

Learning in Mother Tongue: Language Preferences Investigation in South Africa

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ABSTRACT This study is based on the findings conducted to investigate children and parents' language preferences in view of the South African language policy derived from 1996 South African Schools Act, which requires instruction to be conducted in the mother tongue in grades 1 – 3. This study is a survey in which interviews and questionnaires were used to gather data from pupils, parents, school heads, Foundation Phase teachers and teachers in Early Childhood Development centres (ECDs). The sample consisted of fifty learners, forty parents, thirty school heads, hundred and fifty Foundation Phase teachers and twenty ECDs. Respondents were purposively selected from metropolitan, township and rural schools in Motheo district in Free State province in South Africa. The findings were that learners and parents preferred English as the language of instruction at Foundation Phase, despite challenges faced in accessing curriculum through the use of the second language. It is recommended that there is a need for attitude change and thus a serious campaign for all stakeholders to appreciate the role played by the mother tongue in the years of schooling.

BACKGROUND

The apartheid era in South Africa was characterised by a language policy that did not officially recognised indigenous languages (L1) spoken by the majority of the population. In 1994, the

government recognised the significant role played by the mother tongue in learning, thus an educational language policy raised the status of indigenous languages. According to the official language policy of the 1996 Education Act and Department of Education (2002), children in Grade 1 – 3 are to be instructed in their first language, and learn English (L2) as one of the subjects on the curriculum. From Grade 4 onwards, English becomes the language of instruction. According to research and literature (Borich and Tombari, 1997 and Ndamba, 2008) this language policy can be identified as a possible model for bilingual education.

In South Africa, parents are permitted to choose the language in which their children are to be educated (Department of Education, 2002); but the majority of parents demand that their children are educated in English (Heugh, 2010). This is partly due to global prestige of English as a medium of international communication, language of business, and pre-requisite for employment (Buthelezi, 2003). In particular, the post-Apartheid influx of indigenous-speaking individuals from rural to large urban areas where English dominates has led to many children in the Metropolitan region beginning their education in English.

It is generally accepted that this preference is educationally detrimental since the ex-colonial language, such as English, or French, or Portuguese is not known well-enough to allow for the full development of knowledge and cognitive skills (Benson, 2002). However, many parents are not cognisant of the relationship between the child's first language and the language of literacy instruction. According to Cummins' (1979, 1999) interdependence model, literacy instruction in the first-language facilitates appropriate development of cognitive academic skills and this foundation and conceptual skills necessary for successful development of those skills in a second-language. Bilingual indigenous-English speaking children often have early verbal input in indigenous language; and English is introduced once they enter school and develops subsequently through English literacy instruction (Verhoeven, 2007). The language situation of these children is termed both emergent bilingual and English second language learners (EL2) as they first encounter a new language when they go to school and have limited oral proficiency in that language (Bialystok, Luk, & Kwan, 2005), as opposed to other bilingual learners who have encountered both languages before scholastic instruction begins. Not much work has been done on parents and pupils' language preferences in a bilingual set up at the elementary level in South Africa. Thus this study sought to investigate unexamined early childhood bilingual education

issues in South Africa, where there is concern about poor performance by pupils in both L1 and L2 language arts.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical and conceptual framework, which informed and framed this study emerged first from bilingualism and its two forms, namely the additive and the subtractive models, and secondly from related models of second language teaching which are the transitional and immersion models.

One of the expectations and assumption of bilingual education is that the product becomes successful both linguistically and culturally, but it is only possible when the form of bilingualism is additive rather than subtractive (Hornby, 1977; Genesee, 1977 and Javier, 2007).

According to Lambert (1977), in additive model, bilingualism arises out of a situation whereby society attributes positive values to both the individual's first language and second language. Cummins (2000) draws the distinction between additive bilingualism in which the first language continues to be developed and the first culture to be valued while the second language is added; and subtractive bilingual in which the second language is added at the expense of the first language and culture, which diminish as a consequence. This implies that children will be adding a second language at no cost to the development of their first language. Borich and Tombari, (1997) observe that the development of additive bilingualism does not have any negative effect on the children's academic, linguistic or intellectual development. A more additive process of bilingualism is when the child's first language and associated culture are nurtured and supported, then the second language is later introduced (Genesee, 1977).

