The Influence of Language Users' Attitudes towards the Learning and Teaching of English Language in three Post-Independence Namibian Schools

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Abstract

This research sought to examine the influence of language user's attitudes to the teaching and learning of English Language in three selected post-independence Namibian schools. The research was motivated by the high failure rate in English Language by Namibian learners. Generally, the majority of learners fail to effectively read, write and speak in the medium of English Language despite the officialization of the language in the school curriculum at independence in 1990. The monolingual language policy that Namibia chose has had far-reaching, detrimental implications for Namibians and for its development evidenced by the high failure rate against a background of high spending by both parents and government on education. This research thus looked at the extent to which users' language attitudes towards the medium of English vis à vis other languages affect teachers' teaching and learners' learning of English Language.

Keywords: *English Language, English Language learners, English Language teachers,* language attitudes, language users.

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Though language is not everything, but without language it is impossible for anything to happen in education (Wolff, 2006). In essence, language is central in any education system (Kadodo & Mhindu, 2013).

The history of language policy in Namibia dates back to the colonial period. From 1884 to 1915, Namibia was colonised by the Germans who imposed German as official language. From 1920 South Africa took over and instituted Afrikaans alongside English as official languages in Namibia (Frydman, 2011; UNICEF, 2016). However, English was not spoken by a majority with Afrikaans being the language that was actually in use (Putz, 1995). Some literature claim that Afrikaans had been in use in Namibia earlier than German invasion in mid 1700s when slaves speaking Kitchen Dutch fled from the Cape crossing the Garieb River into southern Namibia marking the onset of Afrikaans in Namibia (van Wyk, 2014)

As part of the reparations that Germany had to pay after losing World War I, the former coloniser ceded control of Namibia to South Africa who administered Namibia on behalf of the British from 1915. This ushered into Namibia the apartheid system (Frydman, 2011). Admittedly, in spite of small L1 speaker-population, international (European) languages are thought to be (and employed as) important official languages in Africa. Gadelii (1999) notes that, of the three Indo-European languages spoken in Namibia English is spoken by 0.8% of the total population as their L1, German by 0.9% and Afrikaans by 9.5%. Generally, in most countries in Africa, these languages are assigned official roles in the state including media of instruction (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2001).

Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir (2001) note that in spite of them being chosen as official languages, most of these international European languages are not accessible to the greater part of the population. This, unavoidably, raises spectres in education where troubled learning may be evident. Consequently, this foregrounds the current research in an attempt to understand how historical antecedence plays out in the Namibian education system. This research thus examines the effect of language users' attitudes on the teaching and learning of English Language in three selected post-independence Namibian schools.

Literature Review

The current language policy in Namibia directs that up to Grade Four, "indigenous Namibian languages may be used as the media of instruction" (UNICEF, 2016, p. 2) after which English would take over. It should be noted that the use of "may" in this policy means that the policy does not necessarily compel schools to use indigenous languages prior to Grade Four. This is signposts a non-committal policy on

the use of indigenous languages in education. Totemeyer (2010, p. 14) sadly notes that "during the drafting of the National Curriculum for Basic Education in 2008, the National Institute for Educational Development [NIED] again tried to convince the Ministry to extend mother tongue instruction up to Grade 7 but without success". In short, indigenous languages are not necessarily seen as positive tools that can foster the teaching of Indo-European languages, a belief based on subtractive bilingualism (Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015). As a result, local languages are not viewed as useful in fostering the teaching and learning of English Language in Namibia.

Namibia is home to up to 30 indigenous languages (Frydman, 2011; UNICEF, 2016) of which only 14 have full orthography. According to Harris (2011), at independence, Namibia chose English Language as its official language although the country had no meaningful history of the language stretching from the colonial period and had very few of its citizens speaking it (0.8 %). English Language was only introduced at independence in 1990 (Kisting, 2012) as alternative to the hated-pain-associated Afrikaans Language which had been the lingua franca during the apartheid era. This was against a background of a bulk of Namibian nationals who had neither practical abilities in English Language nor any propensity towards the teaching and learning of that language.

Teachers were neither trained to teach using the language nor were they proficient enough to help learners to make any headway in learning the English Language. Research reports cite leaked government administered tests on teachers in which only about 2% of teachers were seen to be proficient in the medium of English leaving about 98% desperately needing to improve their abilities in English Language (Kisting, 2012). It is not surprising therefore that in spite of high levels of spending on education, failure rates in education remain very high. For example, Harris (2011) reports that only four in ten (39%) of learners who started school in 2009 were expected to reach Grade Twelve.

