has made further positive provisions. In terms of this Circular Minute, Tonga, Kalanga, Sotho, Nambya and Shangaan were to be taught up to grade seven levels by 2005. A lot of progress has been recorded in the teaching of Tonga in primary schools as the first grade seven Tonga examinations was written in 2010. The same Circular Minute acknowledges Nyanja as one of the languages to be taught at secondary school level. Surely it follows that if such a provision is to be made then this language should be introduced at primary school level as well for the benefit of the learner. Another amendment was made to the language in education policy in 2006 which states that prior to form one; indigenous languages may be used as medium of instruction. This is a positive development indeed which should benefit all children. The question of languages in education needs to be seriously considered as the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999) has made the following important recommendations: there is need to recognise linguistic rights as human rights which all citizens should enjoy; and there is need to protect and promote respect for all community languages regardless of the number of speakers and their level of development. These recommendations if taken on board will go a long way in addressing Zimbabwe's linguistic diversity.

LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Language plays an important role in people's lives as it is not only a medium of communication but is also a reservoir of culture. Goduka (1998) argues that language is inextricably linked to culture. It is a primary means by which people express their cultural values and the lens through which they view the world. Language is therefore part and parcel of an individual's identity. It is therefore important for educators and policy makers to make sustained serious efforts to address students' linguistic diversity. The role of the mother

tongue in teaching and learning has been acknowledged. Mnkhandla (2000) argues that as far back as 1953, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recommended the use of the mother tongue in education to be extended to as late a stage as possible.

Zimbabwe appears to have taken heed of this advice as shown in its language policy in education. The provisions of the 1987 Education Act therefore need to be extended to other minority languages such as Nyanja/ Chewa. A similar view is expressed by UNESCO (2004) in Shizha (2007) which emphasises that every child has a right to education and to a system of education that values the child's culture, language and community and access to schooling and active participation without discrimination and hindrance.

Generally, African countries have shown a commitment to addressing the linguistic diversity which is a characteristic of these African countries. The Harare Declaration of 1997 made the following statements regarding linguistic diversity: a democratic Africa with respect for linguistic rights as human rights including those of minorities, a democratic Africa that seeks to promote peaceful co existence of people in a society where pluralism does not entail the replacement of one language or identity by another but instead promotes complementarity of functions as well as cooperation and a sense of common destiny (Thondhlana, 2002). These statements highlight the eagerness to address linguistic diversity. It is therefore important to recognise that the stripping away of students' native language also strips away the child's cultural identity and cultural voice as well as the cultural integrity of the entire family and entire group (Goduka, 1998).

There are a number of reasons that have been forwarded for the inclusion of the mother tongue in the education system. Kembo (2000) in Thondhlana (2002) highlights the following: cognitive and affective development occurs more effectively in a language that the learner knows very well, learning in general (including second language learning) occurs more effectively if the required cognitive development has already taken place through the use of a first language as a language of learning and finally literacy and cognitive skills already acquired in the first language provide easy transition to second language medium education. These observations highlight the importance of instruction through the use of the mother tongue. The prevailing language policy in education in Zimbabwe places some pupils at a disadvantage particularly those coming from a Nyanja/Chewa speaking communities. Such children do not benefit from instruction in their mother tongue and every effort is needed to include their mother tongue in the school curriculum. Efforts to give attention to the home language have a potential to raise it to the place of dignity and respect rather than permitting it to become a source of humiliation and shame for children from diverse backgrounds (Goduka, 1998). Such children are forced to be trilingual or multilingual at the expense of their mother tongue. This is so because their mother tongue is neither the indigenous language taught in the school nor is it the medium of instruction. At the moment there has been another development where Ndebele and Shona are required to be taught in all schools countrywide. Depending on their location such pupils need to show competence in three languages required by the education system in addition to their mother tongue. Zimbabwe's language policy in education has been described as a transitional model (Ndamba, 2008) but children from Nyanja/Chewa speaking communities do not benefit in any meaningful way. Instead these pupils experience transitional submersion in the sense that their L1 is not utilised. This impacts negatively on pupils educational experiences. Therefore, one of the challenges that current educational thinking and practice needs to tackle in Zimbabwe is the ethnic diversity in Zimbabwean classrooms which demands attention to socio cultural issues especially issues of language and its relationship to the process of

learning (Mnkandhla, 2000). Children therefore need to learn dominant languages in addition to their own (Skutnabb-Kangis, 2006)