On the other hand, subtractive bilingualism arises out of a situation where the second language is acquired without accommodating the linguistic skills that have already been developed in the first language (Mwamwenda, 1996). Such situations are evident in societies where one language is considered as having a more prestigious socio-economically determined status than the other, which is regarded as inferior (Silva, 1997; Hornby, 1977, Roy-Campbell, 1996). In this model, the learners' L1 skills are replaced by the L2, thereby placing linguistic and cultural systems in conflict instead of complementing one another (Robinson, 1996). The subtractive model thus disadvantages bilingual children (Mac Laughlin, 1990) since studies by Hakuta (1986) in

Travers, Elliot and Kratochwill (1993) show that children with a high degree of bilingualism have a better level of cognitive development.

Travers, et al (1993) regard transitional bilingual programmes as those that use the learners' first language for the purpose of rapid development of English L2 to occur so that students can quickly move on to an English only programme. The rationale behind transitional models is to use the students' first language only to compensate for their lack of proficiency in English, so as to prepare them for immersion in English as the second language (Lemlech, 1994).

BorichandTombari (1997) described Immersion programmes as those that place non-English speaking learners in an English only classroom with a teacher who speaks the students' indigenous language. The principle is that the second language is used as the medium of instruction and the children's mother tongue is only used when the students fail to understand a concept. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982); and May (2008) consider immersion programmes as consisting of full and partial models. Full immersion happens when programmes begin in kindergarten and extend to upper grades. In partial immersion, there is early immersion which includes some subjects in L2 and others in L1, while late or delayed immersion involves subject matter in L2, starting at upper elementary or high school. The official education language policy for Grade R- 3 in South Africa falls under the transitional model, and the delayed immersion programme. This model of bilingualism in South Africa is also used by countries which share the same historical background of colonialism such as Zimbabwe and Kenya (Cleghorn, 1992; Ndamba, 2008).

A number of linguists as well as experienced and successful bilinguals argue that it is highly desirable for multi-cultural societies to support the use of a first language in the learning of young bilinguals in schools (Scarcella, 1990 in Trompkins and Hoskisson, 1995; and Desai, 2001). Hence, mother tongue education in the Foundation Phase years offers the best introduction to literacy that eventually becomes useful in the acquisition of English as a second language (Westley, 1992 in Mwamwenda, 1996; Hawes, 1979; Hakuta, 1986, in Travers et al, 1993).

When coming to the second language acquisition, research show that if a child masters the first language, then learning another language becomes less problematic in those habits of speech, listening, writing and reading which can be transferred to the learning of the second language (Cummins, 1981; Hawes, 1979; Obanya, 1985; Dawes, 1988; Krashen, 1985 in McLaughlin,

1987). Cummins (1981) in Kroll (1990:95) claims that there is an “underlying cognitive/academic proficiency” common to language and this enables transfers of literacy related skills across languages.

The results that second language acquisition is closely related to the proficiency level of the first language are important for bilingual education teachers and parents of children in bilingual education programmes in South Africa. If taken seriously, this literature can contribute to change of attitudes by teachers and parents who neglect the first language in learning in fear that the first language negatively interferes with the learning of a second language.

However, it must be noted that there are some research findings which show that transfer of skills across languages is not automatic (McLaughlin, 1987). For this reason, Sprosty (1995) is of the opinion that second language learning can be aided by effective teaching of the language arts in the first language. Sprosty goes further to say that knowledge about the transfer of skills between languages is important since teachers who are sensitive to the role played by the first language in developing second language literacy skills are in a better position to use those relationships in preparing learners to become proficient in the second language.

In South Africa, the view that the skills transfer from first language to the second language is expressed in the National Curriculum Statement, Grade R – 3: Home Languages; currently in use, where teachers are strongly discouraged from introducing English reading very early in the year, since children who speak English as a second language need to first have sufficient comprehension of spoken English on which to base the early reading vocabulary, and second, an elementary reading ability in *Sesotho/Setswana*. Thus, some of this will transfer to English, and the two languages can function as separate reading media without confusing the child, but to present both codes at the same time results in uncertainty and confusion for some children.

