

## Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Language Policy in Primary Schools of Chief Chipepo in Kapiri Mposhi District of Central Province, Zambia

Martin Banda, PhD<sup>1</sup>, Nephath Kasebusha<sup>2</sup>, Innocent Mulenga Mutale, PhD<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Edenberg, Kitwe

<sup>2</sup>Kapiri Girls National Technical Secondary School, Kapiri Mposhi

<sup>3</sup>University of Zambia, Lusaka

**\*Corresponding Author:** Martin Banda, PhD, University of Edenberg, Kitwe, Nephath Kasebusha, Kapiri Girls National Technical Secondary School, Zambia

**Abstract:** The purpose of the study was to find out the perceptions of teachers and parents on the 2013 language policy of instructions in the primary schools of chief Chipepo in Kapiri Mposhi district of Central province of Zambia. The study employed the qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect, integrate and analyze data. The study utilized descriptive research design. The target population of the study were all deputy head teachers, senior teachers, class teachers and school executive Parents Teachers' Committees (PTC) in the selected primary schools. The sample size for the study was 110 respondents. The research instruments used in the study were questionnaires and interview guides. Data was collected through questionnaire and interview methods. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic method to generate themes. Excel software 2013 version was used to generate descriptive statistics in the form of frequency tables in order to give clear explanations, presentation and interpretation of the research results. The study showed that the language policy was meant to deculture other language, helps to preserve Bemba language, it is an internal language colonisation and contribute to loss of local languages. Teachers and learners face challenges in implementing the language policy which includes language barrier to both teachers and learners, lack of interest to teach in Bemba, failure to explain concepts in Bemba.

**Keywords:** Perceptions, viewpoints, local languages, indigenous languages, challenges, solutions, language policy, instruction, medium, parents, teachers, learners, Lenje, chief Chipepo, Kapiri Mposhi district, primary schools, grade 1-4.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background

The issue of language of instruction in Zambian schools has been a debatable issue since pre independence era. In the pre independence era, learners were taught in familiar local languages for the first four years. After independence, English was made the official language from grade one to tertiary education. Chishiba and Manchishi (2015) argued that; many studies had been conducted on the issue of language strategy in Zambia (Kashoki 1978, 1989, 1990, Nkosha, 1999) and many recommendations had been made, yet, very little progress has been made. Over the years, Zambians had begun to question and challenge the English-only language of education policy. As early as 1977, reforms were attempted, but did little to change the actual policies. Various studies and research showed that Zambian students were performing below grade level in both English and local languages. In 1996, the educational policies were re-worded after more reformation efforts; this was known as the "Educating Our Future" campaign. While English remained the only medium of instruction, local languages were encouraged to be used to help children achieve initial literacy skills.

Research showed that the 1996 policy change did not lead to higher achievement. A study was conducted for the Primary Reading Programme in 1999 and revealed that students in grades 1-6 were still reading at an average of two grade levels below their own level in both English and local languages. Tambulukani and Bus (2011) recommended that, more time was needed to teach literacy in the local languages and allow the local languages enough time of 2 to 4 years in order to

consolidate initial literacy, thereafter, English can take over as medium of instruction. Other Zambian linguists, such as Mubanga Kashoki, argued that African languages should be the sole language of instruction and should be associated with modernity since they can serve all national needs. He believes that English should serve only international needs as a second language.

In 2013, the government seemed to take Muyebaa and other linguists' recommendations into consideration. An article from *The Times of Zambia* from February 14, 2013 stated that the school curriculum was being revamped in several areas, including language of instruction. In 2013, the policy document was formulated which allowed language of instruction to be administered in a familiar language from Early Childhood Education to grade four. In 2013 National Guide for language of instruction was published by the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MoESVTEE, 2013), mandated that Zambian languages replace English as medium of instruction in Grades 1 to 4, in all primary schools in the nation. The Ministry declared that familiar languages would be used for teaching initial literacy and content subjects in the early education (pre-school) and lower primary school (Grades 1 to 4). The new policy was implemented in January 2014 in all the primary schools, public and private. The term familiar language as used in the policy is not referring to the seven regional languages, but rather to the local language of the community. Zambia being a multilingual state has about seventy-three languages spoken yet, only seven Regional Official Languages are used as language of instruction and subjects that are examined in schools. Despite the policy being a good one, it seems to disadvantage a lot of Zambian learners whose familiar languages are not one of the seven zone languages used in schools as official local languages.

### **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

In Kapiri Mposhi district, the language used in class for instruction from grade one to four is totally different from the learners' familiar languages. Since parents and teachers are interested parties and serious stakeholders, there is need to investigate their perceptions on the current language policy and further examine if there would be room for adjustments in the medium of instruction in primary schools. The introduction of familiar local languages as means of instructions from ECE to grade four has raised some more challenges. In Chief Chipepo of Kapiri Mposhi district which is found in Central province. The language of instruction schools is Ibibemba from grade 1 – 4 and learners are examined in Ibibemba at grade seven, nine and twelve examinations, despite all learners coming from the communities where Ibibemba language is not spoken. To these learners, their familiar language is Lenje. These learners seem not to be benefitting from this good policy because; the mother tongue and the language of instruction in schools is totally different.