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Zimbabwe is a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual nation. Significant strides have been made to accommodate the nation's linguistic diversity by way of teaching some indigenous minority languages. Although the 1987 Education Act empowers the Minister to authorise the teaching of some indigenous languages commonly spoken in an area, Nyanja/Chewa has not received due attention and is not taught in the schools. This tends to affect pupils educational experiences negatively as pupils do not benefit from instruction in the mother tongue in the early grades. Their voices tend to be 'silenced'. It is thus the contention of this study to find out the perceptions of pupils from Nyanja speaking background regarding the status of their mother language in the education system.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the pupils' perceptions regarding the status of Nyanja/ Chewa in the educational system?
2. Are pupils given an opportunity to communicate in Nyanja/ Chewa in the classroom and school environment?
3. What are pupils' perceptions towards the use of curriculum instructional materials in other languages?
4. How would the use of Nyanja/ Chewa in the education system impact on pupils' educational experiences?
5. What are the linguistic challenges faced by pupils from a Nyanja/ Chewa speaking background?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will benefit policy makers in the design of a language policy that addresses the linguistic concerns of indigenous minority students whose languages are not taught in the education system. Educators will find the results of this study worthwhile as these will raise their awareness on the linguistic needs of minority students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted the qualitative research paradigm with a bias towards the phenomenological approach. Qualitative research places emphasis on natural settings rather than laboratories and fosters pragmatism in using multiple methods for exploring a topic (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). At the same time a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The case study research design was adopted for this study. A case study is defined as an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be discussed in some depth within a specified time scale.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population for this study consisted of all pupils in the two primary schools whose mother tongue is Nyanja/ Chewa. From this population a sample of twenty students (ten from each

school, ten male and ten female) was chosen through simple random and stratified sampling techniques.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Data collection instruments consisted of interviews and focus group discussions. Kahn and Cannel in Marshall and Rossman (2006) describe interviewing as a conversation with a purpose. The participants' perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participants view it (emic perspective) and not the researcher's view (etic perspective). According to Dooley (1995) focus group discussions allows group interaction such that participants are able to build on each other's ideas and comments to provide an in depth view not attainable from individual questioning, thereby stimulating an open attitude and interaction. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with school pupils and teachers at their respective schools.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data were analysed to search for common themes pertinent to the research problem. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes, it builds grounded theory (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). Qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions were presented in a narrative form as descriptive data with verbatim statements from participants. Much of the qualitative data comprise people and the words they say (Patton, 1990).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Participants

A total of twenty pupils (10 boys and 10 girls) took part in the study. The pupils showed a high level of linguistic consciousness and the need for their language to be taught which was well above their age. These are pupils who were drawn from grades six to seven and their ages ranged from 11 to 14 years. The pupils are third or fourth generation Malawians/Zambians who were born and raised in Zimbabwe. This tends to present challenges in the teaching of Nyanja/ Chewa in the schools. One argument could be that since they were born in Zimbabwe, they are fluent in the indigenous languages taught in Zimbabwe's primary schools, and so there is no need to teach Nyanja/ Chewa. The other side of the argument could advocate for the teaching of their mother tongue as they may lack sufficient opportunities to practise their language.

Language Spoken In the Home

All the pupils in the sample stated that their fathers are of a Nyanja/ Chewa speaking background. The majority of pupils have both parents who are Nyanja/ Chewa speaking with a few having mothers who are of either Ndebele or Shona origin. In the home, a mixture of Shona and Nyanja/ Chewa is used. One pupil remarked that 'When communicating with other elders in the home my father uses Nyanja, but with us he uses Shona'. This shows that pupils may not have an opportunity to fully master and practice their mother tongue in the home hence the need to provide opportunities in school the learning of their mother tongue.