As indicated by the grade one syllabus, additive bilingualism allows Foundation Phase teachers to emphasise the acquisition of oral language which is necessary in reading and writing English as a second language (Sprosty, 1995). This view is supported by Ndamba (2008) who generally agreed that in the early stages of second language learning, oral language development is crucial. Learning to read before the spoken word is mastered is to invite “pseudo-literacy” which is a problem predominant in many African nations where children fail to become competent in both the first language and the second language (Hawes, 1979; Duminy, 1975; and Bamgbose, 1991). With reference to Zambia, where English has been introduced and taught side by side with the

first language at the beginning of grade one, Miti (1995: 3) asserts that “... we have produced thousands upon thousands of children who are unable to read either first language or second language”

Research on bilingualism, suggests that it promotes overall cognitive development (Borich and Tombari, 1997). These authors observed that studies by Hakuta, Friedman and Diaz (1987) indicate that bilingual children perform better on tests of analytical reasoning, concept formation and cognitive flexibility. Travers et al, however, state that the findings that the higher the degree of bilingualism the better the level of cognitive attainment is only possible when the first language is maintained, the social climate is positive, and when the non-English speakers are not negatively judged. Experimental work carried out by Peal and Lambert (1962) inJefreys (1996) also suggests that those bilinguals who loved and respected both of their languages showed positive effects in the areas of creativity and mental flexibility as compared with monolinguals and those who believe that one of the languages is better than the other.

The 1953 UNESCO Committee states that the best medium for teaching a child is the mother tongue through which understand better and express themselves freely. The situation became ironic in South Africa as the Bantu Education Act was passed on the same date as UNESCO (Barnes, 2004). The basic position of the 1953 report, which shows that children learn quickly through their first language than an unfamiliar linguistic medium, is supported by research evidence from African Nations (Mwamwenda, 1996). A recent review of research and programme reports discusses mother tongue – based bilingual or multilingual education for children starting in early childhood (UNESCO, 2011). Out of many research findings, Bamgbose (1991) cites the *Six Year Primary Project* started in 1970 in Nigeria to establish the effectiveness of the first language as languages facilitated more meaningful learning than English. In another research, Cleghorn (1992) in Ndamba (2008) also carried out comparative studies on the effectiveness of the first language over English second language in several schools in Kenya and it also found that important ideas were more easily conveyed when teachers did not stick to the requirements of the English – only language of instruction.

While those who learn through their first language are at an advantage learners who learn through a second language are disadvantaged (Wallwork, 1985; Clegg, 2005; Heugh, 2000; Miti, 1995). Chaudron (1988) asserts that in a learning situation where only the second language is used as a medium of instruction, learners face problems because their task is threefold. The first

is that the learner has to make sense of the instructional tasks which are presented in the second language. Secondly, the learner has to attain linguistic competence which is required for effective learning to take place. Lastly the learner is faced with the problem of mastering the content itself. This is illustrated by Roy-Campbell's (1996:16) interview findings from a former Tanzanian learner who recalled "... the feeling of incompetence and loss of confidence as a result of a poor or hardly any grasp of English. I know of classmates who stayed dumb in the classroom rather than to embarrass themselves in a language they were not even sure they understood".

Based on the findings that bilingualism has positive effects and that the mother tongue is crucial in the initial phase of the child's school life, South Africa found it necessary to implement an education language policy which recognizes the child's first language. This was done through the use of the transitional or the late immersion model of bilingualism where children would learn in their mother tongue in Foundation Phase (Grades R – 3). It was hoped that this language policy for the early grades would reflect some of the expectations and assumptions of bilingualism that the learners understand concepts better in their mother tongue; skills would transfer from the first language to the second language; all instruction in second language should be delayed until initial literacy in the first language, and that some oral fluency in the second language is achieved.

However, McLaughlin (1987), noted that the major problem of the transitional model is that there is a tendency to emphasise English at the expense of the first language. Instead of using linguistic and cognitive development in the first language for later development in the second language, many programmes in this bilingual model give superficial attention to mother tongue instruction and sometimes children are exited into the second language medium of instruction before they have mastered enough of the language to enable them to access the curriculum. Howie and van Standen (2008), established that South African learners at Grade 5 level had achieved superficial levels of proficiency in English and found very little or no evidence of transfer of skills between first language and second language. And Bloch (2011) has established that Foundation Phase teachers preferred to introduce *Sesotho/Setswana* and English reading at the same time before learners had acquired sufficient oral language in the second language. Thus, such neglect of the suggestions given in the English syllabus could be attributed to either

ignorance or negative attitudes towards the role of the first language in the learning of children in Foundation Phase.

