
The Relevance of Chitonga as a Regional Language of Instruction in the Multilingual Schools of Livingstone Urban in Southern Province of Zambia

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of the study was to find out the relevance of Chitonga as a regional language of instruction from Grade 1 to 4 in multilingual schools of Livingstone. The study objectives were, to assess how teachers are teaching literacy to grade 1 to grade 4 using Chitonga in the multilingual classes of Livingstone and to establish the pedagogical challenges teachers face on the use of Chitonga as a language of instruction in Livingstone. The study used a phenomenological design on the population of Livingstone District. Data was collected using interview guide and classroom observation guide from three primary schools and sixteen (16) participants who included three (3) head teachers, twelve (12) grade 1 to 4 teachers (four (4) from each selected school) and one (1) official from the district education board. The findings revealed that teachers in Livingstone multilingual schools taught Literacy in Chitonga through translanguaging practices like translation and code switching. They also used flash cards, syllabic cards and talking walls. The findings also indicated that Chitonga was not the language of play in multilingual primary classrooms of Livingstone. It was also revealed that there were differences between the Chitonga spoken in Livingstone District and the one used in schools and books. Both teachers and pupils were not proficient in the standard Chitonga. The study concluded that Chitonga despite being the regional language, it was not relevant to the urban primary school learner of Livingstone town because the classrooms were multilingual hence translanguaging practices were used extensively. In the view of the findings, the study recommended that there should be training for primary teachers to teach in multilingual classrooms and schools need to buy more teaching and learning materials in Chitonga for primary schools to help teachers in multilingual classes.*

KEY WORDS: Language of instruction, multilingual classes, regional language, Livingstone.

INTRODUCTION

Since the attainment of independence in 1964, Zambia has undergone various language policies in education and literacy programs with the major ones being the Primary Reading Program (PRP) and the Primary Literacy Program (PLP). The issue of literacy programs and language in education policy in Zambia has, for some time been a matter of concern due to the low literacy levels detected among Zambian pupils, predominantly those in public primary schools. Manchishi (2016) observed that at independence, English language was adopted as the medium of instruction, right from grade 1 up to university through the 1966 Education Act.

After realizing that the use of English as the sole medium of instruction was detrimental to education gains, particularly at the primary level, the Ministry of Education decided that initial literacy should be done in a local language predominantly spoken in an area (M.O.E, 1996). As a result of low reading levels among learners in Zambia, the teaching of initial literacy using the local languages was advocated for. Currently, initial reading in Zambia is done in the officially recognized local language of the region where the school is situated. There are seven officially recognized Zambian languages namely, Bemba, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja and Tonga.

Most of the countries in Africa are heterogeneous states. Each nation has at least more than two languages and this makes it difficult to come up with a Lingua Franca though some nations like Tanzania have managed to come up with a lingua franca which is not without challenges. A study on language policy in Malawi was conducted by Ngalande and Chigeda (2012) and it revealed that Malawi has 16 languages and dialects. Qualitative methods were used to collect and analyse data collected. The study used interview guides, observations and document analysis to collect data. Chewa is used as a medium of instruction from grade one up to the upper grades, against the policy which required use of mother tongue only in lower grades. Other sections of the Malawian community were not happy with the use of Chewa as it was not their first language. The cardinal point is that Malawians believe in the use of mother tongue as the best language for initial education but, there is conflict between policy and practice. The study by Ngalande and Chigeda does not bring out the types of challenges which learner face when learning Chitonga, thus need for research. It was important to establish how teachers are teaching literacy to grade 1 to 4 using Chitonga in the multilingual classes of Livingstone.

In South Africa, a study was done by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and UNESCO's Institute for Education (UIE, 2006). The aim of the study was to find out the difference in reading performance between the learners who were taught in their first language and those who were taught in a language that was not their first language. Grade six language achievement was compared province by province and the study revealed that the

learners who learned through the medium of their first language (L1) performed far much better than the learners who were taught through the medium of their second language (L2). This shows the importance of using mother tongue or L1 as the medium of instruction, but it does not account for causes of poor or low performance in L2. Learners achieve more when taught through the medium of a familiar language as compared to using other languages which are not first languages of the learners.

