



Effects of Icibemba as a Medium of Instruction on the Reading Levels of Namwanga Speaking Learners: A Case of Four Selected Schools in Isoka District of Muchinga Province

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Abstract:

The aim of this study was to establish the effects of using Icibemba as medium of instruction on the reading levels of Grade three pupils in Namwanga speaking area in Isoka District of Zambia. The research design was a case study. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used to collect and analyze data. The methods used were interviews, observations, focus group discussions and document analysis. Grade two pupils were only observed and are not part of the sample as there was no direct information that was required from them. Simple random and purposive sampling were used to come up with a sample consisting of four primary schools, four Head teachers eight grade three teachers and sixteen parents and forty learners. The data was analyzed qualitatively and grouped into identified themes generated from the research objectives. The findings revealed that learners were facing phonological, morphological and semantic challenges. Pupils had problems in understanding what the teacher said in Icibemba due to lack of proficiency in Icibemba, the use of Icibemba as a medium of instruction contributed to low reading levels and pupils were denied parental involvement in their learning as a result of high literacy levels among parents.

Key words: familiar language, literacy, medium of instruction, reading levels

1. INTRODUCTION

Zambia is a multilingual nation with seventy-two ethnic groups and has had challenges on choosing familiar local languages as medium of instruction.

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Nevertheless, the seven official familiar local languages chosen as medium of instruction have negative effects on some ethnic groups whose languages are not closer to familiar languages of instruction in their areas. Zambia being a multilingual nation has about seventy-three languages and dialects, Ohannessian and Kashoki (1978). One of the most important factors in education is language of instruction and a medium of instruction, according to MOE (2000:22) "is a pedagogical tool for explaining, communicating, asking and responding, understanding and activating the learning process." It is not easy to come up with a language that is acceptable to everyone, especially in a multilingual nation like Zambia. However, the Zambian Ministry of Education has been trying to make appropriate changes in terms of language policy since independence in 1964. A significant change in language policy in education took place in the year 2013. This is when "...the policy on education recognized the use of familiar Zambian languages as the official languages of instruction in the pre-schools and early grades (grades 1-4)" (MESVEE 2013:19). This policy implied that all teaching and learning in all subjects were to be conducted in a zonal Zambian language. The policy was actually implemented in the year 2014. The speakers of these languages feel disadvantaged and some have tried to take a step further. The Lamba chiefs of the Copperbelt Province which is a Lamba land for example, rejected the use of Ibibemba as a medium of instruction from Grade one to four as stated in the Daily Nation of 11th February, 2014 "All the fifteen (15) Lamba chiefs on the Copperbelt Province had resolved to outrightly reject the newly introduced government policy to teach Ibibemba in copperbelt rural schools". Though the policy is advocating for use of familiar languages, what are being used currently in Zambia are regional official languages which may not be familiar to other learners.

However, it is important to note that while all the dialects of the seven zonal languages have been grouped, Namwanga has not been grouped together with Ibibemba in the language grouping which shows that the two languages do not have much in common, as the languages which have more grammatical and vocabulary characteristics in common have been grouped together, Ohannessian and Kashoki (1978). For instance, Simwinga (2006) talks of Ibibemba, Aushi, Bisa, Lala and Lamba having been placed in group 'A' but not Mambwe, Lungu and Inamwanga. Also, he consolidates this assertion when he talks of Namwanga, Mambwe and Lungu as not being mutually intelligible with Bemba and therefore, cannot be said to be adequately catered for by Ibibemba in the current language zoning system. This implies that there could be challenges which learners may be facing especially those who have been learning under this policy from Grade 1 as the policy has been in operation for some years now.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The Ministry of Education in Zambia revised the language policy in the year 2013 and it stipulates that children from Pre-school to Grade four will have to use a local familiar language as a Medium of Instruction. Isoka is predominantly a Namwanga speaking area and Namwanga has no grammatical and vocabulary characteristics with Ibibemba, Simwinga (2006). Apart from factors affecting reading readiness such as intelligence, environment and physical, language of instruction plays a critical role in teaching and learning which is not the case in Isoka as the familiar language of instruction is totally different from the learners' language of play.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to establish the effects of using Ibibemba as a medium of instruction on the reading levels of the Namwanga speaking pupils in Isoka District.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To identify the challenges Grade three teachers and learners face in teaching and learning Ibibemba in Isoka District.
2. To assess the perspectives of parents on the effects of Ibibemba as medium of instruction on their children's reading levels.
3. To establish the measures to address the challenges that Grade three teachers and learners encounter in teaching and learning Ibibemba in Isoka district.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Carol Weiss's Opposing program theory (1985) was used to guide the study. Opposing program theory and negative theory of change describes how a program is supposed to have beneficial influence or harmful consequences. The opposing program theory guided the investigation since the factors proposed by Weiss are equally crucial to the implementation of new local language policies in lower primary schools. According to Weiss' idea, any new intervention would have negative consequences that people would have to deal with. When change is launched, and plans are in motion in any normal situation, the program is expected to confront hurdles that may cause it to fail. In terms of this idea, suffice it to say that switching from English to a mother tongue has undoubtedly caused some obstacles for teachers and students, hence the need for them to be established, (Rigole, 2014).