Attitudes toward Mother Tongue Instruction

The positive outcomes of a mother tongue instruction policy depend on people's attitudes towards the first language and English second language. Also to understand how attitudes towards a language develop, it is necessary to consider the social and political history of a nation, since such historical forces play a significant role (Bamgbose, 1991; Robinson, 1996). Thus, the apartheid and the post-apartheid language and educational policies obviously provide a solid basis of the explanation of attitudes towards African languages, and English second language (Silva, 1997; Bamgbose, 1991; Roy-Campbell, 1996; Barnes, 2004; Adegbija, 1994; Desai, 2001).

The apartheid language policies either adopt the use of Afrikaans/English from the first grade or only used indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary school. In the apartheid era, South Africa was officially considered a bilingual state, with English and Afrikaans as the sole official languages of the state. With the demise of apartheid in 1994, the new government has adopted a multilingual language policy giving official recognition not only to English and Afrikaans but also to nine African languages: Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele, Swati, Tswana, Sotho, Pedi, Venda, and Tsonga. One of the main objectives of the new language policy has been to promote the status of the nine African languages by, among other things, using them as media of learning. Six years after the policy was enshrined in the country's new constitution, it seems that not much progress has been made yet in attempts to implement the policy, especially with respect to the issue of mother-tongue education. Rather, the status quo prevails: English and Afrikaans remain the media of learning in English-medium and Afrikaans-medium schools, respectively, much as they were in the apartheid era. The African languages are offered as media of learning from first through fourth grades in predominantly black schools, after which English—not Afrikaans because of its association with apartheid—takes over as the instructional medium.

There seems to be a lack of progress in attempts to implement the new language-in-education policy and attributes its apparent failure mainly to past apartheid policies, particularly the Bantu Education Act of 1953. This resulted in a bad influence of undermining indigenous languages

(Robinson, 1996; Bamgbose (1991). Adegbija (1994:33) says: *“This attitude of denigration towards one’s own language and the exaltation of European languages has not been easy to remove in Africa. It’s a scars are still very visible today, particularly in the education system”*. Thus, the fact that indigenous languages are not used for education beyond the lower grades has greatly contributed towards African indigenous languages being regarded as less important. Govender (2008) also observed this kind of attitude, when he say that the overwhelming majority of South African schools pupils are not interested enough in indigenous African languages to study them at school.

Attitudes can be created through functions that people perceive particular languages as performing. In the African context, Ndamba (2008), is of the opinion that official and local languages are regarded as opposed to each other, rather than as complementary as evidenced by the fact that one of the two languages may be regarded as a more suitable language for certain domains, and the characteristic functions are seen in dichotomous terms. Ndamba (2008) says the local languages are characterized by oral usage, individual/community usage, emotional attachment, village solidarity and personal loyalties. English language is characterized by institutional usage, written usage, functional use, economic advantage and national communication. English as an official language has therefore been associated with the success, power, prestige, progress and achievement, and such associations have generally resulted in English getting a high positive evaluation (Ndamba, 2008).

Cummins in Otto (1997) is also of the view that language can be used in the form of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) which requires sound literacy skills, vocabulary that is broad to allow for subject-matter mastery, concept development and skill in formal oral and written expressions. And by virtue of it being used in formal education, CALP can be viewed as a prestigious form of language usage and in the South African context; English is accorded the role of CALP (Otto, 1997). Another main form of language use is regarded as the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), a form of first language which is acquired in early childhood and meant for social access due to its relatively limited vocabulary. Ntshingila (2006) says in South Africa, the indigenous languages (first languages) are accorded the role of BICS

which has contributed to negative attitudes towards the first language, because they have never been used as CALP, during the initial years of schooling.

Learner Attitudes

According to Ndamba (2008), Westermann (1940) in Ngara (1982) was among the first people to note that there was a danger in using European languages as a medium of instruction for African children, who even at primary school level, did not attach any importance to the mother tongue, which they were prepared to get rid of as quickly as possible.

In Zimbabwe, Ngara (1982) in Ndamba (2008) observed that students had negative attitudes towards African languages. This was evidenced by the way the University of Rhodesia students in the 60s used to regard an English Honours degree as prestigious whereas a degree in Shona had a low reputation. Ngara goes further to say that even white government officials were aware that Africans had negative attitudes towards their own language. Rwambiwa's (1996) findings confirmed that pupils often humiliated teachers of African languages by expressing their (pupil) negative attitudes towards learning indigenous languages. He argues that such attitudes, expressed by students towards the mother tongue, are encouraged by the language policy of 1987 which requires students to learn all subjects in English beginning in grade in grade four.