A study by Tembo and Nyimbili (2021) looked at the practicality of using Indigenous Language (Nsenga) as Medium of Instructing at Grade 1-4 in Selected Primary Schools of Petauke District. The study found that teachers' perception on the implementation of the use of familiar language in selected Primary Schools in Petauke District was positive because the usage of Cinyanja as an instructional language was high in the primary schools due to the policy restriction while the usage of Nsenga as an instructional language was as high due to the sociolinguistic situation in the classrooms and this lead to the teachers and learners preferring to use Nsenga as their language of instruction. Further, Mkandawire, Zuilkowski, Mwansa and Manchishi (2023) argue that bilingual materials and real-life resources with visual aids and talking walls were also reported to aid in the teaching reading and writing in multilingual classes. They add that word or talking walls were used in Zambian early grade classes to aid learners' understanding of teaching points by posting various teaching and learning materials on classroom walls. Sticking to the regional languages without teacher's creativity and realising the language environment becomes a problem for learners in multilingual classrooms.

Chiappe et al., (2002) noted that multi-language classrooms are a norm in the urban areas of United States of America. Students who speak languages other than English are often taught in multiple-language classrooms with some form of sheltered content instruction designed to develop English language while teaching content-area knowledge in reading, numeracy and language arts. Teachers face the daunting task of simultaneously building children's reading and writing ability and enhancing their English-language growth. Complicating matters is the fact that many of these students are from families where the adults in the household have varying levels of English-language proficiency and sometimes limited literacy in any language. This can limit the opportunities that are available for practicing the English language or for providing assistance with homework and other school activities. This study however looked at the relevance of Chitonga as a LoI from grade one to four in the multilingual community of Livingstone. In line with this study, it was important to establish the pedagogical challenges teachers face on the use of Chitonga as a language of instruction in Livingstone.

Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020) conducted a study on quantitative and qualitative benefits of translanguaging pedagogic practice among first graders in multilingual classrooms of Lundazi district in Zambia. Data was collected qualitatively as interview guides and classroom observations were used to bring out the qualitative benefits which were observed or experienced

throughout the experiment. The study reviewed that regional languages were no longer influential in the primary school classrooms of today as their languages are not having a place in the school curriculum especially in eastern province of Zambia. Some of the rural population in Zambia is monolingual. This means that they use one language and there is a possibility that that language is not the language being used as a medium of instruction. According to the literature reviewed, emphasis has been placed on challenges of promoting the use of first languages in initial literacy acquisition without looking at the relevance of such policies on the multilingual communities. However, this study looked at the relevance of Chitonga as a LoI from grades one to four in the multilingual community of Livingstone.

Simachenya (2017) conducted a study on Language Practices in a Multilingual Classroom Situation in Livingstone Urban. Using purposive sampling, the data were collected from twenty teachers and twenty pupils through semi-structured interviews as well as direct observations of lessons. The findings of the study found that in a Tonga regional language classroom, the classroom sociolinguistics was characterised by Nyanja instead of the language of instruction. It is clear that Nyanja was preferred by learners to enable them to contribute freely during lessons in a way of responding to the oral questions from their teachers. The study also established that learners preferred English to Tonga to facilitate participation and addressing teachers to maintain formality and prestige. The study also attributed shortages of Chitonga books as a challenge in implementing Chitonga in classroom situations. The study also established that languages like Tonga and Lozi were limitedly used by learners for the purpose of solidarity with peers from the same ethnic group or close friends. Also, Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021) stated that the regional languages were not the same as the community languages orthographically like the case of Tumbuka and Cinyanja in Lundazi district and the books were not adequate. However, this study looked at the relevance of Chitonga as a LoI from grades one to four in the multilingual community of Livingstone.

Muzeya and Mkandawire (2023) found that some teachers had to switch from Tonga to other languages spoken by learners in class to foster their understanding. The study also established that translanguaging was a promising strategy for teaching diverse learners in multilingual classes of Choma district as it improved learners' participation, cognition and aided the connection of what they were doing in class to their language of play and home language. In addition, Mashinja and Mwanza (2020) who stated that translanguaging pedagogical practice enhances epistemic access and makes teaching and learning become more effective and meaningful in heterogeneous classrooms. Switching from one language to the other provided learners with the content they need to learn in their local languages hence understanding takes place.

Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021) argue that the use of a regional language to cater for linguistic grouping in a province and across districts does not represent the real sociolinguistic that exist in

the communities, schools and homes where the learners come from. They argue that the teaching of literacy to learners whose first language of instruction is not the regional language is faced with the failure to use the teaching and learning materials effectively as they are in a different language alien to the learners. They also argue that the classroom sociolinguistic environment does not favour the use of the community language and the policy does not allow such, the assessment is imposed in the regional language which is not in the community, the language have phonological and phonemic differences and the curriculum is premised on monolingual ideologies.

