

# ***Views and preferences of parents, teachers and principals on the implementation of the language policy in primary schools in Namibia:*** **An explorative study in the Khomas region**

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## **Abstract**

The language policy of schools in Namibia states that from grade 1 to grade 3, learners should receive education in their mother tongues. The mother tongue becomes a subject from grade 4 onwards while English takes over as the medium of instruction. This paper presents the views of parents, teachers and principals and parents on how this policy is implemented in three schools studied in the Khomas region. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews from one urban school, one peri-urban school and one rural school. The findings of the study reflect different language preferences between parents and teachers, the latter favouring English and the former advocating the mother tongue as

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a medium of instruction in the first three grades of formal education. Various reasons were given to support both choices.

### **Introduction:**

In a multilingual situation such as that of Namibia, an important factor for the education of children is the context in which language and literacy acquisition occurs. Baker (2006, p. 331) states that “strategies and advice for developing biliteracy are not universal but context bound.” Personal bilingualism and societal multilingualism are inevitable, and are consequences of globalisation which generates the multiple modalities of communication within single languages. According to Cope and Kalantzis (2006, p. 93), the almost total globalisation of the last decade of the twentieth century gives rise “to a homogenizing imperative that threatens to contract linguistic and cultural diversity in a dramatically escalating way and make the multilingualism of modern nations a transitional stage towards a vastly reduced linguistic repertoire.”

Elective bilingualism is a characteristic of individuals who choose to learn a language, for example in the classroom. Elective bilinguals typically come from majority language groups. They add another language to their linguistic repertoire without losing their first language. This kind of bilingualism has been termed ‘additive bilingualism’, and refers to positive cognitive outcomes from an individual being bilingual (Baker, 2006, p. 74). Such language minority members are proficient (or becoming proficient) in both languages and have positive attitudes towards the first and second languages. In an additive situation, a child may acquire literacy through the second language at no cost to literacy in the first language.

In contrast, circumstantial bilinguals learn another language to function effectively because of their circumstances. Their first language is often insufficient to meet the educational, political and employment demands of their society. In the Namibian context, circumstantial bilinguals can be regarded as those groups of individuals who must become bilingual to operate in the official language, English, that surrounds them, although they have very limited exposure to English in their ordinary, daily lives. Consequently, their first language is in danger of being replaced by the second language in a subtractive context. Baker (2006, p. 74) sees subtractive bilingualism as the negative affective and cognitive effects of bilingualism, because, both languages remain underdeveloped.

The importance of the mother tongue in second language achievement has been reported widely and there is strong support that learners who are not taught in their mother tongue at lower grade levels might have more difficulties to master reading skills and to performing well in school (Cummins, 2000; Prinsloo, 2007; Wolfaardt, 2005). A number of researchers emphasise the importance of the mother tongue, not only for second language acquisition but also for general school achievement. They argue that neglect of the mother tongue leads to poor results, high dropout rates and general under achievement of second language learners. If the medium of instruction during the early phases is in the second language, in which the child is not very competent, she or he will also struggle in other content based subjects such as Science and History, resulting in his or her general under achievement (Biseth, 2008; Cummins, 2000; Heugh, 2005).

In contrast, some researchers support the maximum exposure hypothesis stating that the longer a person is exposed to the second language, the better the performance in that language will be (Porter, 1997). Some thus argue against the notion of mother tongue instruction and rather opt for the Language of Wider Communication to be

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implemented in schools as soon as possible. There are a number of reasons for this. Most African countries are characterised by a multilingual environment, and since more than one language is prevalent in the country, education planners often select a language as medium of instruction in schools that is considered 'neutral' to ensure that no language group will be deemed superior and also to protect national unity (Makalela, 2005). English is often chosen as the neutral language in spite of the fact that native speakers of English might form a negligible percentage of the specific population. The language of wider communication often also has more status than any of the local languages and parents thus perceive this as a more desirable language of instruction for their children (Bamgbose, 1991). Furthermore, it is perceived that this language of wider communication can give the child access to modern education and technology and ensure for rapid economic development (Bamgbose, 1991; Porter, 1997; Ramasamy, 2001; Murray, 2007).

### **Language policy in Namibia**

Namibia is a multilingual and culturally diverse country. All indigenous languages are presently regarded as equal, regardless of the number of speakers or the level of development of a particular language. About 55% of pupils in Namibia speak an Oshiwambo language at home. Other large numbers are Khoekhoegowab speakers (10%), Otjiherero (7%) and Afrikaans (7%). Less than 1% of learners speak English at home (Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, 2007).