Indigenous Language Taught In the School

All the pupils stated that Shona is the only indigenous language taught in the school which means that Nyanja/ Chewa is not taught. One pupil remarked that this could be a result of lack of interest by teachers in teaching the pupils Nyanja/ Chewa. Some of the pupils' responses to these questions included:

- a. I do not know the reason; maybe teachers cannot communicate in Nyanja/ Chewa.
- b. Maybe there are no specialised teachers to teach the language.

Similar views were expressed during focus group discussions where the following responses were recorded:

- I. Nyanja is not taught, I do not know with the teachers, if it was taught I would be happy because it is our mother tongue, it would enhance my proficiency.
- II. Nyanja is not taught since few pupils speak Nyanja/ Chewa.

These responses point towards the need to teach Nyanja/ Chewa in primary schools. The Education Act of 1987 empowers the Minister to add other languages in the primary school curriculum. The Secretary's Minute Circular number 3 of 2002 acknowledges Nyanja as one of the languages to be taught at secondary school level. Despite this acknowledgement not much has happened on the ground in terms of teaching. Pupils from a Nyanja / Chewa speaking background experience a situation where their mother tongue is not taught at all in the school system. Although Ndamba (2008) argues that Zimbabwe's official language policy for grades one to three falls under the transitional and delayed model, pupils from a Nyanja/ Chewa background experience a transitional submersion programme (Adeyemi, 2008). This situation can also be seen as a form of subtractive bilingualism (Molosiwa, 2009).

Effect of Lack of Instruction in the Mother Tongue.

A large number of the pupils felt that they were affected by the absence of their mother tongue in the primary school curriculum. Some of their responses included the following:

- a. I cannot communicate effectively in Nyanja, If Nyanja was taught in my school I would immensely benefit. As of now I am taught by my mother though I am not very proficient yet.
- b. I face problems with my mother tongue, I am not able to communicate in my mother tongue, and if it was taught my proficiency would be enhanced. The school should teach all languages, an individual should be able to communicate in the mother tongue.

Similar views were expressed during focus group discussions where some of the following responses were recorded:

- i. It affects me. You can experience a situation where other relatives communicate in Nyanja in your presence and due to lack of proficiency in the mother tongue; you are unable to communicate with them.
- ii. I always tell my father that I want to go to Malawi but he tells me that I will be humiliated by relatives there because of my failure to communicate in Nyanja.

The experiences of these pupils show the imperative need for the inclusion of their mother tongue in the education system. These pupils hope that the teaching of their mother tongue in the education system enhances their proficiency in it. After all, children should learn the dominant languages in addition to their own (Skutnabb-Kangis, 2000). The provisions of the Harare Declaration should be seriously taken on board (Thondhlana, 2002).

Teachers' and Other Pupils' Attitudes towards Nyanja/ Chewa

A larger number of the pupils felt that there is a negative perception of their language by teachers and other pupils. Their responses included the following:

- a. Other pupils do not view the language positively because they do not understand the language. Those who do not speak the language view it negatively, and this breeds communication problems.
- b. I have not seen or heard one teacher talking about Nyanja issues. In the classroom teachers do not draw examples from Nyanja, our mother tongue.
- c. It is not viewed positively because they do not speak our language to show their liking of it.

Similar views were expressed in Focus Group Discussions were some of the following responses were given:

- i. Those who see it as bad feel that there are witches, as seen from drama presentations such as *Magwiragwira*.
- ii. Their view is negative, because teachers are not keen on teaching us Nyanja; it is only Shona and English.

On the other hand, a significant number of pupils felt that teachers and other pupils view their mother tongue positively. They gave some of the following responses:

- a) Teachers view it as a good language. Some of the teachers speak Chewa / Nyanja.
- b) Others view it as a good language, others see it as bad. The way of speaking appears to be bad.
- c) I have never heard them criticise it.

The perceptions of teachers and other pupils have an impact on the self esteem of pupils, and confidence in their mother tongue. Negating the mother tongue has serious consequences (Freire in Goduka, 1998).