Scholars have proved that, if the home language is the same as the school language, children learn how to read and write easily because they come on board, linguistically equipped and the school is as friendly as the home. Additionally, a good number of studies show that children easily acquire literacy when it is administered in a familiar language and this leads to improved education (Batibo, 2014, Laitin, Ramachandran and Walter, 2015). Tambulukani and Bus (2011) tested the degree of fit between students' home language and the language of instruction, on the reading skills of those students. The study found that "a better fit between children's most familiar Zambian language and the Zambian language in which basic reading skills are practiced leads to better reading skills in the Zambian language. Further, Rigole (2014) noted that language differences may also influence differences in instruction and learning outcomes. It has been seven years after the policy was introduced in Zambia yet, learners in Chief Chipepo of Kapiri Mposhi district are still not acquiring initial literacy in their familiar local languages, there is need to find out the perceptions of parents and teachers and further examine the effects of this language policy in relation to learner performance and investigate if there could be room for any adjustments or amendments to the current language policy.

### **1.3. Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by the negative program theory developed by Carol (1985). Negative program theory and negative theory of change show how an intervention is expected to contribute to positive impacts. The negative program theory shows how it might produce negative impacts. Change is initiated in organizations with the hope for positive impact on the system but brings with it negative impacts which Weiss say can be the reverse of the intended ones or different ones (unintended). The

negative program theory is relevant to guide the study because the factors Weiss propounded are also relevant to the implementation of new local language policy in lower primary schools. In her theory Weiss states that with any new intervention being implemented, there is a set of negative impacts that people need to manage. In any normal circumstance whenever change is initiated and plans under way, the program is expected to face challenges which may interfere with the program. With regards to this theory, it suffices to say that the change of the medium of instruction from English to mother's tongue has definitely posed some challenges on teachers and pupils hence the reason to establish them.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The language policy is an issue that is not only locally, but also a regional and a global issue. In the case of developed countries, most of the evidence comes from bilingual educational initiatives in the United States. A large body of evidence shows that children's reading proficiency in their native language is a strong predictor of their ultimate English reading performance (August and Shanahan, 2008; Garcia, 2000; Reese, 2000). In the context of OECD countries and the United Kingdom, Dustmann (2012) highlighted language as the single most important factor in explaining differences between immigrant and native children's schooling outcomes. Bleakley and Chin (2004) based on the "critical period hypothesis" of language acquisition (Lenneberg, 2004) show that children arriving after the age of nine to the United States have lower English proficiency, and in turn lower wages in adulthood, thus demonstrating the importance of exposure to the language of schooling in early ages. The potentially important barriers to learning and socioeconomic advancement that the choice of a non-native language imposes on the majority of the population would be expected to generate opposition to the use of the colonial language as the principal language of education and government.

It is authentically proven that, globally, native languages, if used in schools for initial literacy, enhance educational development. In Africa, the scenario is the same. The level of education is high when a child is first exposed to it in a familiar local language. There is a positive link between using the child's home language and learning outcomes and that many countries diverge from the national language policy and instead use international languages (Lartec, 2014). This is due to parents' and educators' perceptions on the value of English in terms of accessing jobs and participating in a globalized economy. The international languages have gained a strong foothold in the national institutions of Eastern and Southern Africa. Originally established by colonial governments for the purpose of training local civil servants, the formal education system has consistently been identified with the use of non-African languages of instruction. The more recent influence of globalization has heightened the role and prestige of international languages particularly English in education. These languages are now seen as the gateway to global citizenship, economic progress and enhanced social standing. In this context, issues of language and education are hotly debated, particularly where primary education is concerned. Policy shifts on language of instruction are common, as government authorities try to find a solution that will be both pedagogically effective and acceptable to education stakeholders

The quality of formal education, however, has not increased to anywhere near the same degree as school enrolment. One of the major reasons for this discrepancy between school attendance and learning outcomes is that the language of instruction is unfit to serve as a medium for learning. Children, especially those in early grades of primary school, are fluent in their mother tongues but not in the international language that is being used overwhelmingly in the classroom. An entire spectrum of opinion exists on appropriate language of instruction policy and practice, with ample and varied evidence being cited to support widely divergent choices. Using the mother tongue in the classroom enhances student participation, decreases attrition, and increases the likelihood of family and community engagement in the child's learning. Classroom research on language and learning indicates strong links between language of instruction and the participatory, or learner-centered, nature of the classroom (Batibo, 2014; Kioko, 2008; Trudell, 2005). Fewer children drop out of mother tongue classes (Ramachandran and Walter, 2015); understanding what is being taught, and what they are expected to do themselves, helps to improve children's motivation to continue attending school. Parental understanding of the curriculum and ability to help the child with his or her homework are also considerably heightened. With this background information, the researcher feel,

parents and teachers in Chief Chipepo of Kapiri Mposhi district have something to say on the current language policy in Zambia which seem to contradict with what is happening in their area.

Literature further states that, using the mother tongue as medium of instruction enhances the child's cognitive learning. The positive cognitive effects of using a familiar language of instruction include the ready construction of schemata for learning and the availability of prior knowledge in learning new content (Bloch, 2014). In contrast, using a medium of instruction not understood by the learner significantly impedes learning. Regardless of this, many countries in the world are using non- native languages as official languages either alone or together with some native languages in schools. The Philippines is one of the countries that have experienced changes with regards to the language of instruction. The Philippines is made up of islands and with about 120 -175 indigenous languages and 2 foreign ones. The country has two official languages and these are: English and Filipino. As a country, the Philippines were colonized three times by different countries. This situation counted towards the frequent changes in language policy. Because of Spanish invasion of the island country, Spanish was at some point in history used for educational and official purposes. English was later made the official language after America took over the island from the Spaniards. Alberto (2015) contends that the Japanese invasion later on introduced Tagalog (local language) for political and educational purposes. With regards to language policy after independence, The Philippines adopted a bilingual approach to education; bilingual education refers to the use of Filipino and English as media of instruction in specific subjects (Honeyman 2016). The regional languages were mandated as auxiliary official languages and media of instruction in the region where Filipino is less dominant.