1.5 Significance of the study

It is hoped that the study would be significant as a valuable resource for academicians. It will serve as a source of information for other researchers and a tool for other student teachers in Colleges and Universities. The MOGE might benefit from hearing from parents and teachers about the new Language policy, which would aid the government in making further changes to the language of instruction policy. Finally, when changes and recommendations are applied, the study will increase learner performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literacy skills

Initial literacy involves reading and Mafafwali (2010) looks at reading as the ability to acquire meaning from print. Printed material is expressed in a language and a reader will only be able to decode meaning if he/she is familiar with the language in which the material is printed. Children in initial grades such as Grade 2, need to be assisted by a more knowledgeable person in order to acquire the literacy skills which are needed for someone to be able to read and write. Though other members of the society may provide assistance to a learner, the teacher is the most important in providing this assistance especially in a classroom situation.

Language is the tool in which pupils acquire initial literacy skills, literacy being the ability to read and write, and language is the tool a teacher uses to facilitate that learning and the medium of instruction has positive or negative effects on the learners' reading levels and achievements especially at initial stages.

2.2 Zambia a multilingual society

In Zambia, language can be viewed as a problem especially language of instruction in Zambian schools. On this, Serpell (1978:144) says that "Language is a controversial topic in Zambia with special

significance for educational policy." It is considered a problem because Zambia is a multilingual nation as a result it has not been possible to satisfy all the stake holders or language users. Multilingualism is a situation where people use many languages in a community. Miti et al (2009) in their study, wanted to find out how the teachers were prepared in colleges to teach Zambian languages and to use them as languages of instruction. The study revealed that teachers had difficulties teaching using Zambian languages because of multilingualism. It is either teachers were not familiar with the language where they were sent to work or pupils were not familiar with the language of instruction. Multilingualism is also a contributing factor to problems relating to language policy.

2.3 History of Language policy in Zambia

Before independence, the first missionaries who came to present day Zambia, found a variety of local languages and the first thing they did was to learn some of these languages so that they could communicate well with the people. They even started teaching people in vernacular. The missionaries encouraged the use of local languages. Carmody (2004:106) says, "the general practice in the school system of Northern Rhodesia during the colonial period was that in the early years of an African child's schooling, instruction should be in the vernacular."

The colonial government recognized four vernaculars namely Ibibemba, Cinyanja, Chitonga and Silozi. The missionaries participated in preparing vernacular text books. It was only when a child had reached fifth grade, that he or she was introduced to English as a medium of instruction. The 1966 Education Reforms recommended that English was going to be the medium of instruction from Grade one to tertiary level of education. The reforms also allowed the use of the seven official languages where it was necessary in order to make instruction easier. This was allowed because it was a known fact that not everyone would comfortably learn English more especially with those children living in rural and peri-urban areas where English is hardly used.

In 1992, Focus on Learning, an education policy, acknowledged the negative impact of using English as the medium of instruction especially for initial literacy acquisition but took no action to resolve the problem. MOE (1992:28), states that.

In 1996 Educating Our Future, another education policy had similar concerns as those observed in the 1992 education policy. The policy observed that English had contributed to the backwardness in reading. It also promotes rote learning because the language being used is not very familiar to the learners. MOE (1996:39) states that :

"there is strong evidence that children learn literacy skills more easily and successfully in their mother tongue and subsequently they are able to transfer these skills quickly and with ease to English or another language."

Teachers were allowed to use local languages when teaching initial basic skills while maintaining English as the official medium of instruction.

The Basic school Curriculum Framework document of 2000 made some changes to the language policy. When the Primary Reading Program (PRP) was introduced, a local familiar language was to be used during the literacy hour only as a language of instruction while English continued to be the medium of instruction in all other areas. MOE (2000:23) states that "at all levels and in all subjects teachers are encouraged whenever necessary and relevant, to use the familiar language for explanations, clarifications, questions and answers."