The language policy of schools in Namibia states that learners should receive instruction in their mother tongue during the first three years of their primary school education and from grade four, the mother tongue should be offered as a subject when the medium of instruction changes to English (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993). In the language policy discussion document (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture, 2003), fourteen languages are indicated as languages that could be offered as a first language at school. The ideal situation would be that every learner's mother tongue would be accommodated, but in practice many classes have pupils with different home languages and only one of these can be the medium of instruction during the lower primary phase. The multilingual nature of Namibian schools obviously complicates the task of educators, especially in the first 3 grades and has thus resulted in the ineffective implementation of the mother tongue medium of instruction. There are schools that are unable to provide mother tongue medium of instruction because they lack the necessary material and human resources in order to implement mother tongue medium of instruction. Another issue is where learners with diverse mother tongues are found in one classroom and it becomes difficult in selecting one mother tongue as the medium of instruction. In an attempt to overcome these challenges, some schools have opted for English as medium of instruction from grade one and this may have resulted in the neglect of the mother tongue (Wolfaardt, 2004). Ministry statistics show that the percentage of learners receiving mother tongue instruction varies substantially from one language to the other. The following languages recorded at least 80% in having learners being taught in their mother tongue: For home language speakers of English, German, Oshindonga, Rukwangali, Rumanyo, and Thimbukushu at least 80% of learners are recorded to receive mother tongue instruction during the initial grades. For Oshikwanyama, Silozi, and Afrikaans the percentages are 71%, 67% and 64% respectively. For Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab and Setswane the number drops to below 50%. For Ju/'hoasi speakers, which actually groups the San languages together, only 7% of learners are taught in their mother tongue (Ministry of Education: EMIS, 2007).

Thus the official discourse, as has been communicated through the Language Policy says children at the elementary level (grade 1-3) of education in Namibia should learn subject

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content through the medium of local languages. Policy decisions were made with the input from all stakeholders in children's education. However, within educational circles there is still a conflicting opinion about the best language to use for learners' education. The objective of this study was to do an in-depth exploration of the situation with regard to the language for initial literacy and the language of instruction in the selected schools and to obtain the views and preferences of stakeholders with regard to the implementation of the National policy on languages of education.

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

An explorative case study was conducted during September 2011 in three schools in the Khomas region. We employed qualitative research methods since we were interested in getting an in-depth understanding of participants' views on the implementation and challenges regarding the language policy in their schools.

### **Sample**

Three primary schools in the Khomas region of Namibia were purposefully selected for the research. Schools were selected in this central region of the country since it was expected that they may have a multi-lingual character. One of the schools was an urban school, one a peri-urban school and the third a rural school. The research sample consisted of the three principals of the selected schools, six grade one and three grade four teachers, four parents of grade one learners and six parents of grade four learners who were selected using convenience sampling with the assistance of the school principals. The criterion sampling technique was employed to identify teachers to be included in the sample. It needs to be noted that for the rural school guardians were interviewed since parents were living far from the school.

### **Instruments**

Semi-structured interview guides were used to interview school principals, teachers and parents. We interviewed the participants about their views regarding the language of initial literacy and the language of instruction in their schools. Although several of the questions were the same for all the three identified groups, some questions were specifically designed for only parents, for only teachers based on their grade level of teaching and for only the principals. In addition to this, classroom observations were done in selected grade one and four classes in order to determine the availability, suitability and quality of learning materials.

## **Findings**

### **Characteristics of the selected schools, parents and teachers interviewed**

In the urban school an option for initial literacy education between English and Afrikaans for grades one to three learners was available. Based on the reports from the parents, teachers and the principal it became clear that the choice for Afrikaans as one of the two languages of initial literacy in the urban school was mainly historically determined. Before Namibia's Independence most persons living close to this school were Afrikaans speaking and although the situation has changed substantially since that time, Afrikaans remained as the alternative to English as the language for the first three grades in this school. It seemed that the option for English was more popular and when the two available English classes for grade one became full, learners had to be placed in the Afrikaans stream where

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there were also two classes available. The home languages for the parents interviewed in the urban school were Afrikaans and Oshiwambo, and teachers reported that their home languages were either Afrikaans, Kheokheogowab or Otjiherero.