Mashinja and Mwanza (2020) concluded that the pre-primary teachers' uptake of translanguaging gave room for changing the conceptualization of language, particularly towards pupil's linguistic repertoires as social communicative and learning tools worthy ensuring meaningful learning opportunities for all learners; enhancing positive language teaching and learning experiences. Other scholars like Namuyamba et al., (2018) argue that more regional languages have to be used in order to promote the one Zambia one nation slogan despite Bemba, Nyanja and English being the widely used languages. This will enable a number of people to appreciate their languages and the way they can influence learning and help content understanding in Zambian schools. Therefore, different uses of translanguaging bring about positive effects on the learners and this creates a conducive learning environment linguistically to multilingual learners and classes in the African and Zambian context.

This study aimed at establishing the relevance of Chitonga language as a language of instruction in the multilingual community of Livingstone city. The argument put across by those supporting the use of only seven zonal Zambian languages as MOI is that these languages have a similar orthography and therefore can easily be learnt by both learners and Nyanja, Kaonde, Lunda, Lozi, Bemba, Luvala and Tonga teachers. Such arguments find support in views such as those of Mwanakatwe (2013) who says that true, several of the local languages and dialects are similar as practically all of them belong to the group of Bantu-speaking language group. This means that the use of Tonga as a MoI in a multilingual community of Livingstone can be of great value and relevance not only to the school going children but to the whole community, thus need for research.

Second language is not only English, but it can even be a local language that a child is not very familiar with. Namwanga is predominantly used in Nakonde District where, according to the new policy, Bemba is the MoI. A study by Chinyama (2016) found that pupils had problems in understanding what the teacher said in Bemba due to lack of proficiency in Bemba. Mulunda (2016) also argued that some of the regional languages were not mutually intelligible with the community languages the learners used hence created problem for literacy acquisition. Therefore, towns in Zambia are multilingual and yet the policy still dictates the use of monolingual practices embedded in the regional languages. Hence, the focus of this study was to

establish the relevance of Chitonga as a LoI from grade one to four in the multilingual community of Livingstone. In line with this study, it was important to establish how teachers are teaching literacy to grade 1 to 4 using Chitonga in the multilingual classes of Livingstone.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relevance of Chitonga language as a language of instruction in the multilingual schools of Livingstone city.

Objectives

- i. To assess how teachers are teaching literacy to grade 1 to grade 4 using Chitonga in the multilingual classes of Livingstone.
- ii. To establish the pedagogical challenges teachers face on the use of Chitonga as a language of instruction in Livingstone.

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

This study followed a phenomenological design. It used in-depth interview techniques to establish perceptions of the relevance of using Chitonga as a medium of instruction in a multilingual community of Livingstone. This study had a total number of fifteen (16) participants and the distribution is as follows: three (3) head teachers, twelve (12) grade 1 to 4 teachers (four from each selected school) and one (1) official from the district education board. Simple random sampling was used to select the three (3) schools which automatically included the head teachers at the selected schools. Data was collected using interviews and complete classroom observation. Nyimbili and Nyimbili (2023) compliment this choice in that language researching calls for the researcher to be inside the classroom in one way or the other. This is because, through observation, Mwinsa (2013) suggested that researchers can also uncover factors that are important for a thorough understanding of the research problem that were unknown when the study was designed. Since this study was qualitative, data was analyzed descriptively through the identification of themes which were in line with the research questions. For the sake of authenticity, the researcher made direct quotations from the responses that were given. Consent from relevant authorities was sought before carrying out the research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Teaching of Literacy to Grade 1 to 4 Learners using Chitonga in the Multilingual Classes of Livingstone urban.