Fluency In The Indigenous Language Taught In The School

The majority of pupils stated that they are not very fluent in the indigenous language that is taught in the school, which is Shona in this case. This can be a result of a situation where there is a tendency to communicate either in the mother tongue or a mixture of Shona and Nyanja in the home. These impacts negatively on their fluency in the indigenous language taught in the school. Some of their responses included the following:

- a. I am not fluent and proficient. At times the teacher can use unfamiliar words in an unfamiliar language. If one does not respond, one gets punished.
- b. I am not very proficient, I grew up in a predominantly Nyanja speaking community and this has affected my Shona vocabulary.
- c. I mix Shona and Nyanja, some Shona words are difficult. I do not know their meaning.

During focus group discussions similar sentiments were expressed. These included the following:

- i. We are used to our mother tongue and imitate our parents in speech. Shona is problematic.
- ii. I am unable to say whether I am proficient or not. This is because I am unable to see where I make mistakes. Others have to tell me about this.

Lack of proficiency in the indigenous language taught could be a result of the mother tongue that is predominantly used in the home. Such pupils face a dilemma where they are not proficient in their mother tongue as well as Shona, the indigenous language taught in the

school. This highlights the importance of the views of the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Mnkandhla, 2000).

Problems Encountered In Learning Indigenous Language Taught In School

A larger number of pupils acknowledged that they face a number of problems in learning the indigenous language taught in the school which is Shona. These problems are mostly due to the fact that these pupils are coming from a linguistic environment that is different from the school environment. Their responses included some of the following:

- a. I am not very proficient, I face problems with comprehension. Other areas of language such as proverbs present problems. Teachers want us to include proverbs in composition writing, I cannot do this due to lack of proficiency.
- b. Writing compositions and answering comprehension questions presents difficulties.
- c. The written part is problematic. I have a problem with vocabulary and I am prone to using words wrongly.

In focus group discussions similar sentiments were highlighted. They included the following:

- i. Some Shona words are difficult; I do not know their meaning.
- ii. Shona vocabulary presents some problems. It is difficult to understand some Shona words when one is used to Nyanja.

These views demonstrate that although the pupils are able to communicate orally in the indigenous language taught in the school, the written part presents some difficulties. These difficulties are a result of lack of proficiency in the indigenous language taught in the school. Benefits of the use of the mother tongue should be considered seriously as effective learning of a second language depends on the mastery of the first language (Kembo, 2000 in Thondhlana, 2002).

Pupils' Evaluation of a Situation in Which Mother Tongue Is Not Taught

All the pupils were concerned with the prevailing situation in which their mother tongue is not taught in the primary school curriculum. They all felt that this scenario was a painful and boring experience. Some of their responses included the following:

- a. It is painful as I do not see the place of my mother tongue in the education system. I would be happy if Nyanja was taught.
- b. It is painful if you are surrounded by people who do not speak your mother tongue; you have to learn the languages used by others.
- c. It is painful because one wants to learn own mother tongue. You should be able to communicate with others in the home as well as visitors from Malawi.

Similar sentiments were expressed in focus group discussions. Some of the responses included the following:

- i. Other languages are taught whilst ours is neglected.
- ii. We want to be able to write it (Nyanja) as we do Shona.

These responses reflect the pupils' level of linguistic consciousness as regards the current status of Nyanja/ Chewa in the primary school curriculum. The responses show that there is an urgent need to seriously consider the teaching of Nyanja/ Chewa. There is need to address the challenges presented by ethnic diversity in Zimbabwe's classrooms (Mnkandhla, 2000). In terms of postmodern theory, there is need to consider previously silenced voices (Lyotard in Marchland and Parpart, 1995). Failure to teach a student's native language has an impact on cultural identity (Goduka, 1998).

Problems Encountered By Using Textbooks and Charts in Other Languages in the Classroom

A larger number of pupils felt that the prevailing situation where classroom charts and text books are written in languages other than their own tends to present a number of problems. Some of these problems influence pupils' educational experiences. Some of their responses included the following:

- a. There are no Nyanja charts and texts. It is painful because my mother tongue is not represented.
- b. Media and textbooks are not in Nyanja. As a person who is used to seeing media and textbooks in Shona and English, I do not take them seriously.
- c. At times I am not motivated to read the charts and textbooks as these do not include my mother tongue.