In both the peri-urban and rural schools the language for initial literacy was Khoekhoegowab. The home languages for the parents interviewed in these schools were Afrikaans and Kheokheogowab and for all teachers it was Kheokheogowab. In all schools a few of the parents reported that they used English occasionally at home. Parents interviewed from the urban schools were in general more qualified and had higher level occupations than parents from the peri-urban schools and the guardians from the rural schools.

### **Parents' views**

A total of 10 parents were interviewed in order to find out their views regarding the language for initial literacy and the language of instruction as practiced at their school. The parents were aware of the policy as laid down by the Ministry of Education with regard to initial literacy and the language of instruction in the schools. Furthermore, in the urban school, where English could be chosen for initial literacy, the parents were happy with the arrangement. Reasons were that English is the official language. One parent also said she struggled too much in her own life because she cannot speak English. She remarked: "English should be the [medium] of instruction since it is used every day, it is good. Initially I wanted her (daughter) to be in the English class but there was no room left..." Parents felt it was their duty to teach their children the mother tongue. They said they did not fear that the mother tongue would "fade away" since their children acquired it naturally.

In both the peri-urban and rural schools the language for initial literacy was Khoekhoegowab. Parents and teachers reported that the Ministry, based on the language policy, decides what the language for initial literacy should be. However, teachers as well as parents had opportunities to make inputs as to the choice of language to be offered in the school. In the peri-urban school some parents were not happy with the arrangement. They indicated that the indigenous languages had little value, and since the dominant language was English, this was more valuable for their children to study. One of the parents at the peri-urban school pointed out this view clearly when she said, "Happy, but the dominant language is English. Therefore, we are not happy that English is not the language of instruction at the lower level of education - these others (local languages) are of little value."

In all schools it seemed that parents were in favour of having English for both initial literacy and the language of instruction. The reasons given were that since there are so many languages, English served to unify learners from different language backgrounds. English can be used for communication with any person anywhere and the local languages limit communication. Parents were happy to have the mother tongue as a school subject only so that learners do not lose it as they grow older. One parent emphasised the need to learn in English by noting that, "English should be both the language of instruction and initial literacy since even parents are compelled to learn these basic skills in English. Even in our adult literacy classes we use English. Why is adult literacy not in mother tongue?" This seems to suggest the inferior position of mother tongue for these parents and hence their support for the use of English for initial literacy and as language for instruction. They saw the practical utility of the English language in their lives and felt their children should be exposed to the learning of English at the earliest possible time in their education. They

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reasoned that if the mother tongue was that important, it could have been used in adult literacy classes where the adults learned how to read, speak and do arithmetic in English. In fact they viewed the English language as "... the key to the child's future" and as such it needed to be taught and used by the child throughout school beginning from lower grades.

When parents were asked to evaluate the teachers' command of the languages used for initial literacy and for instruction in general they had varied opinions. Some parents felt the teachers' command of English was relatively poor, and said they suspect they may fail the English proficiency test implemented by the Government if they sat for the test, "... the English of teachers is relatively poor. Teachers come from background of another language and this has an effect on their language use. Not very good in general. Need for improvement. I am interested to see results from teachers' proficiency and I think many teachers might fail".

Others were of the view that the teachers were "good" in the use of English, although pronunciations were a problem. For example, teachers would use "gut" for "goat", or "malk" for "milk". The poor teacher pronunciations are most likely to be reflected later in the learners' spoken English in adult life since learners tend to copy their teachers, especially at the tender impressionable ages of learners in grades 1 to 4.

### **Teachers' and principals' views**

#### **Teachers' views of the language policy**

A total of nine teachers were interviewed. Contrary to parents' views, it became evidently clear that the majority (seven) of the teachers at the different primary schools were in full support and in favour of the language policy as promulgated by the government, with specific reference to the mother tongue instruction in the first three grades. The views of the majority of the teachers in the urban schools were that the policy was good, but difficult to implement due to the multicultural context of the country. They were also of the opinion that learners struggle to learn concepts in English if they did not have an opportunity to learn these in the mother tongue from grades 1 to 4. They were thus in favour that the child should be taught in the mother tongue from grades 1 to 4. The views of some teachers in the peri-urban school were that the mother tongue should continue up to Grade 6 or 7. Teachers also felt that schools should take responsibility of implementing the Language Policy.