Lartec (2014) points out that the language policy of 1987 which was revised in 2004 requires that children in grade 1-3 were to be instructed in Filipino while those in grade 4 onwards were to be instructed using the second language which is English. Filipino is used as language of instruction in the following subjects; Social studies, music, home economics, physical education, practical arts and character education. English on the other hand is allocated to science, mathematics and technology subjects. The essence of using the indigenous language in education is to allow children acquire literacy skills, which later was to be used in the learning of a second language. The Filipinos might have scored marks by introducing mother tongue based education right after independence, the weakness in their system lies with the fact that mother tongue based education has not been given the right time frame. Learners are expected to learn the literacy skills in the first three years of their school life, which is not enough (Dutcher, 1997). In some countries like Ethiopia, learners learn through their mother tongue the first eight years of school life and the system is regarded as successful (UNICEF, 2016). The time frame pupils have been given to acquire the needed literacy skills is too limited and has rendered the use of indigenous language for instruction less effective. This state of affairs has pushed the researcher to investigate the problems that arise as a result of using mother tongue for instructional purposes.

Another inherent weakness of this language policy is the bilingual approach to education. English is introduced as a language of instruction at fourth grade before learners acquire literacy skills from the first language to be used to learn English. Moreover, English has been given great importance hence used widely from upper primary to tertiary level yet Spanish is the language used extensively in social and political context. To the contrary Spanish should have been used alongside the indigenous language as the two could have blended well. The use of two languages can be successful but it all depends on the extent to which learners have reached in acquiring the linguistic competency with the first language such that second language learning is not affected. Lartec (2014) notes that Filipino based education had been hindered by absence of books printed in indigenous language and the lack of vocabulary. By implication, the implementation of mother tongue based education was hurriedly done and little or no research was undertaken as there were no materials to be used at the inception of Filipino as the language of instruction. Moreover the system faced problems as there was no prior training given as teachers were not prepared to teach in local languages. At inception of local language policy, schools largely depended on teachers to improvise learning materials that were lacking.

Litteral (1999) points out that years prior to independence (1970s) things changed for the better though the change was insignificant. Firstly, it was the formulation of the five year- education plan

where basic vernacular education was rejected by the national executive council and English remained the language for formal education. Despite the rejection of vernacular as language of instruction, it was allowed in classes only for explaining difficult concepts. The other developments of the 1970s in education were the extensive debates on language policy which influenced new educational developments that took place in the 1980s (Honeyman 2016). The 1980s also saw some positive changes in language policy in Papua New Guinea. There were debates on language policy and the introduction of village vernacular school system (pre- schools outside formal schooling where vernacular was used for teaching and learning) which were under community control. In addition, for the second time, the philosophy of education council recommended that the first three years of education be in vernacular but this was rejected by parliament. This scenario had also happened in Zambia where suggestions to change the language of instruction were rejected by parliament due to lack of a common language. Had the language of instruction changed in as early as 1980s some of the imminent problems encountered could have been avoided (Litteral, 1999).

Additionally, during the same period in Papua New Guinea the teachers were being trained to teach in local languages after some problems in methodologies were encountered. The researcher would like to find out the challenges whether or not are methodological in nature. The approval of the national language policy in this period led to the enactment of education reforms in 1995 and subsequent introduction of vernacular in primary grades. Lartec (2014) indicates that the current language policy in education system begins at the elementary school where mother tongue education is practiced. Tok Pisin or vernaculars are used in the transition period. The purpose of the use of local language in the three year initial period is to establish strong cultural bonding between children and their community. Honeyman (2016) contends that by the year 2000, the national formal education was providing education to kindergarten and grade 1- 3 in over 380 native languages which increased to 430 by 2003. This was the major problematic case with regards to the use of local languages for instructional purposes in Kapiri Mposhi district. It is not possible that the education system could manage to provide teaching and learning materials in over 400 languages as the country is far from being developed and the researcher would like to contextualize the situation with the case of chief Chipepo of Kapiri Mposhi district.

Many African countries are also in language of instruction dilemmas. All countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with a colonial past are characterized by the use of the former colonial language as the official language of the country. Official language refers to the primary language used in education, to conduct government business and administration including the functioning of higher courts, and the principal language of business and commerce in the country. The primacy of the former colonial languages in formal domains is highlighted by the fact that no country in Sub-Saharan Africa provides secondary schooling or higher education in a local language. In fact, with the exception of Tanzania and Ethiopia, no country offers the entire span of primary schooling in a local language (Albaugh, 2014). Many countries with multiple languages have acquired a single language to dominate their education sectors in Africa. Depending on different estimates and definitions, the number of languages spoken in Africa ranges between 1,000 and 2,500 (Gadelii, 2004). However, only 176 of these African languages are used in schools as mediums of communication, and for many languages, their use is often limited to informal education programs (UNESCO, 2010). In formal education, most African countries use the language of their historical colonizers or the language of a dominant ethnic group. The use of unfamiliar languages as a medium of instruction is often mentioned as an important source of low enrolment rates, retention rates, literacy levels and academic achievement (Tihtina, 2014).