2.4 Icibemba and Namwanga languages

A study was conducted in Nakonde district by Mwape (2002) as discussed in Simwinga (2006) which investigated on the language used in the border towns and the risk of the local familiar language being over taken by the second and other languages. The study discovered that Namwanga was not under any immediate threat of being replaced by Swahili or Bemba. Mwape's study was not looking at language in educational use but nothing much has been studied on challenges faced by learners in Nakonde who use icibemba in a predominantly Namwanga speaking area. Simwinga (2006) also looked at the impact of language policy on the use of minority languages in Zambia with special reference to Tumbuka and Nkoya. The findings in these studies promote the use of familiar language. Learners seem to perform better with the use of their first language than using the second language. Kalindi 2006 in his study of poor readers in Northern Province suggested that one of the reasons why pupils were poor in reading was because Bemba was not their familiar language. So they struggle to learn to read and write. World Bank (1995) also condemns teaching pupils using an unfamiliar language because it promotes inequalities and marginalization to rural learners.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design

The aim of the study was to establish the effects of using Icibemba as a medium of instruction on reading levels of the Namwanga speaking learners in Isoka district. The study adopted both the qualitative and quantitative method approaches and a case study design which is an in-depth study of a single unit, such as one individual, one group, one organization, one program and many other such arrangements. The main aim is to arrive at a detailed description and understanding of the entity (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). Ideas were understood more clearly because a case study provided a real-life situation. In this study, a case study research design was chosen because of its suitability and ability to investigate specific aspects such as challenges learners face and how such challenges could be affecting the learners' reading levels.

The study adopted the qualitative aspect of research as it was aimed at collecting information from respondents on the effects of using Icibemba as a medium of instruction on reading levels of the Namwanga speaking learners in Isoka which is predominantly Namwanga, reviewed learners' reading levels in primary schools and highlighted factors affecting teaching and learning of reading. Structured open-ended interviews were conducted and questionnaires were used to respondents. The internet also supplemented data for the study.

3.2 Research sites

The study was carried out in the four selected schools in Isoka district of Muchinga Province from which respondents were also sampled.

3.3 Population, Sample and Sampling procedure

The population for the study was purposefully drawn from the four schools. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select Head teachers (4) while the simple random sampling procedure was used to select the teachers (8), parents (16) and pupils (40). The sample size comprised of 68 respondents. Also, the primary data was complimented by the secondary data which was derived from government policy documents, ministerial reports and relevant literature on the teaching and learning of initial literacy.

In the sampling of institutions, the study adopted the stratified cluster random sampling technique. Sampling was done zone by zone. Schools were clustered by zones. One zone was purposively selected based on highest number of schools. The sampling was done at three levels: Sampling zones and schools- level 1, Sampling Head teachers-level 2, Sampling teachers, parents and learners -level 3.

3.4 Data Analysis

In this research, data was analysed qualitatively as the semi structured interviews and observation schedules were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorization of themes from the semi structured interviews and observation schedules Kombo and Tromp (2006). Charts and graphs were used to analyse data. The data gathered was analysed according to the themes of the study, the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the interview guide was analysed manually and also, a combination of software MS Access, SPSS and MS Excel was used to analyse data. Analysis was mainly descriptive, that is, mean, median, mode, range, and standard deviation. Related statistics were applied where possible. Statistical testing took the form of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation and regression both simple and multiple.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The researcher avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission consents, assents were obtained from respondents involved in the research and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. In this research, the researcher was fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. In the same way, all the respondents of the research were to remain unidentified to the public as all their valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researcher for use only in the research and participant's identities will forever remain hidden.

The Researcher got permission from the Head teachers to interview class teachers, parents and learners in the four selected schools. The names of respondents would remain anonymous for the sake of confidentiality, Bryman (2001) and Diener and Crandall (2008). However, the identity of respondents was concealed in the thesis but for identification in the thesis, forty learners were allocated numbers 1 to 40, sixteen parents were allocated ordinal numbers 1st to 16th, eight Grade three teachers were allocated names of classroom teaching and learning materials of chalkboard, ruler, duster, chalk, manilla, pen, file and book while Head teachers were allocated primary colours of Blue, Green, Orange and Red.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)

Overall, reading skills were low on the seven sub-tasks among Grade 1 learners in the six schools. Very few learners in the sample could read with enough fluency to allow for real comprehension. Most learners were unable to sound a single letter or read a single syllable or word or read words in a passage correctly. Table 1 below has more details concerning learners' performance where, reading comprehension, oral passage reading and non-word decoding had the lowest mean scores.