Those in favour of the mother tongue instruction in the early years expressed their views clearly. One teacher was of the opinion that the mother tongue instruction for the first three years of primary education is actually good for the learners. She said: "It is good because it allows the learners to express themselves well and comfortably when telling stories in class." If instructed in English, according to this teacher, "Learners cannot show their abilities well, their full potential do not come to the front." Hence, in this teacher's view, it is better for the learners to receive instruction in their mother tongue (during the first three years of primary education). This teacher has Afrikaans as a mother tongue. She completed a three year education diploma and, at the time of collecting data, she was in the fourth year of a qualification in learner support through the Institute of Open Learning (IOL) at Potchefstroom University.

A fourth grade teacher at the urban primary school, who is Otjiherero speaking and completed the BETD and a B.Tech degree in educational management from the University of Pretoria, expressed the same views as the first grade teacher alluded to above. He

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stated that the policy was good and as such, preferred that instruction in the first three years of primary education be conducted in the mother tongue. However, due to the different cultural backgrounds children come from, implementation of the policy is rather a challenge. Another fourth grade Otjiherero speaking teacher at the same primary school also echoed the views of her colleague. She indicated that, "Learners struggle to learn concepts in English if they did not have an opportunity to learn these in the mother tongue from grades 1 to 4." She emphasised that children should be taught in the mother tongue from the first grade to the fourth grade.

A first grade teacher at the rural school, a few kilometres outside of Windhoek, was also of the view that the mother tongue instruction for the first three years of primary education is better. In her opinion, learners experience problems in grade four when they begin instruction in English at lower primary phase. Her preference is that the mother tongue instruction continues. This teacher is Kheokheogowab speaking and completed a Junior Primary Teacher Diploma. Another Kheokheogowab speaking grade one teacher at the same primary school who also earned a Junior Teachers Diploma also prefers the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, at least for the first three years of primary school. A fourth grade teacher at this school expressed the same sentiments about the language policy. She added that, "It is better if local languages would continue up to grade 6 or 7. Children do not show their real intelligence or real potential with these changes in languages."

First grade teachers at a peri-urban primary school, both of them Kheokheogowab speaking, differed in their views with regard to the language policy. While one stated it clearly that she did not like the language policy (without elaborating why she did not like it), the other one said that it was a good policy and a good start for the learners. However, this teacher lamented that more material was needed (perhaps to facilitate the implementation of the policy).

Thus, only two of the nine teachers interviewed at the urban, rural, and peri-urban schools were not in favour of the language policy. Of the two teachers that did not support the policy, one did not provide any reasons why he or she does not like the policy. However, the other teacher articulated her not supporting the policy very clearly. This was a Grade 1 teacher from the urban primary school who held views contrary to those of her colleagues about mother tongue instruction. Unlike her colleagues, she expressed the view that a language policy requiring that children receive instruction in the mother tongue for the first three years of primary school was not necessary. In her view, the multiplicity of the learners' language backgrounds renders the policy unnecessary and a waste of three years of instruction; rather, it is best to start instruction in English as this is the language in which the learners will be receiving instruction beyond the third grade. She said: "After all, children are quick to learn a new language; therefore, why place a barrier in their learning of a new language by teaching them in their mother tongue. After all, it is better to teach children in English from the very beginning in order to consolidate their skills in the English language as this is the language in which instruction will be conducted after grade three and beyond." However, this teacher was not entirely against learners learning their mother tongue. Her implicit view is that the learners can learn the mother tongue as a subject while instruction proceeds in English. However, she expressed concerns about the teachers' knowledge of, and expertise in, the mother tongue(s). In her opinion, if the teacher is not proficient in the mother tongue, and many of the teachers are not, he or she will create more problems for the learners. According to her, instruction in the mother

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tongue works effectively only if the teacher is “well equipped in teaching using the mother tongue.” In addition, she reasoned: “Besides, instruction in the mother tongue does not help the learners acquire the necessary English vocabulary that they need for instruction in English after the third grade.” She further stated that unlike the learners who receive instruction in the mother tongue, those learners who begin with English as the medium of instruction cope well with English after the third grade because they have had exposure to English vocabulary, spelling, and reading from the onset. The teacher who expressed these views was a teacher of the Khoekhoegowab linguistic background. In her Basic Education Teachers Diploma (BETD) training, she received specialised training in Kheokheogowab, Afrikaans, and English. She also earned a certificate in education with emphasis on learner support. At the time of data collection, she was enrolled in an honours degree program in education at Potchefstroom University.