The colonial language policies either adopted the use of English, from the first grade or only used indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary school. Postcolonial language policies have maintained the status quo, thus perpetuating the existence of an elite group, which is characterized by relatively high economic status, high educational level and high competence in English. Therefore, African nations remain prisoners of the past, since they are so overwhelmed by established practices to such an extent that it is virtually impossible to break away from them (Bamgbose, 1991). Hence, the colonial and neo-colonial subjects tend to

undermine their own languages. This attitude of being negative towards one's own language and the exaltation of colonial masters' languages have not been easy to remove from the life of Zambians. Its scars are still very visible today, particularly in the education system.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in trying to understand the impact of using non-native languages as an official language in general, and as a medium of instruction in schools in particular, on socioeconomic development. Laitin and Ramachandran (2016) show that choosing a language which is very distant from the ones spoken locally, and to which day-to-day exposure is low, has economically important negative impacts on human capital, health, productivity, and income. Exploring the role of language of schooling, recent quantitative evidence from Ethiopia (Ramachandran, 2015), and South Africa (Eriksson, 2014; Taylor and von Fintel, 2016) show that provision of schooling in a local language has positive effects on test scores, literacy, wages, and occupational outcomes. Global evidence has been in support of mother tongue-based education as a critical part of high quality education.

While the education arguments for the use of mother tongue are robust, decisions on language of instruction in schools are often rooted in a nation's history, culture and environment. In the Eastern and Southern Africa region (ESAR), many parents and policy makers have veered towards early adoption of international languages. In addition, many countries in the region have multiple languages spoken within their borders, which present logistical and linguistic challenges in using the language the child is best able to speak and understand. Examples of these countries are Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar and Zimbabwe, to mention but a few. After several decades as a British colony, Kenya gained its independence in 1963. English remains the dominant language in Kenyan politics and commerce. Kembo-Sure and Ogechi (2009, p. 151) note that the colonial history of Kenya established English "as the most revered, powerful and 'prestigious' language," while the mother tongues were to be used "for mundane communicative needs" in the private sphere. Kembo-Sure and Ogechi argue that the "independent language policy in education firmly entrenched the old colonial pattern to the extent that the mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction and taught as a subject for only three years of an individual's school career (ironically shorter than the four years the colonists gave it)." Ethnologue lists 68 languages for Kenya. Current language policy National language policy mandates use of the language of the catchment area as the medium of instruction in Grades 1 to 3 (Nyatuka, 2014); in practice, however, English is used extensively as the medium of instruction even in Grade 1 classrooms (Trudell and Piper). English and Swahili are supposed to be taught in these schools as subjects; but as Ruto observe. Most formal schools flout this policy and start with English as the medium or mix three languages (Ruto, 2004, p.126). Discussing this pro-English classroom practice, Trudell (2007) observes that post-independence governments' education choices have mirrored their own agendas of national unity and stability, including the maintained use of European colonial languages as languages of instruction (p. 554). Trudell argued that for these countries, including Kenya, the national education agendas are motivated by economic progress and social advantage. Speakers of Kenya's non-dominant languages also have strong reasons to value English.

Discussing Lesotho's Language policy, it gained independence from Britain in 1966. Ethnologue lists five languages for Lesotho. According to the current language policy, Kamwangamalu (2013) states that Lesotho is essentially monolingual in Sotho (SeSotho), although English and Sotho are both official languages and are both used in schools. English is widely seen as the language of prestige and economic opportunity. Kamwangamalu observed that parents in Lesotho do not want Sesotho used as the medium of instruction even in lower primary education, because Sesotho is not associated with economic value in the local linguistic marketplace: English is associated with employment opportunities, it is the language of government administration and international communication; it is the language of power and status and the language of the elite (Kamwangamalu, 2013). Education policy and practice Given that Lesotho is described as a monolingual nation and that more than 99 % of its inhabitants are Sesotho speakers (Lekhotho, 2013), it is not surprising that SeSotho features in the education system as the medium of instruction for the first three years of primary school and as an examinable subject through secondary school. What is surprising, from a pedagogical standpoint, is that the medium of instruction switches to English in Grade 4 - despite the fact that approximately 75 per cent of the population of Lesotho do not speak English (Lewis, Simons and Fennig, 2014). In fact,

as Kamwangamalu notes, parents object to the use of SeSotho even in the lower grades because they do not see it as having any economic value added for the learners (Kamwangamalu 2013, p. 161).

Kembo and Ogechi in UNICEF (2016) argued that the transition from mother tongue medium to English medium is premature, it denies children the intellectual skills in their first language which they can later transfer to English. Similarly Dutcher (1997) opined that, the child requires at least twelve years developing his first language, six before formal education and the other six with formal education. The three years in which children are taught through local languages is not enough. By implication it means that even though children are taught in local languages, there are still some deficiencies such that bridging to English becomes difficult in the coming grades of which the researcher would like to explore. The first language needs to be developed fully before the second language can be introduced because it is the necessary foundation for the cognitive development upon which the acquisition of the second language is based. Thus mother tongue based education need to be given the adequate time frame if its effects are to be minimized. The government policy permitted seven Zambian languages to be used as well. In addition to the choice of English as the official language, the government also designated seven Zambian languages, namely Bemba, Kaonde, Lunda, Luvale, Lozi, Nyanja and Tonga as regional official languages (ROL) to be used alongside English as school subjects, for functional literacy and public education (Nkolola-Wakumelo, 2012). However in practice, the medium of instruction became English (Masaiti and Chiti, 2014). English was the language of textbooks, although teachers were allowed to use one of the seven regional languages for oral explanations.