In order to make learning and teaching of literacy successful in multilingual classes from grade one to four using Chitonga as a language of instruction, teachers in Livingstone city implored various ways. These were:

Using the language of play

The study findings established that teachers used English and the languages of play to teach literacy to grade 1 to 4 learners because Chitonga was not a common language of play among the children in school. One respondent said: *when learners are playing and interacting among themselves, they use Nyanja and when they come in class, they have to switch to Chitonga.* Another teacher added that: *Children use Nyanja when playing and in their home and not Tonga.* Many learners from grade 1 to 4 in Livingstone have adapted the use of the language of play when learning using Chitonga as a LoI. The study findings established that English and Nyanja are dominant languages of play for learners in Livingstone city and these are the languages that were commonly used in the grade 1-4 classroom. One teacher said: *most learners at this school are too conversant with Nyanja and thus, when they are playing Nyanja dominates.* Another teacher commented that:

As you might be aware, before learners enter for grade 1 the majority of them have a pre-school background for the fact that Livingstone is an urban district. Therefore, at pre-school the LoI is English and when they come to grade 1, it becomes hard for them to divert from English to Chitonga. Therefore, even interactions among themselves is done in either English or Nyanja.

The findings are supported by Simachenya (2017) who study also discovered that learners preferred English to Chitonga to facilitate participation and addressing teachers to maintain formality and prestige. The study findings are also in line with Tembo and Nyimbili (2021) who found that teachers' perception on the implementation of the use of familiar language in selected Primary Schools in Petauke District was positive because the usage of Cinyanja as an instructional language was high in the primary schools due to the policy restriction while the usage of Nsenga as an instructional language was as (sic) high due to the sociolinguistic situation in the classrooms and this lead to the teachers and learners preferring to use Nsenga as their language of instruction. From the foregoing, it was evident that the classroom sociolinguistics in the urban towns in Zambia where the regional language was not the community language like in Livingstone influence the teachers to use the community language to teach at the expense of the regional language.

Translanguaging

The study findings found that teachers chose to switch languages by using one which could be understood by a learner all the time until that learner could understand the official language of instruction. One respondent commented that:

the best people who can give you proper information are the teachers who teach at primary level from grade one to four. These are people who are highly engaged with the learners and are the ones who have full information on how

they are teaching in this multilingual classes. However, as a head teacher, I have always encouraged them to use different languages like Nyanja, Tonga or English so as to meet the educational needs of all the learners.

Another teacher stated that:

Teaching literacy in a multilingual class from grade 1 to 4 is not an easy job. As a teacher there is need to use English to cement the understanding of Chitonga to the learners.

The language of instruction in Livingstone is Chitonga while learners come from different language backgrounds. Therefore, in order to help all the learners meet their education goals, research revealed that teachers in Livingstone opted to teach Chitonga along with Cinyanja and English. Many learners in Livingstone have adapted to learning using Chitonga through translanguaging despite most of them not being native Tonga speakers. The study findings are similar to Simachenya (2017) who found that in a Tonga regional language classroom, the classroom sociolinguistics was characterised by Nyanja instead of the language of instruction. In that sense, translanguaging provided the transition and the scaffolding in which technical terms and concepts were framed to enable ease of recall, cognitive processing and access. It was evident during research that classroom situations of multilingualism influenced teachers to translate in English or Nyanja when teaching literacy in Chitonga from grade 1 to 4.

Translating

The study findings established that translation is one of the methods used by teachers to teach literacy. One teacher said that,

Because Livingstone is a multilingual community, I say the word in Chitonga and then translating it familiar languages. Secondly, I use picture study to get sounds and I also use Flash cards for sound recognition.

Another participant said:

I use a language that embraces everyone and the current syllabus we are using is one of the best because it helps them to understand and enhances their reading because when learning subjects like literacy, they have to deal with sounds in local languages so that it helps them to read English in a better way at a later stage of education.

It was discovered during research that through translating, learners who had challenges with the use of the LoI were now able to get the lesson contents and also learn the LoI. Research also revealed that sociolinguistic situations in multilingual classes prompted teachers to translate from

Chitonga to either English or Nyanja in order to help learners improve their literacy levels and proficiency in the LoI. One teacher said:

It is quite a challenge because the majority of the pupils do not know how to read Chitonga. Hence, I spend much time just explaining one thing for pupils to understand. No matter how much time I spend on explaining the same thing, pupils still fail to know how to read at the end of the day because Tonga is not the language of play.

One teacher said:

Teaching is supposed to be done in Tonga but we do not know how to speak Tonga fluently hence we use Cinyanja. The learners too, do not know how to speak Tonga in these classes hence we use a common language in class.