In Tanzania, where education in primary schools is conducted in Kiswahili, studies by Roy-Campbell (1996) show that students favour retention of English as a medium of instruction at secondary level. Roy-Campbell found that many Tanzanian students who said that English should be maintained as medium of instruction could hardly carry out a conversation in English with the researcher. Such sentiments expressed by students who could barely communicate in English can only be attributed to attitudes. Roy-Campbell goes on to say that students do not value their mother tongue; hence they would prefer to learn using a language that they do not comprehend even when given the option to use their own language in learning.

In South Africa, the situation is not different. South African learners who were interviewed by Setai (2005); Langa and Setai (2006) preferred the use of English in the learning of mathematics in the secondary school. These researchers attributed learner choice of the language of instruction to the socio political situation. These learners did not see value in their African languages as they do not have any social and economic benefits. In September 2009, the Minister

of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande said that those taking up African languages at University level were sometimes perceived by their peers as ‘second-grade students’ (Sapa, 2009). These are few examples of learners’ attitudes towards English as a medium of instruction.

Parental and Community attitudes

With regard to the West Africa, Fyle (1976) in Ndamba (2008) says that during the colonial period community attitudes were developed when everything pertaining to Europeans was regarded as excellent and worthy of imitation, whereas all that which belonged to the local African community was considered to be inferior. People in the post-colonial countries still identify education with former colonial languages as evident in new South Africa and Namibia, where Roy-Campbell (1996), Granville et al (1998), Setai (2005) observed that African still resist mother tongue education in favour of English which they view as a language of knowledge. Although children from non-English environments speaking backgrounds have potentially rich linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the communities do not indicate an awareness of such linguistic richness because of attitudes which range from ignorance or indifference to support and pride, and this somehow affects children’s learning (Murray and Smith, 1988).

In South Africa, research carried out by Ngidi (2007) and Ndamba (2008) revealed that parents from schools of Mthunzi circuit (KwaZulu-Natal) had positive attitude towards the use of English as language of learning and teaching and as additional language in schools. Then parents of children from Navilsig Secondary school regarded Sesotho second language as being of no value to their children’s lives since it did not render a person employable. The same sentiments were expressed by children of parents concerned. These parents had no objection to their children learning English which they felt was more important for the future of their children.

Part of this study focused on learner’s language preferences since these children are the direct beneficiaries of language policy which recognizes the significance of learning in the mother tongue in the lower grades. Parents’ views were also sought to establish if there is consistency between language policy and parents’ perception of the role of the mother tongue in teaching and learning.

Purpose of the study

This study sought to establish the extent to which learners in grade 1 – 3 and parents with children in Foundation Phase value the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. The impetus of the study came from the strong evidence from research findings which indicate that the mother tongue plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning of bilingual children during early years of schooling.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study used a mix method design and both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain data. A mixed method is a procedure used to collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative research to understand the problem identified in the study (Creswell, 2008). The purpose of mixed methods in this study is to explore the problem that relate to both aspects of the approach and do so accurately.

Sampling

It consisted of fifty (50) learners aged between six and eight years in grade 1 -3 (10 in grade 1 and 20 in both grade 2 and 3) and forty (40) parents with children in the Foundation Phase. The study also targeted all schools principals, all Foundation Phase teachers and Early Childhood Development(ECD) teachers from thirty (30) schools to elicit their views on parents and learners' language preferences in learning. Twenty (20) ECDs, thirty (30) principals and hundred and fifty (150) Foundation Phase teachers participated in the study. School principals, ECDs and Foundation Phase teachers were included in the study since these interact with learners and parents most of the time. They get salient issues from parents through utterances, comments and suggestions during consultations and Parents's days. Respondents were selected from metropolitan, township and rural schools in Motheo district of Education.

Instruments

The face to face interviews were conducted in the mother tongue since most of the respondents were not competent in English. If the interviewer is skilful, Best and Kahn (1993) believe that the interview can be regarded as a data gathering device which is often superior to others as people are more willing to talk than to write, and confidential information may be obtained from respondents who might be reluctant to put it in writing. The interview was considered suitable in

this study in order to determine respondents' opinion, attitudes or trends of beliefs (Sharma, 1994).