The study by Tambulukani and Bus (2011) tested the degree of fit between students' home language and the language of instruction, on the reading skills of those students. The study found that a better fit between children's most familiar Zambian language and the Zambian language in which basic reading skills are practiced leads to better reading skills in the Zambian language. Matafwali (2010) examined the link between proficiency in language of instruction and reading performance in Zambian schoolchildren. The study found that language fluency and alphabetic skills are separate predictors of reading. It was also found that Grade 2 pupils in the study performed no better than Grade 1 pupils; this was attributed to the move from Zambian language-medium instruction to English medium in Grade 2. In two major reviews of educational policy, in 1977 and again in 1992, the case was made for vernacular languages and their role in ensuring quality in education was made (Linehan, 2005). In the 1996 Educating Our Future policy the government proposed introducing the local languages in grade one for initial literacy using the New Breakthrough To Literacy (NBTL) Programme and English to be introduced in grade two through the Step In To English (SITE) Programme and continue with both English and Local languages from grade 3 to grade 7 using the Read On Course (ROC) Programme. This was implemented in 2000 through the PRP but the local languages were not utilized very much and the outcomes did not favour the nation very much in terms of reading levels (Matafwali 2005).

The current education curriculum framework of 2013 has its main focus on areas such as language of instruction in pre-schools and lower primary grades and review of the literacy teaching approaches and methodologies. The policy mandates all schools to use familiar languages (Mudenda and Nankamba 2014). The main shortcoming of this policy is the lack of clarity with regards to familiar languages and the researcher was mesmerized to do an empirical study on the challenges faced by teachers teaching in familiar languages. It is not specified whether familiar language implies language of the community or the seven zonal languages; Lunda, Luvale, Kiikaonde, Silozi, Chitonga, Icibemba or Chinyanja. Most teachers tend to use zonal languages a situation that has disadvantaged pupils in some areas including Mafinga district.

Mudenda and Nankamba (2014) did a study on the local language in which they investigated the impacts, much of their finding were on the positive side and a few on the negatives. Some of the difficulties identified include; congested classes, limited physical facilities, lack of qualified teachers, diverse languages and no direct translation from English to local languages due to limited vocabulary. From the observation, some challenges can be linked to mother tongue based education while others seem not to be related. One may ask how congested classes tend to negatively affect the use of local languages in teaching and learning. The other weakness from the challenges the study brought out is

lack of explanations of the physical facilities mentioned and how do they affect mother tongue based instruction. The conclusion drawn from this study focused on the positive side of mother tongue based education hence the need to identify more threats to mother tongue based education. This is the point of departure for the researcher to investigate the perception of teachers and parents on the 2013 Language Policy of instruction in primary schools.

Mbewe (2016) did a similar study but was narrowed to the use of Chinyanja as a language of instruction in Lusaka province. Some findings are similar to those brought forward by Mudenda and Nankamba with the exception of the following; lack of parental support for Chinyanja, absence of teaching and learning materials and lack of pedagogical knowledge from teachers. The study by Mbewe (2016) established that pupils do not like being taught in Chinyanja as they were not proud of it. The researcher should have inquired more and find the reason behind that rather than leaving it there. Thus the study of Mbewe (2016) is a base from where this study develops from. This study seeks to provide answers to things left hanging in the said study. This study seeks to find answers to such questions in a bid to improve mother tongue based education. The researcher is convinced that the findings of the study are not enough as there is more to it than what was established.

Similarly, Mubanga (2012), who wanted to establish the effect of using Nyanja as a medium of instruction in a predominately Soli speaking area of Lwimba in Chongwe District which falls under the Nyanja language zone, reports that children learnt literacy skills with great difficulties in Nyanja. Mubanga (2012) concluded that since the pupils in Lwimba area mostly speak Soli they have problems with Nyanja which is the language of initial literacy for the region. Classroom research on language and learning indicates strong links between language of instruction and the participatory or learner-centred, nature of the classroom (Batibo, 2014; Kioko, 2008; Trudell, 2005). Fewer children drop out of mother tongue classes (Laitin, Ramachandran and Walter, 2015); understanding what is being taught, and what they are expected to do themselves, helps to improve children's motivation to continue attending school. Parental understanding of the curriculum and ability to help the child with his or her homework are also considerably heightened.

It is on record that local languages are better to be used as language of instruction in schools especially for lower grades. However, not all the children and teachers in Zambia speak these seven languages. There are more than 70 languages spoken in Zambia and for all these to find space in school curriculum, it is a high mountain to climb, although the latest policy advocates for familiar languages. For all these past years the seven languages have been synonymous with Zambian languages used in education. However, with evidence that some school catchment areas have been found to be disadvantaged because their familiar language or language of play is not any of these seven, it has become imperative that other dialects be brought on board (MoESVTEE, 2013). However, up to now, only the seven ROL are the only ones documented and examinable by the ECZ. Hence adopting few languages as ROL at the expense of many others would bring tension in the nation as other tribes would feel inferior. It was therefore assumed that the use of a neutral, non-indigenous language as the official language would foster national unity hence English was preferred.