Due to language proficiency, teachers are forced to speak other languages in order to teach. These findings are supported by Nyimbili (2021) who also found that the other translanguaging practice was the co-working with translation across languages. This was the strategy the teacher used to also ensure that every learner had access to the knowledge being presented in class. These are also supported by Mashinja and Mwanza (2020) who stated that translanguaging pedagogical practice enhances epistemic access and makes teaching and learning become more effective and meaningful in heterogeneous classrooms. This agree with Namuyamba et al., (2018) when they stated that more regional languages have to be used in order to promote the one Zambia one nation slogan despite Bemba, Nyanja and English being the widely used languages. In this context, the teachers being in control of the class has all the ways to ensure that learners are learning using the language they can understand. For this, it was wise for the teachers to be translating from one language to the other to ensure that every learner had access to knowledge in that class. The teachers can be said to be ‘classroom and linguistic sensitive’ because they could sense the needs of the learners and respond quickly with language change to ensure they are not lost. In such a manner, it can be noted that teachers were above the policy restrictions of using the regional language in the primary classrooms which were not providing access to equitable learning in multilingual classroom. Such initiatives are made to ensure that learning was taking place effectively.

Syllabic cards

The study found that in the teaching of learners in multilingual classes of Livingstone, the teachers used syllabic cards to enable learners build words through the sounds taught and the syllables which they build from the sounds. Through the use of syllabic cards, most learners from grade 1 to 4 in Livingstone have adapted to learn using Chitonga though most of them are not native Tonga speakers. Through this procedure, learners are able to use their languages to

give examples of words since the syllable is defined. One responded said, *“in order to help learners build words, we use Syllabic cards”*. Another respondent further said:

Most children who are not Tonga speaking faced challenges in their early years, therefore, to assist them I thought of imploring the use of cards and it has proved to be effective. I have seen most of my learners who had challenges in reading and making words improve.

Multisyllabic words can stymie struggling readers. These findings are supported by Bender et al (2002) who found that multi-dimensional methods in teaching were best when teaching using a local language. Hence, they have mastered quick and accurate recognition of the syllable types, long words can be decoded in a systematic manner. Research discovered that in order to help children with challenges in the LoI, teachers opted using syllabic cards which helped in word building and fluency promotion.

Code switching

The study revealed that even if most schools in Livingstone endorsed the use of Chitonga alongside English. The findings showed that code switching for both the teacher and the learner would enhance an acquisition of both Nyanja and English language competence. One participant echoed:

I am not Tonga and I do not understand Tonga fully which makes me fail to use Tonga fluently in class. To compensate for this, I usually use Cinyanja since my learners speak Nyanja even more than me.

Another participant stated that:

Explaining content to learners using broken Tonga becomes bad to the native speakers hence we usually use Nyanja. Nyanja is preferred because most learners use this language in their daily communication at home and in school.

Through the use of code switching, most learners have adapted to learning using Chitonga as a LoI in as much as most of them are not native Tonga speakers. This is in line with Kudzai et al., (2013) who observed that mother tongue was only used at a classroom level during oral discourse through code switching, practicing teachers and pupils had devised in order to solve classroom language problems. Muzeya and Mkandawire (2023) also found that some teachers had to switch from Tonga to other languages spoken by learners in class to foster their understanding. They further argue that translanguaging was a promising strategy for teaching diverse learners in multilingual classes of Choma district as it improved learners' participation, cognition and aided the connection of what they were doing in class to their language of play and home language. Tonga would enhance a continuity of culture in the lives of the children. By clinging to English as MoI and embarking on the national literacy framework (NLP), the sub

urban schools seem to be portraying a sense of insecurity with the NLP. However, this desired model of instruction has similar reasons as those indicated in the 1977 educational reforms where the policy allowed a mixture of English and Local language for better lesson delivery on the part of the teacher and for easy grasping of concepts on the part of the learners.

Using talking walls.

The study reviewed that the use of talking walls has proved to be effective in teaching language to early grades. Using talking walls in teaching from grade 1 to 4 in Livingstone district has helped most learners adapt to learning though the majority of them are not native Tonga speakers. One participant commented that, “*the use of talking walls has proved to be effective in helping learners who have language problems.*” During the observation, it was realized that the rich messages on the walls were attracting learners to go through what they learnt by reading through such work. They could struggle to read in Tonga but always used the walls to their advantage. This created less dull moments for the learners in classrooms.