Table 1: Distribution of EGRA mean scores segregated by zone

SUB TASK	Mapapa Zone		Lwangenzi Zone		Possible Total Score
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	
Letter sound knowledge	1.6	1.0	1.0	0.95	5
Non-word decoding	0.7	0.65	0.3	0.2	5
Oral passage reading	0.97	0.55	0.43	0.35	5
Icibemba vocabulary	1.97	1.5	2.1	1.5	5
Orientation to print	0.34	0.5	0.6	0.5	3
Reading comprehension	0.27	0.2	0.07	0.05	4
Listening comprehension	0.67	0.6	0.6	0.5	3

Overall Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results reviewed that reading skills were low on the sub-tasks assessed among Grade 1 learners in the targeted schools. Very few learners in the sample could read with enough fluency to allow for real comprehension. The study also revealed learners who were unable to sound a single letter or read a single syllable or word or read words in a passage correctly (53.5%). Literature showed that learners should be able to read early or by the end of the end of their first grade in Primary school if they were to succeed in their future education development (Chiappe et al, 2002). It should be noted that learners' inability to read was therefore, a reflection on teachers' poor pedagogical practices.

4.2 Mother tongue interference on Icibemba words.

The study revealed that the learners mispronounced Icibemba words because of the interference of Namwanga which is the language they have been using from childhood. For example, the learners were saying 'ecipuna' instead of saying 'ichipuna'. Learners were replacing phonemes and syllables in Bemba words with those syllables and phonemes which are commonly used in Namwanga language. Table 2 below shows some of the words which were commonly mispronounced due to Namwanga interference as they were captured by the researcher during observation in the classroom and outside the classroom. These words were compiled after observing learners in all the four schools in this study

Table 2: Icibemba words frequently mispronounced by Namwanga children

BEMBA	NAMWANGA	ENGLISH
Batata	Watata	Father
Umukashana	Emukazyana	Girl
Abana	Awana	Children
Umulilo	Umoto	Fire
Bakafundisha	Wakafundisha	Teacher
Ichipuna	Ecipuna	Chair
Amenshi	Aminzi	Water

Children tend to pronounce these Bemba words as if they were Namwanga words. The initial letter sound /i/ and /u/ were usually replaced by /e/. In order to show respect to people, Icibemba language uses 'ba' while Namwanga language uses 'wa' but learners were always replacing 'ba' with 'wa'. Instead of saying Ba mayo, Ba tata, Ba yama.

During interviews with teachers, it was revealed that there are syllables which are common in Bemba and not in Namwanga while others are common in Namwanga and not in Ibibemba. For example /ba/ is common in Bemba while /wa/ is common in Namwanga. As a result Namwanga speaking learners found it difficult to pronounce /ba/ and ended up replacing it with /wa/ which is commonly used in their language. There are sounds which interviewees said were used by Ibibemba speakers which Namwanga speakers found difficult to use and there were sounds used by Namwanga speakers which interfered with Bemba pronunciation of words. Some of the sounds that are not used in Bemba language are /v/, /z/, /vw/, and /zy/ but children use the same sounds to pronounce Bemba words.

The study revealed that learners mispronounced some Bemba words. They mispronounced Bemba words mainly due to the interference of Namwanga which they have grown up with and children spoke Ibibemba as if they were speaking Namwanga and sometimes it confused the teacher.

Pronunciation plays an important role in human speech and communication. Correct pronunciation of words is the only condition that can bring out meaningful speech. In order to convey the actual meaning and message of the delivered speech, it must be sounded and articulated correctly (Ahamed, 2013). Pronunciation should not be taken lightly as it has great impact on meaning. The communication between the learners and the teachers was not effective due to lack of proficiency. Some learners ended up using Namwanga when they could not speak Bemba. It was found that the teacher did not know Namwanga, so there was communication breakdown. Language was a barrier to effective communication which turn affected the flow of lessons. During lessons, the teacher would be teaching in Bemba while learners would respond in Bemba which was not clear and sometimes use Namwanga.

Children in Isoka could be fluent speakers if they could maintain one language which they have grown up with than making an abrupt change. The culture at school does not support proper learning because of the change in language. The children speak Namwanga at home and when they start school they suddenly switch to Ibibemba which they are not familiar with. It is in contradiction with socio-cultural practices which support continuity from what the child knows. Parents do not also support the learning of Ibibemba as they feel that it erodes their cultural values and identity as a people.