According to Lee (2012, p. 1) the Urban Trust of Namibia funded by OSISA undertook research to ascertain what impact teaching in the English Language had on Namibian students' overall performance. The research found that even among the few teachers who had scored between 75% and 92% their work was still ridden with errors of punctuation, capitalization, subject-verb agreement, use of articles and singular-plural forms (Kisting, 2012). In spite this reality, like elsewhere in Africa, "there has been lack of will power by policy makers to change the language policy to allow the use of indigenous languages as media of instruction" (Kadodo, Kadodo, Bhala & Bhebe, 2012, p. 32).

Therefore, it is upon this background that this study examines the effect of Language user's attitudes towards the learning of English Language in post-

independence Namibia perchance finding solutions to the high failure rates. Scholars (Kadodo et al., 2012; Kadodo & Mhindu, 2014; Kadodo & Zanga, 2015) indicate that language attitudes are a strong factor in the teaching and learning of a language. The current research examines the effect of language users' attitudes on teaching and learning of English Language in three selected post-independent Namibian schools.

Theoretical Framework

In this section we look at the studies and theories that explain the meaning and development of language attitudes. The ultimate aim is to understand how possibly language attitudes influence the teaching and learning of English Language in selected Namibian schools.

Language Attitudes

Kadodo et al. (2012) note that language attitudes can best be appreciated by closely examining their origin. Attitudes are states of mind that predisposes individuals "to think, feel, perceive and behave" toward a selected referent object (Kadodo et al., 2012, pp. 33-34). Scholars are of the view that language attitudes are enduring and predispose individuals to behave selectively towards an attitude referent (Ajzen, 1988, p. 4; Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2006, p. 738; Taylor, Peplau & Sears, 1997, p. 130). Attitudes are general evaluations that people have of themselves, other people, objects and issues (Kadodo et al., 2012, p. 33; Tesser, 1997, p. 196). Attitudes locate objects of thought on dimensions of judgement (McGuire in Lindzey & Aronson, 1985) and, in the case of language, it can be viewed favourably or unfavourably.

When we hold attitudes toward a language, successful teaching and/or learning depends on the direction of our disposition towards that language. Attitudes can be positive or negative with very rare cases of neutral (Kadodo et al., 2012). What this means is that where teachers and learners have positive attitudes toward a target language, they will make every effort in their power to learn that language. They develop intrinsic (inner) motivation to learn the target language. For that reason, they would necessarily invest adequate time and resources that may see them making positive progress towards the teaching and learning of the target language. On the contrary, in cases where the language attitudes are negative, teachers and learners tend to give up and feel that the teaching and learning of such language is an unnecessary bother. In spite of nationalistic feelings that people may have, they may still wish to teach and learn through other mediums because of their perception of what such languages are able to do for them; for example, good employment or acceptance by significant others.

It is quite evident that the language attitudes that we hold may seriously affect how we use language in different spheres of our lives. What this means is that

the successful teaching and learning (or lack of it) of English Language in Namibian schools depend on users' language attitudes.

Formation of Language Attitudes in Namibian Schools

Various language learning theories explain how language attitudes develop in people. The social learning theory sees attitudes as habits; implying that they can be learnt (Kadodo et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 1997). The theory sees people as generally passive. When exposed to stimuli, they are seen as capable of learning through association and reinforcement or through observation and imitation (social learning theory) and that incidentally accounts for the genesis of their attitudes to the attitude referent object; in this case language (Kadodo et al., 2012). Consequently, the resultant attitude to the referent object (target language) contains associations of attitude object (language) and certain values towards the attitude object accumulated over a period in respect of the referent object.

Just like habit formation, attitudes are inculcated as a result of varying contingencies and reinforcement (Kadodo et al., 2012, p. 34; McLaughlin, 1987, p. 7). Tesser (1995, p. 222; see also Kadodo et al., 2012, p. 34) reports that there is a large amount of research studies that have shown that "people's attitudes can be influenced by pairing some target object with some stimulus" about which the person already feels positively or negatively, or placing the target object in some context that induces positive or negative feelings toward that referent object. If the gratification from the learning activity is very strong and positive, the learning entity becomes highly motivated to learn the target language. In other words, learning English Language for Namibians must "promise" high returns for the learners such as offering possibly the only sound window for better life through employment. When this happens, it galvanizes the learner to positively work towards actualizing that "dream".