These findings are in line with Chigenda (2012) who found that the cardinal point is that Malawians believe in the use of mother tongue as the best language for initial education but, there is conflict between policy and practice. Research revealed that teachers used talking walls to enhance language development of Chitonga through putting up talking walls from which learners got the meaning of words in both English and Chitonga. Mkandawire, Zuilkowski, Mwansa and Manchishi (2023) argue that bilingual materials and real-life resources with visual aids and talking walls were also reported to aid in the teaching reading and writing in multilingual classes. They add that word or talking walls were used in Zambian early grade classes to aid learners’ understanding of teaching points by posting various teaching and learning materials on classroom walls. Posters of commonly used Tonga terms and their meaning were put in grade 1 to 4 classes by the teachers. Research discovered that in order to help learners with the challenges in literacy and especially in the use of the LoI, talking walls played a great influence in building phonetics and spellings in Chitonga.

The Pedagogical Challenges Teachers Face on the use of Chitonga as a Language of Instruction in Livingstone Classrooms.

The second objective was to establish the pedagogical challenges teachers face on the use of Chitonga as a language of instruction in Livingstone. The challenges included:

Poor classroom environments

The study revealed that poor classroom environments in Livingstone affected teaching using Chitonga as a language of instruction. The poor classroom environment meant the over enrolment, lack of desks, books and classroom general congestion not supporting quality learning (Mwansa, Moono, Chavwanga, Banda & Chishipula, 2019). During observation, the

researcher realized that some learners were not sitting properly on a desk as one desk could take up five children and this affected their writing abilities. They could also not use the few books effectively as the class had about fifteen desks against six books hence they could not share. Poor classroom environments made it difficult for teachers to pay attention to individual needs of the learners especially those who had more difficulties in the use of Chitonga. One teacher was quoted saying:

As you may be aware, since the time the new dawn government (UPND) announced free education from grades 1 to 12 in all public schools, there has been an increase in enrollment at primary level in public schools. This has affected delivery on our part as teachers as the number of learners we have in class cannot be well managed.

Another teacher said:

It is hard to concentrate on individual literacy challenges different learners could be facing. Due to the overcrowded classes in this school, time is also never enough from literacy.

These findings are supported by Pali (2020) and Nyimbili (2021) who found that classroom environments were not fertile for teaching in local languages. The issue of overcrowded classes for instance made it difficult for teachers to help out pupils who had difficulties with the use of the MOI in Livingstone district. The pupil to teacher ratio was so high that it was difficult for teachers to attend to the needs of the learners. Research revealed that poor classroom environments made it hard for teachers to find solutions for those pupils who had challenges in the use of the MOI in the multilingual community of Livingstone as discovered by Mwinsa (2013) who found that having adequate learning spaces in schools was vital for effective learning to take place.

Shortage of Chitonga books

The study findings proved the point that teachers and learners faced challenges in the teaching and learning of literacy from grade 1 to 4 using regional languages like Chitonga. The shortage of Chitonga books for grade 1 to 4 learners in Livingstone district has negative consequences on the teaching and learning of literacy using Chitonga on both the teachers and the learners.

Another participant added that:

"I don't just give them assignments, but I have also utilized the few story books available in the school. These story books have helped my learners improve proficiency in Chitonga. They are now able to read and write Chitonga well as

a result of these story books. Sometimes I even allow them to go with the story books at their homes for further practice.”

Another said that:

Our schools need to be restocked with Chitonga books so as to help both the teachers and learners in the teaching and learning using Chitonga.....this will help learners improve in both reading and writing skills in Chitonga.

This is because text books are resource materials for both the teacher and learner. Simachenya (2017) supported this when he found that shortages of Chitonga books as a challenge in implementing Chitonga in classroom situations. The Tonga orthography was different from the Tonga they spoke in the urban hence the teachers were supposed to have access to the right materials which have the correct Tonga orthography which should be used to teach learners if they are to acquire the correct literacy in Tonga as a language of instruction. This challenge was also echoed by Nyimbili and Mwanza (2022) when they stated that the regional languages were not the same as the community languages orthographically like the case of Tumbuka and Cinyanja in Lundazi district and the books were not adequate. Therefore, the use of correct books which can be enough to meet the large numbers of pupils in class would help learners learn literacy better than ever.

Difficulties in introducing new phonemes.

The study established that another problem that teachers faced when using Chitonga as a LoI was when they wanted to introduce the new phoneme for the day. Introducing new phonemes by teachers was a big challenge when teaching using Chitonga in the multilingual classes of Livingstone. One respondent said that: *I teach the vowels first and use a key picture for each (drawing). I teach one frequently used consonant at a time in conjunction with the vowels.* Another respondent said: *I do phonemic awareness and then ask, “What is the sound they hear at the beginning. Then I blend sounds and syllables to form words. Additionally, I repeat with another common consonant.* It was observed in class that the Tonga phonemes were different from the Nyanja ones hence it was challenging for the teachers to introduce the phonemes without using two or three languages. The teachers opted to use the phonemes of Cinyanja was common in class unlike the Tonga phonemes which could not be known by most learners.