### **Principals’ views of the language policy**

The data collected from the principals of schools show conflicting opinions about personal attitudes towards the language for education policy. Two of the three principals were in favour of the mother tongue instruction in the early years while one did not support this view. The principal of the rural school preferred learners to be taught in English as from grade 1 onwards. He based his view on parents’ belief that their children would benefit more from education at upper grade level where English is used as the language of instruction. In his words: “parents feel that the schools should move to English only as learners movement upwards into high schools is limited with Khoekhoegowab; learners do not stand to benefit from Khoekhoegowab ...” To the contrary, the principal of the peri-urban school showed a positive attitude towards the language for education policy. His attitude was clearly reflected in his words when he said: “It is correct. The language policy says the child should be taught in the mother tongue from grade 1-3”. The principal of the urban school also agreed that learners should be taught in the mother tongue for the first 3 years. She felt the policy should not change but persons who must implement it must rather be empowered. She made the statement that the problem with mother tongue instruction for the first 3 years is that if you enforce that, you will have segregation again. Tribes (language groups) will need to be sorted in schools to enable the implementation of the policy.

About the procedure schools follow for the choice for language(s) used for teaching, all three school principals reported that together, teachers, parents and communities around the schools come together and choose the language(s) used for teaching. The principal of the peri-urban school explained the procedure as follows: “We call a meeting and we decide in a meeting. Teachers, the principal and parents decide together about the medium of instruction and English.” Although all three principals reported that all types of stakeholders (parents included) take part in the decision making about the choice of the language of instruction, the principal for the rural school added an explanation that indicated parents’ lack of trust in local language to be used as a medium of instruction. After the principal explained the process followed to choose the language for instruction, he further explained: “parents feel across the board that the language of instruction should be English ...” The principal of the urban school explained that Afrikaans in addition to English was chosen as one of the two languages for initial literacy due to historical reasons as explained above. Another reason was that they did not have any teachers for other languages because teachers were trained mainly in Afrikaans and English. Practical reasons thus also played a role in the selection of languages taught in school.



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When it comes to the attitudes of learners and their competencies in English and other languages offered at school, principals expressed different experiences. The peri-urban school principal's experience was positive. The following were some of the statements he made to express his satisfaction with learners' achievement at his school: "Our learners can speak, read, and write both languages, English and Khoekhoegowab"; "Learners speak English very well through grades 1-7. Very few learners speak Khoekhoegowab language on the school premises and even grade 1 learners speak English." Furthermore "They feel they are privileged to learn and know more languages." The principal for the urban school indicated clear differences in learner performance and said that "only a few learners at her school were very good in the English language while some were very weak." She added that learners are better in speaking than in writing. "If we had oral responses allowed it may be different." The same was found with Afrikaans and she pointed out that the level of Afrikaans spoken at home seemed not to be sufficient either. To the contrary, the principal from the rural school said his school performed the lowest on the Departmental scale for the last couple of years, not only in English but across the curriculum. He said learners were more confident when instructed in Khoekhoegowab because of its familiarity and they did not feel threatened. He noted that, however, "Learners feel proud to speak and read in English and those who cannot read well in English feel side-tracked."

Principals were also asked to express their views on the relation between literacy and general school performance. Principals concurred that literacy has a very big influence on the other subjects and that good results in any subjects was not easy if there is a language problem. The principal for the urban school added that behavioral problems are also linked to literacy since those underperforming become disruptive specifically in the later grades. She said there are learners even in grade 7 that still could not read.

All three school principals indicated that they experienced challenges that negatively affect the implementation of languages of initial literacy and instruction at their respective schools. The main challenges mentioned were related to learning materials, teachers' proficiency in local languages and English and also learners' proficiency in English. The principal of the urban school stated: "... lack of teaching aids such as reading books and text books is a problem." In support, the principal of the rural school said: "... "We do not have enough resources in Khoekhoegowab." The limitation of resources was also clearly expressed by the principal of the peri-urban school as he said: "We use no electronic resources, we do not have any."

Unqualified teachers for the languages of instruction and initial literacy were also a challenge. The following were the words of the principal of the urban school: "Teachers are not qualified to teach English." With regard to the mother tongue, she added: "Even those teaching Afrikaans (selected Mother Tongue) as a subject are not very proficient. Required levels expected from teachers in the mother tongue are very low in their training." The rural school principal added: "Some are first language speakers but do not qualify to teach initial literacy." School principals recommended that for learners to learn the languages of instruction and initial literacy teachers (as implementers of the language policy in schools) should be empowered in the English language; and the use of English should be implemented as from the pre-primary education level. One principal put it this way: "It is a drawback for children when teachers do not know the language."