On the other hand, observation and imitation (Kadodo et al., 2012) according to the social learning theory means that the learning entity observes the significant other in society and their admirable qualities are seen as dependent on the significant other's target language abilities which thus allures the admirer to vigorously pursue the learning of the target language in the hope of being empowered just like the significant other. Observation and imitation can thus trigger positive learning of the target language.

Given the theorization above, one would expect Namibian teachers and learners to be highly disposed to learning English Language. This, however, does not

seem to be the case. Our theorization in trying to explain the lack of progress in the teaching and learning of English Language in Namibia is entrenched in understanding the complex history of language policy of the country. As earlier discussed in this research, Namibian education and history in general can be divided into three phases: 1884 to 1915 German occupation with German as the official language but with flexibility in that indigenous people used their local languages in their day-to-day activities and in education (Putz, 1995); 1920 to 1988 under the control of South Africa with Afrikaans taking over as official language and language of education; and, 1990 to present with the first legitimate Namibian government legislating English Language to replace Afrikaans, the "language of the oppressors" (Frydman, 2011, p. 182).

However, as noted earlier, Afrikaans has a history dating back to mid-1700s) before the officialization processes of languages in Namibia. Key to our theorization of the source of the Namibian problem is in understanding the possible impact of the threesome official language triangle comprised of German, Afrikaans and English. The learning of English Language is not necessarily independent of Afrikaans which had been very dominant in education and in industry and commerce prior to Namibia's independence. Afrikaans had been very dominant creating what we term "dependence syndrome" resulting in a "love-hate relationship". In this case, indigenous people hated the language for what it symbolized but had to depend on it for education and employment. In such a case, outwardly, indigenous people would hurt the language with passion but are trapped in a "catch 22" situation where they may feel they cannot do without that language. In our view, this contradiction can persist even after independence so long as there has not been a complete and vigorous takeover in all spheres of life by the new official language, in this case English.

It is also possible that the significant others in Namibia are those who were educated during the peak of Afrikaans as official language and medium of instruction. In this case, it is not English Language, but rather Afrikaans that holds sway. As already hinted to above, language attitudes can be very subtle in the way they operate in individuals. Language attitudes can operate subconsciously but with telling effects at the conscious level.

Of course, another critical dimension is that most of the teaching force was neither trained to teach content subjects in English Language nor are they themselves proficient in the language. As noted earlier, there is ample research (Harris, 2011; Kisting, 2012; Lee, 2012) showing that most of the teachers were not fluent in English Language. What this amounts to is a case of one student teaching another student. Most teachers in Namibia are in the process of learning English Language and therefore have to contend with the mechanics of teaching content via English Language which, they themselves are not proficient in. This in itself can create negative learner-attitudes towards the learning of the language. In addition to this,

issues of tenability of resources could also play a key role in development of users' language attitudes (Oyugi & Nyaga, 2010).

Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative paradigm as this helped to achieve the research objectives since it provides a detailed description of issues in question thus generating key information (Maree 2010). Descriptive survey was employed to understand the effect of language users' attitudes on the learning of English Language in the three selected post-independence Namibian schools. Qualitative research data collection methods gave participants the opportunity to respond in their own words. Bernard (1995) asserts that open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to participants, sometimes unanticipated by the researcher. Such information would be rich and explanatory in nature. Therefore, the researchers employed qualitative research methods owing to their ubiquitous nature.

Research Participants

Most of the data was collected from three schools; namely Retard School, Desert School and Revered School (pseudo names for ethical reasons). All the primary schools are located in Khomas region. In selecting the schools, accessibility was an important factor. These schools were accessible to one of the researchers allowing ease of data collection. A total of fifteen Grade Six teachers and forty-two Grade Six learners were randomly selected to reduce the probability of a biased sample (Wilson & Sapsford, 2006). In addition, three school principals of the three said schools constituted participants in this research. The three school principals and five interviewees were purposively sampled. We opted to purposively sample school principals and the five interviewees to ensure that "knowledgeable people" take part in interviews (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 157). The five interviewees in the five regions were selected from Part Three Great Zimbabwe University Namibian students who were on teaching practice (in the year 2018) in Namibia. Telephone interviews were held with the teacher trainees, one in Walvis Bay, one in Swakopmund, one in Oshakati, one in Katima Mulilo and another one in Oshikoto.