The interview schedule for parents had closed and open-ended questions to allow the researcher to follow points which needed elaboration and to clarify questions the respondents misunderstood (Creswell, 2008). The interview was specifically aimed at answering the research question on whether there was consistency between language policy and parents' perceptions of the role of the mother tongue in learning. The interview guide for parents had questions which solicited information on their children's grade level, whether they preferred their children to learn in the mother tongue preferences.

The interview schedule for learners in grades 1 – 3 was structured and intended to find out children's language preferences in speaking, reading and writing. It was meant to answer the research question on the perceptions and attitudes of learners on the use of first language as a medium of instruction. Best and Kahn (1993) say that interviews are particularly appropriate in getting responses from young children.

The questionnaires in this study served as a complementary data collection instrument. The respondents were primary school principals, ECDs and Foundation Phase teachers. There were two questionnaires, one for grade 1 – 3 teachers and other for both school principals and ECDs. Questionnaires were quite appropriate because they were relatively easy and quick to answer (Best and Kahn, 1993). With three types of samples and 181 respondents, the structured questions enabled data to be analysed and compared easily. Reliability was ensured because the questionnaire was structured to allow for greater uniformity in the way questions were asked. Similar questions were asked of Foundation Phase teachers, school principals and ECDs and responses were compared, thereby catering for reliability.

Procedure

Since this study involves participation of minor children, permission to conduct the study was sought from the Free State Provincial Education Department in the Motheo District directorate. The interviews were conducted by the researcher. Learners who were interviewed were identified by teachers as weak, average and fast learners in order to ensure that all ability levels were represented. Parents who had come to conduct business at schools and had learners in any of the Foundation Phase grades were interviewed. Questionnaires were administered to school principals, ECDs and Foundation Phase teachers of 30 primary schools.

Data analysis

Descriptive analysis, frequencies and percentages were used.

Results

Results show that all the sampled learners speak *Sesotho/Setswana* at home. Concerning language spoken with friends during break time, at home and at play, all learners indicated that *Sesotho/Setswana* was the only language they used for communication. The results show that the majority of children understood when the mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase School. Hence, children's responses to the interview concerning their language preference in reading, speaking and writing showed that:

- that the majority of pupils interviewed preferred to read and write in English but when it came to speaking, they mainly liked *Sesotho/Setswana*;
- more respondents indicated that children preferred to learn in English;
- the greater percentage of those who responded indicated that parents wanted their children to learn in English;
- various reasons were given by parents for the language preferred as medium of instruction

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The perceptions and attitudes of learners in grade 1 – 3 were examined on the basis of their language preferences in reading, speaking and writing. The general finding was that children preferred to read and write in English, while they mainly liked to speak in *Sesotho/Setswana*. However, it may be necessary to mention here that when children said they liked to write in English, they could have meant copying English words from the chalkboard since they may not be able to express themselves adequately in English, which is a second language (Ndamba, 2008).

A possible explanation for favouring English more than the first language may be that children are told by parents that they go to school to learn English (Ndamba, 2008). Attitudes that English is more important than *Sesotho/Setswana* may be passed on to children by parents who tell children that English provides educational and employment opportunities in the future (Hart, 2008), thus children may begin to develop negative attitudes towards the first language which

they might then regard as less important (Bamgbose, 1991; Adegbija, 1994; Robinson, 1996; Mchunu, 2006).

Learner attitudes can also be explained in terms of influence from teachers (Setai, 2005; Ngidi, 2007; Ndamba, 2008). When teachers undermine the children's first language and use English as medium of instruction from the first grade, this may result in children having a negative attitude towards their mother tongue (Murray and Smith, 1988; Ngara, 1982). This attitude comes about possibly because when their mother tongue is not used for educational purposes, children may not attach any importance to it (Bamgbose, 1991; Roy-Campbell, 1996; Silva, 1997; Langa and Setai, 2006).

Nevertheless, on a more positive note towards first language, the study found that children liked to speak in the mother tongue more than in English during lessons. This may be due to the fact that these children, who all indicated that they speak *Sesotho/Setswana* at home, may find it free and natural to express themselves in their mother tongue during lessons (Duminy, 1975; Fyle, 1976; Ngara, 1982; Ndamba, 2008).