These findings were similar to Nyimbili and Mwanza (2020) who found that regional languages were no longer influential in the primary school classrooms of today as their languages are not having a place in the school curriculum especially in Eastern province of Zambia. A teacher could introduce the new phoneme by asking learners to identify a picture and from the name given, a phoneme could be introduced. The teacher’s expectation is that the children would name the picture or object in Tonga because it is the language of instruction. At one particular school, the teacher narrated what happened one day when she wanted to introduce the phoneme /L/. She

displayed a picture of a mango and asked learners to mention the name of the object they were seeing in picture. All the learners who were pointed at said they were seeing ‘mango’ which is not the Tonga name for mango.

Lack of knowledge on the LoI

The study found that Nyanja was preferred by learners to enable them to contribute freely during lessons in a way of responding to the oral questions from their teachers. This means that some learners in the selected primary schools of Livingstone Urban opted to respond to their teachers in Nyanja in order for them to be fully part of the learning process. Many learners in Livingstone district lack the knowledge of the LoI as most of them are not native speakers of Chitonga. One respondent said:

‘When I was given a grade 1 class, I did not know. I learnt from the pupils. I told the Head teacher that I do not know how to speak Chitonga, but he said, ‘yes, that is how you are going to learn’. This is now my fifth year and at least, I can speak but I still have problems with reading and pronunciation’.

One respondent said: *Sometimes I do not know some Tonga words for certain things, so when a pupil has mentioned it in English, I would fail to correct him or her.* The teachers who taught the lower primary were not very proficient in Tonga just like the learners they taught. It was observed in a grade two and three classes that some teachers were more comfortable to use Cinyanja or English than Tonga as their Tonga was not fluent. This made the researcher to conclude that teachers and learners lacked fluency in the language of instruction.

This is in line with Simachenya (2017) who found that in a Tonga regional language classroom, the classroom sociolinguistics was characterised by Nyanja instead of the language of instruction. It is clear that Nyanja was preferred by learners to enable them to contribute freely during lessons in a way of responding to the oral questions from their teachers. Most learners in multilingual classes of Livingstone district were conversant with the use of Nyanja in classroom situations as compared to the LoI (Chitonga). Research revealed that lack of knowledge in the LoI made both teaching and learning difficult as some learners failed to participate in the lessons because they were unable to neither speak nor understand the language which was being used by the teacher.

It was also established in the study that teachers were forced to use Nyanja in their teaching of literacy because learners provided answers in Nyanja instead of the Chitonga which was not familiar to them. It was also learnt that when the teacher used Chitonga to ask questions to the class, the learners would use Nyanja to ask the teacher to rephrase the question in a simpler language they could understand. One respondent said:

The best way to teach literacy in a multilingual class is through using a variety of languages. Teachers need to use a variety of languages like Tonga, English and Nyanja so as to help all the learners understand the concepts and the lesson at large. This will help meet the intended learning outcomes set by a teacher for that particular lesson.

This became a great challenge to teachers. This is what Pali (2020) pointed out in his study when he found out that teachers were not adequately trained during in-set programmes such as workshops, continuing professional development (CPD) meetings and teacher group meetings to allow learners respond in the language of preference. The foregoing findings are also in line with Mashinja and Mwanza (2020) who concluded that the pre-primary teachers' uptake of translanguaging gave room for changing the conceptualization of language, particularly towards pupil's linguistic repertoires as social communicative and learning tools worthy ensuring meaningful learning opportunities for all learners; enhancing positive language teaching and learning experiences. Therefore, teachers are now dictated by the classroom linguistic situation to respond to the learners' linguistic needs.

Pre-school background

The study established that teachers faced a lot of problems with children who passed through Pre-School because the language of play to most of these children was English. The pre-school background of most learners in Livingstone city is a great challenge as most of the learners are used with English as a LoI at pre-school level. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the teacher to drive the learners to the use of Chitonga. One teacher said:

'Most children in Livingstone start by going to private Pre-Schools and go to government schools for grade one where they face very big problems with Chitonga (speaking and understanding). At Pre School, they concentrate more on English than Chitonga. Their parents speak to them in English at home. So, for such a pupil, the language of play becomes English and when they go to grade one, they find it difficult to understand and speak Chitonga. There is need for the parents to help out'.