We were convinced that we would get valuable information by focusing on "a relatively small but information-rich group (Denscombe, 2010, p. 34) allowing us to understand how language attitudes affect the teaching and learning of English Language in Namibia. One of these researchers teaches at a school in Khomas region

and therefore offered an insider-perspective on the cosmopolitan city of Windhoek. We treat Windhoek and Walvis Bay as key centres in Namibia. Windhoek is the nerve centre of activities in Namibia whilst Walvis Bay is a key seaport for the country and therefore likely to influence perceptions beyond their localities. They can be beacons for people to look up to thereby influencing language attitudes in subtle ways that can operate at the subconscious level of language users.

Data Collection Procedures

Semi-structured interviews, open and close-ended questionnaire and observations were employed for data collection. The interview was chosen for its ubiquitous ability to elicit data for clarity (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Creswell, 2014). Gray (2014, p. 383) notes that an interview is effective in gathering information about "a person's knowledge, values, preferences and attitudes". The interview allowed the researchers to collect qualitative data from school principals, teachers and the five teacher trainees whilst the questionnaire allowed learners to express their feelings towards the issue at hand. A total of five class observations were carried out in selected classes of the three participating schools. The observation method, not only allowed one of the researchers to observe the language users' attitudes to teaching and learning of English Language in relation to other languages in the users' repertoire, but also enabled the researcher to hear some of the learners deploying the languages in their learning (Flick, 2002). In all cases field notes were made to preserve data. The questionnaire allowed the researchers to convert data into useful information as offered by respondents (Tuckman, 1999).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration in research is a process of "shielding individuals who provide" information to researchers (Creswell, 2013, p.513). Ethical practice mandates the researcher to strive to "do good" and do "no harm" to the participants (Somekh & Lewin, 2011, p.25). It was for these reasons that pseudo names of participating institutions were used to protect their identities. Anonymity and confidentiality were also ensured of all participants who took part in interviews, lesson observations and completion of questionnaires. In discussion of results, principals are referred to as PPS1, 2 or 3 whilst the five student teachers are referred to as S-T1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. For teachers' questionnaire TQ is used to refer to question numbers whilst for learners' LQ is used. Lesson observations are referred to as LO1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6. Participants were therefore not required to write or declare their identities. It was also made clear to all

participants that participation was voluntary. As for learners, school principals assisted by introducing the researcher who was collecting data as well as explaining the intentions of the research and assuring them of safety.

Results and Discussions

Once the data were collected analysis was done. Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 64) state that, "analysis involves taking data apart, conceptualizing it, and developing… concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions in order to determine what the parts tell us about the whole." The process allows various analytic tools to be used to probe the data, stimulate conceptual thinking, increase sensitivity and provoke alternative interpretations of data. Some of the data was organized into pie charts and tables for interpretation to understand the influence of users' language attitudes on teaching and learning of English Language in the selected post-independence Namibian schools. Emerging ideas from interviews, observations and questionnaire are collated to crystalize into meaningful ideas.

Respondents in this research unanimously agreed that Namibian students' performance in English Language was poor. Analysis of data provided us with reasons to agree that performance in English Language was indeed poor.
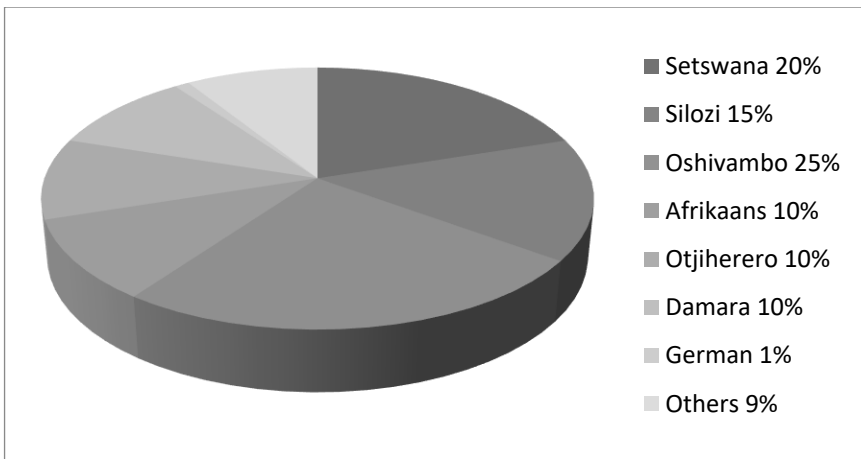