This study found that there was no consistency between language policy and parents' perception of the role of the mother tongue in learning since parents clearly indicated that they preferred English to *Sesotho/Setswana* as the language of instruction for their children in the Foundation Phase. English is positively evaluated possibly due to its functions in the future of children, as expressed by one of the respondents in an interview:

“Ha a kapasa Sesotho, ha se nahomothusahofumanamosebetsi. Ngwana e nwa ha a nahokenaYunivesithinghoyakamolao a sapasa English. Kedumelahorengwanawakaa qobellwehoithuta English.”(If he/she passes Sesotho, it will not help him/her get a job. The child will not be admitted if he/she does not pass English. I prefer my child to be forced to learn English).

Another respondent put it thus, *“Ngwana o tlatswelapele a satsebeletho. Qetellongbatla be basentsebokamosobangwanaka ho phethahala.”* (The child will proceed without knowing anything. As a result they would have totally destroyed the future of that child).

This indicates that parents of *Sesotho/Setswana* children have become used to English as a language which provides their children with a more profitable future in the world of employment. English is viewed as performing high functions than the mother tongue which does not render a person employable; hence parents tend to negatively evaluate indigenous languages

because they do not perform such high functions (Saville-Troike, 1982; Adegbija, 1994; Robinson, 1996; Hart, 2008).

The other explanation for the positive evaluation of English by parents is that because of the apartheid policy, parents got used to undermining the first language since it was not an official language. Ndamba (2008) and Desai (2001) attribute the negative attitudes towards the first language to the fact that the current language policy requires children to learn in their mother tongue only in the lower grades. Children will eventually have to learn English and will be required to pass English as a subject in order to obtain a Matric Senior Certificate. This was demonstrated by one parent in this study, who, with reference to the use of *Sesotho/Setswana* as a language of instruction in the Foundation Phase, says,

“Ketjhojwalohobanekeqaleho e mpe. Ha banabafihladitlhahlobongtsametriki ho tla be ho le thata ho bona, ho tlaetsahorebapasedithutotse ding empa e sengpuoya English.” (I say so because that is a bad beginning. When children get to Matric examinations it will be difficult for them, resulting in them passing other subjects but not English language).

The negative attitudes towards first language are further enhanced by the fact that parents are ignorant of the role the mother tongue in teaching and learning, particularly for bilingual children during early years of schooling (Mwamwenda, 1996; Sprotsty, 1995; Clegg, 2005; Ndamba, 2008). In this study, only 17% of the parents showed an appreciation of the role of the mother tongue in the teaching and learning of children. The community appears to be ignorant of the linguistic richness brought to school by children from non-English speaking children (Murray and Smith, 1988; Ntshingila, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The suggestion we get from the findings is that parents and children had a more positive attitude towards English than the mother tongue as language of instruction at the Foundation Phase. This shows that people have been so linguistically colonized that they have more trust in the second language than they do in the first language process of children's learning. Parents and teachers need to be exposed to information concerning the value of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction as these participants were unaware of the educational benefits of using the first language during the initial years of a child's schooling.

We need to change parents and learners attitudes for favouring English more than the first language. This should be done through campaigns to educate people on the rationale use for using the first language at Foundation Phase. This would assist in creating “a new generation of South Africans who are proud of their languages and their values, their cultures and their heritage” (Pan South African Language Board {PANSALB}, 2011). Currently PANSALB is making great strides to promote indigenous languages standards through sub-projects which involve making monolingual mother tongue dictionaries. Unless there is attitude change at all levels of society, and strong government intervention, the work done by PANSALB might appear a futile exercise.

Briefly, majority of the respondents in this study indicated that they favoured English as the language of instruction in the Foundation Phase because English is a gate way to success in school and subsequent employment opportunity.

There is a need for further research on how to strengthen current policy implementation measures governing mother tongue in the Foundation Phase education in South Africa. There is a solution, even though 19 years after freedom, parents, teachers and learners still have negative attitudes towards learning in first language, despite benefits offered by mother tongue instruction.

Finally, research is necessary concerning on how South Africa as a nation can take advantage of additive bilingualism rather than viewing it as a subtractive bilingualism which undermines learning at the first language level. Hence, the scope of this study should also be extended to how skills can be enhanced between the first language and the second language level, considering that some studies show how that the transfer is not automatic (Clegg, 2005; Ndamba, 2008).

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