Learners as well were struggling with the English language. This experience was voiced by the principal of the peri-urban school as he said: "Some learners are from farms. They got no pre-primary education. They meet English for the first time at school. They struggle a lot."

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### **Teaching and learning materials**

Two grade one classes and two grade four classes in the urban school were visited. Only the basic classroom set-up and materials were observed and no specific lessons were observed. The children in grade one classes sat in groups of 4 to 6. They were well behaved but free and open. Most text books were available for each child. Some books were only enough for 50% of the class and therefore 2 children had to share a book during class. All books remained in the class and learners thus did not have any book to take home. For some lessons and topics teachers make photo copies due to a lack of books. Books were in good condition. Several posters, pictures and other aids were available. Most of these were made by teacher or bought from her own pocket.

Grade four classes were very old and hot in summer and cold in winter since they were prefabricated. Their walls consist of asbestos sheeting and their roofs are made up of iron sheets. In grade four classes, text books were enough for one group of learners. Learners cannot take books home since the next group must also use the books. However, during class they have their own book to use and do not have to share. Teachers evaluated the availability of text books as good. Each class had a reading corner but this was very limited and contained mainly English books. Several learning materials were displayed on the walls. The Ministry of Education provides a list of compulsory materials to be displayed and these are checked (e.g. months of the year, numbers, conversion table etc). These materials are also mostly made by teachers or bought from their own resources. These resources were found to be in good condition, interesting and creative.

### **Discussion, conclusion and recommendations**

Most teachers were in favour of instruction in the mother tongue during the first three grades and some even suggested this to continue up to grade 6 or 7. However, the research revealed that parents in general prefer that their children have initial literacy education in English. This places the controversies at the forefront of the crises facing education today. Not only do the data indicate contradictory (and maybe uninformed) beliefs among various stakeholders in education, there is also insufficient common ground among stakeholders about the importance of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the initial stage of teaching and learning in schools. It is therefore recommended that parents be informed about the benefits of instruction in the mother tongue during the first grades to ensure a strong foundation for reading and concept development.

Some school heads were concerned about the language proficiency of teachers. The Ministry of Education is presently in the process of investigating this issue and has plans to upgrade the English proficiency of teachers. In addition, the proficiency in the language used for initial literacy should be of high quality. In our view, this matter should also be evaluated and improved upon.

Teaching materials are important for the development of the language in schools. If these resources (e.g. text books, technological resources, any print materials) are lacking at schools, there is no doubt that the learning of any subject (whether language or content) becomes difficult if not impossible to learners. However, it should also be noted that it is not only through such resources that understanding and mastery of the language is shaped. The language of face-to-face human interaction, the physical environment of the classrooms, and nonverbal human messages (such as gestures, body language) are crucial as well for the successful implementation of any language learning.

The low status and value assigned to and the ideas of neglecting local language because learners know it already are not in line with Vygotsky's conception of the Zone of Proximal

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development which introduces the concept of mastery of skills through scaffolding from experts (more experienced others), thus positing the primary of social interaction, and the importance of creating an environment where the skills, concepts, and language valued in the community to be available for appropriation by the learner through interaction with those more fluent. The learner thus should encounter and receive scaffolding to appropriate the next level of knowledge and skills, whatever the current stage of language development might be.

In a subtractive educational environment (e.g. 'weak' forms of bilingual education), the transfer of literacy skills between the two languages may be impeded. In such subtractive situations, literacy may more efficiently be acquired through the home, minority language. Literacy can be built up via the higher level of language skills in the home language rather than through the weaker majority language, in the case of Namibia, English. According to Baker (2006), when literacy is attempted through the second, majority language the child's oracy skills in English may be insufficiently developed for such literacy acquisition to occur.

Cummins (2006, p. 37) is adamant that continued development of both languages into literate domains (additive bilingualism) is a precondition for cognitive, academic and linguistic growth. He continues that, by contrast, when bilingual students develop low or minimal literacy in L1 and L2 as a result of inadequate educational support, their ability to understand increasingly complex instruction in the L2 and benefit from schooling will decline. The causal factors here, according to Cummins (ibid) are instructional and socio-political, but students' L1 and L2 academic proficiency acts as a mediating or intervening variable which influences the quality and quantity of their classroom participation, and hence academic growth.

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