The problem of having to choose between several of the competing local languages has meant that countries often tend to remain with the status-quo- the colonial language. Ramachandran and Rauh (2016) stated that, "one of the important arguments put forth in favor of retaining the colonial language has been that it distributes advantages and disadvantages equally across ethnic groups." Thus, individuals may prefer use of the colonial language to ensure that the relative standing of groups in society remains unaffected. Choosing a particular group's language could also result in the speakers of other languages facing discrimination in finding jobs or wages, which would be a concern beyond its monetary costs to those affected. The official use of one local language could undermine the customs and traditions of others. In light of these concerns, individuals might prefer to retain a neutral language even at the cost of foregoing economic benefits, which could be a crucial aspect underlying the revealed language policy preferences.

The national guide document states that one of the key factors contributing to a poor reading level in the past was the use of wrong language of instruction in Zambia, i.e. English. The National Guide also found some faults with the accepted use of zonal languages. For all these past years the seven languages have been synonymous with Zambian languages used in education. However, with



evidence that some school catchment areas have been found to be disadvantaged because their familiar language or language of play is not any of these seven, it has become imperative that other dialects be brought on board (MoESVTEE, 2013). This is the case of the researcher's study site. According to the new policy, each local community is to agree on which Zambian language will be used as medium of instruction in the first four grades. At Grade 5, one of the seven regional languages becomes the language of instruction. English is to be taught as a subject from Grade 2 or 3. Learning in one's first language is 'essential for the initial teaching of reading.' Children arrive on the first day of school with thousands of oral vocabulary words and tacit knowledge of the sound system of their mother tongue, but are unable to use and build upon these linguistic skills because they are instructed in a foreign language. Dismissing this prior knowledge, and trying to teach children to read in a language they are not accustomed to hearing or speaking, makes the teaching of reading difficult, especially in under-resourced schools in developing countries.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The mixed research paradigm (qualitative and quantitative research methods) was used to collect, integrate and analyze data. These methods helped to maximize the strength and minimized the limitations or weaknesses of each other. Therefore complemented each other during the study, hence data collected was reliable. The descriptive research design was used to integrate various components of the study in a coherent and logical manner in order to effectively address the research problem. The descriptive research design was used to collect the experiences, feelings, views, opinions and thoughts of the respondents. The target population of the study were all PTC school executive members, deputy head teachers, senior teachers, all grade 1-4 teachers in the selected primary schools of chief Chipepo of Kapiri Mposhi district. The sample size was one hundred ten (110) respondents. The questionnaire was used as both an instrument and method of collecting quantitative data. They helped to collect data from the vast areas, uphold respondents' confidentiality and enabled respondents express their views freely. The interview guide was used as an instrument to collect qualitative data while the interview was used as a method. The interview method enabled the researchers to test information from respondents by cross examination, hence detailed and reliable data was obtained.

### 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. Perceptions on Language Policy of Instruction

**Table1.** *Perceptions on language policy of instruction*

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Meant to deculture other language</i>	10	16.7
<i>Helps to preserve Bemba language</i>	10	16.7
<i>It is an internal language colonisation</i>	7	11.6
<i>Contribute to loss of local languages</i>	12	20.0
<i>Contributes poor academic performance</i>	10	16.7
<i>Mother language is not used in schools</i>	5	8.3
<i>Lead to extinction local languages</i>	6	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** *Field Work, 2021*

*N = 60*

The study revealed that the language policy was meant to deculture other languages that have no Bemba speaking background. The study support Emenanjo (2006) that the essence of using the indigenous language in education is to allow children acquire literacy skills, which later be used in the learning of a second language. The introduction of mother tongue based on education right after independence has some weaknesses in their system lies with the fact that mother tongue based education has not been given the right time frame. Learners are expected to learn the literacy skills in the first three years of their school life, which is not enough. In some countries like Ethiopia, learners learn through their mother tongue the first eight years of school life and the system is regarded as successful (UNICEF, 2016). The time frame pupils have been given to acquire the needed literacy skills is too limited and has rendered the use of indigenous language for instruction less effective.

The implementation of the language policy in schools helps to preserve Bemba language in the Lenje areas. The language policy is an issue that is not only locally but also a regional and a global issue.

The language acquisition of children arriving after the age of nine have lower English proficiency and in turn lower wages in adulthood, thus demonstrating the importance of exposure to the language of schooling in early ages. The potentially important barriers to learning and socioeconomic advancement that the choice of a non-native language imposes on the majority of the population would be expected to generate opposition to the use of the colonial language as the principal language of education and government. The implementation of Icibemba as a medium of instruction in Lenje land in real sense is an internal language colonisation of the Lenje areas. Tambulukani and Bus (2011) revealed that it is better fit between children's most familiar Zambian language and the Zambian language in which basic reading skills are practiced leads to better reading skills in the Zambian language. The majority of the respondents indicated that use of Icibemba as a medium of instruction and Zambian subject in the area aims at preparing learners for an alien language.