■ Setswana 20%
■ Silozi 15%
■ Oshivambo 25%
■ Afrikaans 10%
■ Otjiherero 10%
■ Damara 10%
■ German 1%
■ Others 9%

Figure 1: Learners' home language

We can note from Figure 1 that of the Indo-European languages, Afrikaans had an L1 speaker population of about 10% whist German had about 1%. None was English L1. What this means is that there is a near, or absolute absence of an English

speaking environment to inspire learners. At a comparative level as shown in Figure 1, of the Indo-European languages in Namibia, it would seem Afrikaans would have a better chance of being understood compared to English. The 2011 census estimates in Table 1 show that in Namibia English Language is accessible to approximately 3.4% of the total Namibian population in spite of it being the official language. On the other hand, Afrikaans was accessible to an estimated 10.4% of the Namibian population whilst German accounted for only 0.9%. As for the European communities in Namibia, 60% are proficient in Afrikaans, 32% in German and only 7% in English. What this implies is that the Namibian school and home environment lack a vibrant and motivating English Language speaking community for cultivating positive attitudes towards the learning of the subject. Table 1 shows that at a comparative level Oshivambo (understood by about 48.9% but, unfortunately not preferred in education) would offer a better environment for its learning and use in teaching content subjects because it offers the practice environment compared to English Language. An official language must serve as a tool for official communication and language of access to all other content subjects. Of the Indo-European languages available in Namibia, Afrikaans could possibly have offered a better chance compared to English Language.

Table 1: *Rank of languages most spoken in Namibia (2011 estimates)*

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Language	Speaker population
Oshiwambo	48.9
Nama/Damara	11.3
Afrikaans *(defacto lingua franca)*	10.4
Otjiherero	8.6
Kavango	8.5
Caprive	4.8
English (official language)	3.4
German	0.9
San	0.8
Others	2.4

Source: Census 2011 Government of Namibia @ http://www.gov.na/languages-spoken.

Given the situation presented above, we are not convinced there is sufficient English Language supporting environment to promote any meaningful learning of the language. What this does is to create, whether consciously or subconsciously, negativity towards the teaching and learning of English Language and the teaching of content subjects through it. Going by the statistics in Figure 1 and Table 1, of the Indo-European languages in Namibia Afrikaans could possibly offer a better

chance to learners and teachers sans the fact that it reminds indigenous people of apartheid. Interviewees suggested that the high failure rate in English Language was a result of absence of an English Language supportive environment as well as lack of adequately trained teachers to teach the language.

The data revealed that some of the older members in the teaching profession were trained via the medium of Afrikaans which makes their suitability to teach in the medium of English questionable. Interviewees revealed that owing to these limitations there was tendency for teachers to teach in indigenous languages available in their repertoire. Teacher respondents confirmed that they mix English Language with local languages in teaching English Language and content subjects. In justifying code-switching and mixing, they argued that expressly using English Language would leave their learners "blank". Unfortunately, the content of a language is the language itself. Unless learners know how to deploy the language, they will make very little meaningful progress. For example, writing compositions becomes a very painful process because learners will hardly produce any meaningful communication. Failed English Language exercises and tests in our view create and foster negative attitudes towards its learning.

Whilst we are not throwing code-switching completely out in teaching and learning an L2, we argue that this should be sparingly done otherwise there will be very little or no progress in learning the target language. There are cases when teachers claim that they are code-switching when they, in fact, are simply teaching through indigenous languages [See Kadodo et al., 2012 for this discussion]. This, in our view, will not develop learners' abilities in the target language. If anything, this may create negativity towards the English Language resulting in very little progress.
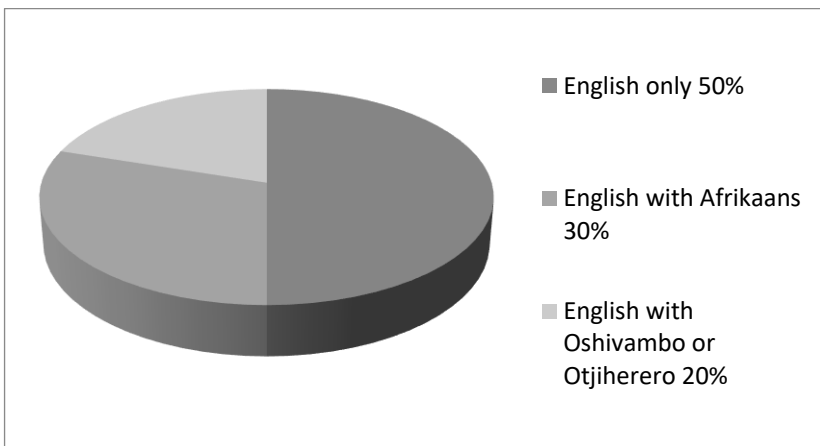