In focus group discussions the pupils expressed similar views. Some of their responses included the following:

- i. It is painful. At times some pupils remark that have you ever seen charts with stories from Malawi in the classroom?
- ii. This is a painful experience because Nyanja is not considered; it would be desirable if media and textbooks could be written in Nyanja.

Therefore lack of inclusion of these pupils mother tongue in the primary school curriculum has a negative impact on their motivation to learn and succeed. The child's mother tongue has to be considered as it is part of the child's cultural identity (Goduka, 1998).

Opportunities to Communicate In Mother Tongue Inside and Outside the Classroom

A larger number of the pupils stated that there are no opportunities [provided to communicate in Nyanja inside and outside the classroom. This type of situation deprives pupils of the opportunity to practise conversing in their mother tongue. The pupils expressed some of the following views:

- a. Opportunities are not provided for communication in the mother tongue inside the classroom, we communicate amongst ourselves when we are outside.
- b. We only communicate in Shona and English. At my former school in Bindura, Nyanja was used to communicate a lot of times especially when outside.
- c. It is not official to speak Nyanja in class, we just speak it, and it is our language.

During the focus group discussions the pupils gave similar sentiments. Some of their responses included the following:

- i. Others laugh at us; some pupils mock us, so one ends up communicating in Shona.
- ii. Communication in the mother tongue is prohibited, Shona is also prohibited, the teachers emphasise English.

It is important that pupils are encouraged to communicate in their mother tongue particularly when outside the classroom. This enables them to develop confidence and pride in their language. After all UNESCO (2004) emphasises the importance of the child's language (Shizha, 2007).

Attitude to School with Inclusion of Mother Tongue

All the pupils felt that schooling would be more enjoyable in a situation where their mother tongue was included in the primary school curriculum. Some of their responses included the following:

- a. It would be more enjoyable to communicate in Nyanja/ Chewa.
- b. Others would also know our language, like we do their language, Shona.
- c. It would be more enjoyable. One would be able to communicate in the mother tongue; most children here come from a Nyanja/ Chewa speaking background.

Similar views were expressed in focus group discussions where some of the following responses were recorded:

- i. I would be happy because my mother tongue would be taught.
- ii. It would be more enjoyable communicating in my mother tongue.

The inclusion of Nyanja/ Chewa in primary schools in commercial farming areas tends to benefit the pupils in a number of ways. As has been alluded to, the Education Act of 1987 provides an enabling environment for the inclusion of minority languages. Policy makers have to consider this issue seriously.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the inclusion of Nyanja / Chewa in the primary school curriculum is an emotive issue indeed. In Zimbabwe's primary schools Nyanja/ Chewa is not taught and it is not offered as a subject at the secondary school level. Pupils in this study were of the view that their mother tongue is neglected and this has an impact on their cultural identity, as well as motivation to succeed. These pupils suffer a disadvantage in that they do not benefit from instruction in the mother tongue in the early grades. The situation obtaining in Zimbabwe currently regarding the teaching of Nyanja/ Chewa can be seen as part of the colonial legacy, where indigenous languages suffered calculated neglect. A desirable situation is one where Nyanja / Chewa is taught in all primary schools in the commercial farming areas. This emphasises the need for policy makers to seriously consider the teaching of Nyanja/Chewa in primary schools in Zimbabwe. The 1987 Education Act makes provisions for the inclusion of other minority languages in the primary school curriculum and this includes Nyanja/ Chewa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study seeks to make the following recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture should seriously consider the teaching of Nyanja/ Chewa in all schools in commercial farming areas and mining communities.
2. School heads in commercial farming areas and mining communities should encourage pupils to communicate in their mother tongue in the school environment.
3. The Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture should seriously consider the deployment of more Nyanja/ Chewa speaking teachers in schools in commercial farming and mining areas.
4. Teachers' colleges should also consider the teaching of Nyanja/ Chewa to enable teachers deployed to such communities to communicate and function effectively.
5. Classroom pedagogy should draw examples from all students' cultures.

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