The study supports Kembo and Ogechi (2016) whose study showed that the transition from mother tongue medium to English medium was premature, it denies children the intellectual skills in their first language which they can later transfer to English. It is important to make mention that children requires at least twelve years developing his first language; six before formal education and the other six with formal education. The three years in which children are taught through local languages is not enough. By implication it means that even though children are taught in local languages, there are still some deficiencies such that bridging to English becomes difficult in the coming grades of which the researcher would like to explore. The first language needs to be developed fully before the second language can be introduced because it is the necessary foundation for the cognitive development upon which the acquisition of the second language is based. Thus mother tongue based education need to be given the adequate time frame if its effects are to be minimized. The Optimal first language education provides rich cognitive skills, which make transition to second language medium education easy. However, this could be only possible in an environment with a mono language.

The use of Icibemba contribute to loss of local languages. This is because the language is introduced to grade 1-4 when they are still young. The language learnt in schools has more influence on learners. It is in this context that the use of Icibemba lead to the extinction of the local Lenje language in the local areas of the Kapiri Mposhi district. This could be the more reason for the poor performance of learners in schools because they find it difficult assimilate the concepts in Bemba to Lenje. It is important to point out that the mother language in reality is not used in schools as the Ministry of General Education emphasised on the of the use of the first language in the teaching and learning process as an alien language in schools.

The other respondents interviewed indicated their perceptions that:

*"I feel the use of Icibemba in the non-Bemba speaking areas should have hidden agendas and meaning. It is one way of trying to deculture the local people in terms of their local language spoken in the area. The use of Icibemba in schools as a medium of instruction in the teaching and learning process does not serve the interest of the local people in their areas."*(PTC School Executive Member: School E)

*"The use of Icibemba is for the benefit of the Bemba society as it helps to preserve their language by using it in the teaching and learning process. To make the matters worse, in upper grades Icibemba is an examinable subject. You see now sir that the whole essence is to help preserve the Bemba language. The use of Icibemba in schools is contributing to the loss of the local languages of the local areas because the language is introduced to learners when they are young in grade 1-4, hence they will grow without knowing their languages."*(PTC School Executive Member: School B)

*"I feel the use of Icibemba has really contributed to the extinction of the local languages here. We really want our language to also be used as a medium of instruction in schools for the sake of our children. You see sir! Icibemba is even an examinable subject at grade 7, 9 and 12 in our area, what purpose is it adding to our society. I wish if the language can be localised in the teaching and learning process."*(PTC School Executive Member: School A)

#### **4.2. Challenges Faced by Teachers and Learners on Language Policy of Instruction in Schools**

**Table2.** Challenges faced by teachers and learners on language policy of instruction in schools.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Language barrier to both teachers and learners</i>	15	25.0
<i>Lack of interest to teach in Bemba</i>	8	13.3

**Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Language Policy in Primary Schools of Chief Chipepo in Kapiri Mposhi District of Central Province, Zambia**

<i>Failure to explain concepts in Bemba</i>	10	16.7
<i>Loss of confidence to teach in Bemba</i>	4	6.7
<i>Lack of Bemba background</i>	9	15.0
<i>Fail to change concepts from Bemba to mother tongue</i>	14	23.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Work, 2021

N = 60

The major problem that came out in this study was the language barrier to both teachers and learners. The study partially agreed with Matafwali (2010) that language fluency and alphabetic skills are separate predictors of reading. It is true that learners had challenges in learning in a language that they do not use at home. It is important to make mention that the language that learners speak determine the outcome of the learners in lower grades of 1-4. Teachers lose interest to teach using Icibemba as a medium of instruction. This has been attributed to the fact that some teachers handling the grades 1-4 have no Bemba background. It is in this context that using Icibemba becomes a challenge on the part of the teachers. Teacher cannot express themselves in an effective manner, hence they fail to explain some concepts in Bemba. Learners fail to clearly explain concepts from Bemba to mother tongue, this has posed great challenges on the part of learners in the teaching and learning process. The lack of training to teach in local languages has left them ill-equipped to teach. It makes teachers look like they were not adequately trained when indeed so. This plus the poor academic performance has reduced their confidence. Confidence comes in where the objectives are achieved because it shows that that whatever is taught remains part of the learners. The lack of training leaves teachers powerless as they do not have information needed to perform some tasks. Training is a powerful tool in building ones confidence. A teacher's work is anchored on training as without training there can never be effective teaching.

The use of Icibemba as a medium of instruction in schools does not lead to higher achievement. The study was in line with a baseline study that was conducted for the Primary Reading Programme in 1999 which revealed that learners in grades 1-6 were still reading at an average of two grade levels below their own level in both English and local languages. Muyebaa (2009) believes that this is partially due to the fact that English and Zambian languages do not pair well together; initial literacy skills in a local language do not necessarily transfer to literacy skills in English. This is because the Zambian languages are phonetically based whereas English is not. It is on record that local languages are better to be used as language of instruction in schools especially for lower grades. However, not all the children and teachers in Zambia speak these seven languages. With evidence that some school catchment areas have been found to be disadvantaged because their familiar language or language of play is not any of the seven, it has become imperative that other dialects be brought on board, (MoESVTEE, 2013). However, up to now, only the seven languages are documented and examinable by the Examination Council of Zambia. Hence adopting few languages as Read On Course at the expense of many others brings tension in the nation as other tribes would feel inferior. This study argued with the statement that the use of a neutral, non-indigenous language as the official language foster national unity as it destroys the languages of other regions.