Figure 2: *Teachers' language choices for teaching English Language and content subjects*

Figure 2 present information on learners' views on teachers' use of language combinations when they are teaching content subjects. The purpose was to check on deployment of languages in class. Half of the learners indicate that teachers use English Language as the medium of teaching English, a third (30 %) indicate a combination of English Language and Afrikaans whilst 20% said they use English Language with Oshivambo or Otjiherero. However, as discussed earlier, LO (2, 3, 4 & 6) indicated that (at least for those lessons observed) there was a greater use of indigenous languages. In our view, and also as said by the teachers, code-switching and code-mixing were meant to ameliorate the high proportion of learners perplexed by English Language. As Harris (2011, p.7 in UNICEF, 2016, p.3) notes, learners want to "succeed at school generally, and in English in particular, but the problems of language hinder their ability to understand their subject[s] well enough" and in this case, English Language. Lack of progress in the learning of English Language frustrates learners possibly creating negative attitudes towards its teaching and learning. Hence teachers also are likely to feel frustrated with the process of teaching.

Lesson observations (LO1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6), interviews with principals (PPS 1, 2 & 3) and student-teachers (S-T 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5) reveal that teaching and learning environments in some schools did not generate self-motivation for learners to make meaningful progress in learning English Language. The physical environment needs to foster positive attitudes to the learning of English Language. As revealed in telephone interviews with the five student-teachers (S-T1, 2, 3, 4 & 5), the importance of English Language for Namibian students cannot be doubted. However, they felt that more needs to be done to foster the teaching and learning of the language. Interviewees (S-T1, 3 & 4) noted that in some regions like Windhoek, Walvis Bay, Swakopmund and other areas in the southern parts of the country, Afrikaans seem to be used regularly and may need to be synchronised with the teaching of English Language so that the two languages are not seen as rivals just like regional languages elsewhere in Namibia. This proffered view was in-keeping with an observation that some cosmopolitan learners may still be accommodative of Afrikaans especially that the "significant others" in their areas may have been educated through Afrikaans. They felt that English Language needs to offer more role models to inspire learners.

In suggesting solutions to improve the learning of English Language in Namibia, most teacher-respondents (TQ 10) suggested upping teacher training as well as improving the teachers already in the field through workshops. They also suggested use of teaching methods that "interest" learners for them to be interested in learning English Language. School principals (PPS1, 2 & 3) suggested significant reduction of untrained teachers as well as in-servicing teachers in the field to improve their teaching abilities. School principals also suggested that code-switching and code-mixing should be reduced.

As already discussed earlier, choice of language for learners and teachers is a function of what they perceive the language as capable of doing or promising to do for them. Learners are aware that English Language is a gate-keeper which, if they were to unlock, could better their lives. As such, based on their desire to succeed in life, outwardly they will consistently express their desire to be able to operate through the official language. However, lack of meaningful progress could subconsciously create frustration resulting in the love-hate relationship.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research concludes that owing to subtle ways in which attitudes operate, there is need to put in place mechanism that creates positive dispositions towards the learning of a second language; English in the case of Namibia. Language choices in education are, sometimes, entangled in emotions making it difficult to ascertain and separate inner feelings from outward expressions. Outwardly expressed learner choices are likely to be influenced by known values of society notwithstanding what one feels inside. Difficult as it maybe, there is need to demystify the ideology of modernity and the proliferation of images of success through Western languages (Chakrani, 2011) to allow strategic deployment of home (or first) languages for the purpose of learning a second language; English in this case.

English Language learning is not all about provision of learning materials, but also about successful deployment of both material and human resources. Absence of an inspiring environment for the learning of English Language results in lacklustre learning of the language. We believe that this leaves learners frustrated and uninspired to learn the language thereby developing, subconsciously, negative attitudes towards it. Teachers' skill in teaching and the way they deploy English Language should model for learners to develop an inner drive necessary for learning the language. Lack of sufficiently and appropriately qualified educators may stymie the progress of learners. This results in apathy and indifference towards the learning of the language.

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