Another teacher added: *"Parents should start speaking to their children in Chitonga at home in preparation for grade one"*.

Teachers thought that English would have been given the status of a language of instruction in schools, and that this would have catered for those pupils who passed through the Pre-School and those whose home language was English. This would have been a favourable situation given the principle behind the new breakthrough in literacy policy. These study findings are supported by Simachenya (2017) who discovered that learners in Livingstone preferred English to Tonga to

facilitate participation and addressing teachers to maintain formality and prestige. However, there is need to follow the recommendation made by Namuyamba et al., (2018) when they stated that more regional languages have to be used in order to promote the one Zambia one nation slogan despite Bemba, Nyanja and English being the widely used languages. When they get to grade 1 they are taken to a government school where they need to adjust from the use of English to the use of Chitonga.

Communication barrier

The study revealed that there was a communication barrier between learners and teachers in primary schools from grade one to four in Livingstone due to the difference between the language of play and language of instruction. One has to say: *“multilingual classes are very difficult for both the teacher and learners because Tonga is not the original language of the indigenous people of Livingstone”*. Another teacher commented that:

The problem is that, when learners are playing and interacting among themselves, they use Nyanja and when they come in class they have to switch to Chitonga. This is a great challenge to both the learners and me the teacher as there is need to harmonise between the Language of Play and Language of Instruction.

These findings are supported by Chinyama (2016) who found that Pupils had problems in understanding what the teacher said in Bemba due to lack of proficiency in Bemba. On the other hand, some teachers whose mother tongue is not Bemba had some challenges when communicating to the learners during literacy lessons because of language barrier. In Livingstone, learners use Nyanja when interacting among themselves and it became hard to make them change to Chitonga when they are in class.

The study found out that learners had difficulties in understanding when Chitonga was used as medium of instruction. All manners of communication were done in Nyanja. Nyanja was the first language the children were exposed to when they were born. The children only encountered Tonga when they entered school in grade one at the age of six to nine years.

One respondent commented that: previous governments did not consider deploying teachers to areas where they were not conversant with the language instruction, this has greatly affected the delivery of teachers at primary school level in Livingstone. Most teachers in this school who teach at lower primary level do not know how to speak proper Chitonga not talking about writing and reading fluently.

When learners did not understand Chitonga, learning was not taking place effectively as this was seen from the week 10 assessment results and the class observations conducted.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the use of syllabic cards, translating and translanguaging, flash cards, language of play, code switching, and talking walls to teach literacy to grade 1 to 4 multilingual classes were proven to be relevant as they provided learners with access to knowledge which was relevant in the different languages. Therefore, multilingual practices enabled learners to perform classroom tasks and access relevant literacy skills in the languages they understood better rendering Chitonga irrelevant in multilingual classrooms of Livingstone town. The pedagogical challenges teachers face on the use of Chitonga as a language of instruction in Livingstone were phonological, morphological, semantic, mispronounce Chitonga words and misinterpret similar to Nyanja words. Learners also failed to understand explanations given by teachers in Chitonga. Pupils and teachers lacked proficiency in the LoI. Learners found it very difficult to learn in Chitonga. 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. Learner involvement in lessons was very minimal. It can be concluded that the challenges teachers and learners faced made it difficult in the teaching of literacy from Grade 1 to 4 in multilingual classes of Livingstone. From this, it can be understood that the use of Chitonga as a regional language of instruction in the primary schools of Livingstone city was irrelevant as the classrooms were multilingual whose sociolinguistics was bias to the language of play, Cinyanja and English while Tonga was not familiar to all but few learners and teacher.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for this study.

- i. The study then recommends that there is need for the policy makers in Zambia to embrace the changing linguistic landscape in the classrooms and choose to save the children by using multilingual practices when teaching instead of the monolingual regional language.
- ii. The teachers too should ensure they respond to the classroom linguistic environment and teach learners according to their linguistic needs since the regionalized language policies are not supporting the learning environment of today. This will help learners learn in such classrooms.
- iii. The Zambian government should increase the number of languages for initial instruction between grade 1-4 according to the community languages available. This will see the communities choosing a language which is dominant in such communities and influence learning positively unlike the regional language policy which is not helping the multilingual reality of the classrooms of today.

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