The other respondents that were interviewed pointed out that:

*“The major challenge that arise as result of the 2013 language policy is simply the language barrier faced by both teachers and learners in the teaching and learning process. The children come from homes where they do not speak Bemba, this poses great challenges for them to translate certain concepts to their respective languages. The teachers that are not Bemba speakers and have no background of the language, do face challenges in imparting knowledge in learners. Ba sir! Teachers that are not so much conversant with the language have challenges in teaching learners in Icibemba, this has indeed contributed to the low academic performance of the learners in schools.”(Senior Teacher: School E)*

*“Some teachers do not have the background and knowledge of Icibemba, for this reason they fail to explain certain concepts to make learners understand. If teachers who have to transmit the knowledge to learners in an expected standard fails to explicitly teach due to language barrier, then we have to*

*get worried as local people because we are aware that this leads to poor academic performance for our children.” (Deputy Head Teacher: School A)*

*“The loss of interest coupled with little or no confidence among teachers using Icibemba to teach surely leads to poor academic performance among learners. The learners fails to interpret and comprehend concepts from Icibemba to their mother tongue or the language they use while at home has posed great challenges among learners as you know sir that we are talking about a young girl or boy who is in grade 1-4.” (Senior Teacher: School D)*

#### **4.3. Solutions to Challenges Faced by Teachers and Learners Language Policy**

**Table3.** Solutions to challenges faced by teachers and learners language policy

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Use of Lenje in the teaching and learning process</i>	9	15.0
<i>Training of teachers to teach learners in their localities</i>	5	8.3
<i>Language proficient to determine teacher deployment</i>	7	11.7
<i>More languages to be used in teaching and learning</i>	20	33.3
<i>Teach English alongside local language used</i>	7	11.7
<i>Production of materials in local language used</i>	10	16.7
<i>Supplementary books to be printed in local language</i>	2	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Work, 2021

*N* = 60

The study suggested the use of local languages in the teaching and learning as a medium of instruction in schools of chief Chipeco. This implies that if the languages learners use at home would be used automatically make learning relevant to a child. It is cardinal to make mention that the medium of instruction in the teaching among the Lenje, learning would be of great relevance and easier way of understanding certain concepts. In finding solutions to challenges faced in using Icibemba as a medium of instruction in schools from grade 1-4, team work is the best and ideal option. Team work among diverse group always reveals new and fresh ideas. There can never be an individual who has all the solutions to some challenge. Working together brings together multiple ideas that can help solve the challenges in good time. Team work is also important because it gives all members more learning opportunities. Working together as a team allows people to see the success and failures of others in a supportive environment. Being able to see the failures of others enables other team members to learn from such. Equally in mother tongue instruction where teachers have not undergone training, teamwork should be utilised as it will enable teachers to learn from the success of others and improve their practice. However, team work can only be successful if Learners are to be taught in the local language of the area they are very much similar in terms of their dialects.

The study supported Williams (2017) whose study indicated that to teach a new structural pattern or a new word orally before the children read or write it would help improve their literacy abilities. How teachers teach is as effective as what they teach. The action they take directly affects what students learn. It is important to note that lack of familiarity with the language of teaching is blamed for illiteracy rates among people who live in chief Chipeco of Kapiri Mposhi district Lenje language is spoken. Considering the advantages of using the local language in acquiring literacy. It is important to suggest that teaching in the language learners are familiar with in that particular region for literacy to improve, a learner has to be comfortably seated, and this can help improve the writing and reading skills. Teachers should also try to socialise and have develop the interest in learning in Lenje for the proper interaction with learners in class and school at large. Learning the language is the only option available for teachers as it is the means to an end. Teachers have to mingle with others familiar with the language and try by all means to learn the language. They feel language is best learnt in social circles and not at work premises.

Some of the respondents that were interviewed reported that:

*“The use of the local language as a medium of instruction in the teaching and learning process will surely help to preserve our culture through language. If children can start learning in the language they use while at home can even help motivate the boys and girls in the early grades of 1-4. The*

*localisation of the language to be used in schools as medium of instruction in the teaching and learning process will be of great help for our areas. However, the localisation of the language for instruction in schools from grade 1-4 can only be successful if teachers are re-trained in the local used in the area.”(PTC School Executive Member: School B)*

*“The deployment of teachers in areas where they are not familiar with the language used poses great challenges in the teaching and learning process for both learners and teachers. Therefore, the deployment of teachers should be based on the language proficiency of the area. The learners have to be taught in English alongside the local language used by learners in their homes, this will really help the children to easily understand what they learn. The teaching and learning resources have to be prepared in the language that our children understand more easily. Besides this, supplementary books have to be printed in the language children use in their various homes. The school language policy for instruction should be revised in order to allow other languages be used as the medium of instruction or the sake of our children in schools.” (Deputy Head Teacher: School A)*

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The language policy of instruction in schools was meant to deculture other languages and help to preserve Bemba language, it is an internal language colonisation as it contributes to loss of local language of the Lenje land. It is important to make mention that it contributes poor learners' academic performance in the area. In reality the mother tongue is not used in schools and that it lead to extinction of the Lenje language. Both teachers and learners face challenges in implementing the 2013 language policy in schools which includes language barrier to both teachers and learners, lack of interest to teach in Bemba by teachers that are non-Bemba speakers, hence the failure to explain certain concepts in Bemba, loss of confidence to teach in Bemba, lack of Bemba background and failure to change concepts from Bemba to mother tongue.

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