4.3 Namwanga learners and the language of instruction

Most of the Learners claimed that they did not know the language of instruction which led to lack of understanding. School became a strange place for the children. Outside the classroom environment, children were free to express themselves in Namwanga as it was their language of play in the area. The literacy assessment results obtained from the participating schools show week ten (10) results. The learners were given to read six sounds, six syllables and eight words in Ibibemba which made up a total of twenty items in the assessment.

Table 3: Distribution of marks obtained according to the three levels:

LEVEL	SCORE	RATING
Red	0-7	Poor
Yellow	8-12	Everage
Green	13-20	Good

Learners who got correct items of the test from 0 to 7 were placed in the Red level, 8 to 12 were in yellow level and those who got from 13 to 20 were placed in green level.

Learners did not know the language of instruction because their mother tongue was Namwanga and the language of play in the area was also Namwanga and most of the learners did not understand the instructions given in Bemba. To make the matters worse, the teacher did not understand Namwanga which was being used by the learners. Learners understood and spoke Namwanga very well and fluently. The reading levels for the grade three learners in Isoka were very low as could be seen in the assessment for week ten of term one and Ball (2011:25) agrees when he says that: "Children who begin school in an unfamiliar language face dual challenges of acquiring the new language while learning the curriculum in that new language."

The study found that learners were replacing prefixes for Bemba words with prefixes for Namwanga words especially in words which had similar roots in Bemba and Namwanga. Learners would say 'watata' instead of 'batata'. This was happening mainly because the learners were more familiar with Namwanga than Bemba. Namwanga was always interfering in their speech. There was lack of linguistic competence in the language of instruction (Bemba). Linguistic competence, according to Simwinda (2006:173) refers to "One's knowledge of the formal or grammatical rules of a given language". The learners were not following the grammatical rules in Bemba which made the children's spoken Bemba to sound more like Namwanga. Teachers resorted to submerging learners into Bemba language such that learning was no longer meaningful. Learners were just parroting Bemba words without really understanding. Gacheche (2010) quotes Skutnabb-Kangas (2000:105) saying "A system where instruction is carried out in a language which children do not speak is referred to as submersion, as it is comparable to forcibly holding a child under water".

4.4 Parents perception on the use of Icibemba in Primary Schools in Isoka?

Parents have a negative view on the use of Icibemba as a medium of instruction in Isoka district. Icibemba is seen as a draw back in the education of their children. The problem is that Icibemba is not the familiar language in Isoka and that is why it has received negative views from parents who are mostly native Namwanga speakers. Each tribal group would like to maintain its culture and this is usually done through language, UNESCO (2008) The socio-cultural theory requires the involvement of parents and other more knowledgeable people to be involved in the learning process for positive results. Parents and other caregivers are tools which help children internalize what they learn.

5. CONCLUSION

The study has shown that learners and teachers faced different types of challenges while parents had negative perceptions on the teaching and learning of Icibemba as a medium of instruction. The challenges that were being faced were phonological, morphological and semantic. The challenges encountered caused learners to mispronounce Icibemba words as well as misinterpret Icibemba words which were similar to Namwanga words. Learners also failed to understand explanations given by teachers in Icibemba. Pupils lacked proficiency in Icibemba while teachers lacked proficiency in the learner's language and in some cases in Icibemba

The study also confirmed that there was no mutual intelligibility between Bemba and Namwanga mainly because of the different places of origin. As a result, there was a big difference between Bemba and Namwanga vocabulary. Namwanga speaking learners found it very difficult to learn in Bemba. Learners did not participate actively during lessons due to lack of competence in the language of instruction. Some teachers also lacked competence in the language of instruction as well as the learners' language which made teaching very challenging. Teachers ended up using lecture method

when teaching in order to avoid misunderstanding with learners. Learner involvement in lessons was very minimal. Parents failed to help their children with homework because of not being competent with the medium of instruction and also because of high levels of illiteracy among the parents and therefore, children did not have a role model.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The head teachers should ensure that lower grades are allocated to teachers who are familiar with Ibibemba which is the medium of instruction and Namwanga which is the learners' familiar language for effective communication between teachers and learners.
2. The District Education Office should come with a deliberate policy where newly deployed teachers should be taught the medium of instruction and the children's familiar language for a period of at least six months in school after deployment.
3. The Government of the Republic of Zambia should increase on the number of official recognized regional languages by adopting Namwanga as a medium of instruction in Isoka District and other Namwanga speaking areas.
4. School Head teachers should sensitise parents in the community on the benefits of their involvement in the education of their children. Parents should assist their children with homework as homework is a policy requirement by the Ministry of Education.
5. The District Education Board Secretaries and Head teachers should spearhead the introduction of Adult literacy classes so that parents can learn to read and write as well as understand the importance of education in general.

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