Teachers' perceptions on using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower levels of Primary School in Manzini region of the Kingdom of Eswatini

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ABSTRACT

This paper sought to establish teachers' perceptions on the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels of primary school, grade 1-4. The paper adopted a qualitative approach where a case study research design was utilized. Data were collected from eight (8) grade 1-4 teachers in one primary school in the Manzini region of the Kingdom of Eswatini. The school was randomly selected and purposive sampling was used to select the teachers who participated. One on one interviews and questionnaires containing open- ended questions were used to collect data from the sampled teachers. The paper was based on the following research questions: what are teachers' perceptions of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels of primary school? How is teaching and learning affected by the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels of primary school? Data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The findings of the study revealed that there were challenges of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, as siSwati language is not developed or rather standardized so that every Liswati speaks the same dialect. Emaswati sometimes interpret one word in different ways. Again most schools admit multi- racial learners and these have a problem in understanding the siSwati. In addition, some learners are from English speaking environments as both their parents are educated and so are their siblings and friends. English is also a global language and therefore has a significant impact on students' employment prospects when they grow up, the same thing cannot be said about siSwati. If learners learn in siSwati from the time they begin primary school, they are likely to struggle to learn in English at a later stage. Emphasis during teacher training is on the use of English as a medium of instruction. Based on the findings, the study recommends that teachers should be trained at college level to teach the subjects at primary school, in the mother tongue. Curriculum materials, teaching and learning materials should be written in the mother tongue.

Introduction

Mother tongue as a medium of instruction has been adopted by most countries globally. Most of the countries that have adopted this initiative are those that were once colonised by other countries. In a bid to decolonise their education systems most of them have drafted policies that will ensure that learners who are in the lower grade levels get instruction in the mother tongue with the hope that this would yield positive results. The Kingdom of Eswatini is one of the African countries which were once colonized by the Europeans and has since adopted the global trend of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels. This development by the Kingdom of Eswatini was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Training through the introduction of Eswatini Education and Training Sector Policy of 2011.

Background

The use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction is a practice that is common in a number of countries. In Brazil for example, every public school uses Brazilian Portuguese as a medium of instruction. Brazilian Portuguese is the official language of Brazil and is widely spoken by most of the population. Brazilian sign language is also another official language in Brazil. Minority languages include indigenous languages and languages of more recent European and Asian immigrants. The population speaks or signs approximately 210 languages, of which 180 are indigenous. Brazilian private schools use European languages (mainly because of the country's European heritage) such as English, German, Italian or French (Ball, 2012).

In Canada according toBenson (2012) almost all public schools use either English or French as the medium of instruction. In the Republic of China, standard Chinese is used as the medium of instruction in most schools. In elementary and secondary schools for ethnic minorities, the minority languages, such as Mongolian, Tibetan and Korean, are used (Nyika 2014).

In India, the medium of instruction varies between English, Hindi and the respective states' official languages. Private schools usually prefer English, while government primary schools use either Hindi or respective states' official languages. The medium of instruction in India is dependent upon the state and its official language. In Philippines, Filipino, which is the mother tongue, is used together with English as a medium of instruction from preschool to university (Gobana, 2014).

In Malaysia, Malay is the medium of instruction in most schools. However, there are also Chinese and Indian schools serving the respective communities, which are allowed to use Mandarin and Tamil, which are their indigenous languages, as media of instruction, but Malay is still required to be taught as a subject in these schools (Kuper, 2013).

In Australia, most schools use English, which is the indigenous language of Australia (Mebratu, 2016). However, in the State of Victoria, a state that is known for its many Greek and Italian settlers, there are a number of schools that teach in Greek and Italian, which are the indigenous languages. Australia has no official language but English is regarded as the de facto national language of Australia and is spoken by all. A de facto language refers to a language that is used by a majority of the people in a country, but there are no laws regarding it (UNESCO, 2012). Of importance to note is that Australia is a linguistically and culturally diverse country with influences from more than 160 spoken languages. Early European settlers in Australia almost eradicated the indigenous languages, and a few of these aboriginal languages have survived today (Kuper, 2013).

In Finland, the medium of instruction is Finnish; but Swedish as an official national language is used in a number of schools along the coast as a medium of instruction. These two are used as medium of instruction because they are the national languages of Finland(Foley, 2013).In Slovenia, the general medium of instruction is Slovene. In areas with the Hungarian ethnic minority, bilingual instruction in Slovene and Hungarian is compulsory. In the Italian ethnic community area, basic education can be provided in Slovene or Italian (Mebratu, 2016).

Jacqueline (2014) highlights that in the United Kingdom; English is mostly used as a medium of instruction. In Scotland, English is the primary language of instruction however Gaelic medium education is also available. Gaelic medium education (G.M.E. or G.M.E; Scottish Gaelic: FoghlamtroMheadhannaGăidhlig) is a form of education in Scotland that allows learners to be taught primarily through the medium of Scottish, Gaelic, with English being taught as the secondary language (Foley, 2013).

The situation is different in the United States of America. The United States of America is a developed country and one of the economically stable and leading countries in the world, but the use of the colonial language still prevails in this country's government domains including the education system, even though the country gained its independence a long time ago, on the 4th July 1776. Since the country was colonized by the British, English-only policies, have found strong public support (Macedo, 2000, as cited by Shongwe, 2018). The English-only movement has been particularly successful at the state level and in the education system. In the past two decades, many states in America have adopted English as the official language and reduced the use of other languages in government and public services, including schools. All instructional materials and books are in English. Teachers are required to have a good command of English but knowledge of students' native language is not required. While mixing students of different age groups, language groups, and grade levels for English instruction is allowed, using students' native language to teach content matter is strictly prohibited. In fact, under this initiative, parents can sue teachers who use any other language other than English in the classroom (Macedo, 2000, as cited by Shongwe, 2018).

The foregoing reveals that in most Asian and European countries, the mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction. The exception is Philippines where the mother tongue, Filipino is used together with English as a medium of instruction. This is because the country practices Mother Tongue – Based Multilingual Education. The same thing applies with the United States of America where the colonial language still prevails. This is because of the English-only movement, which has been successful in the state level and in the education system.

Africa is one of the continents where learners are taught in either foreign or second languages, more especially in the first four grade levels. The use of these languages as a medium of instruction is based on the belief that the foreign or second languages are of great educational and economic benefit to these African countries as they enable Africans to interact with people from other countries in the globe (UNESCO, 2012). This however is not true as research reveals that education conducted through the use of these languages is often oflow quality as the learners have to struggle with both the new content and language that is used for presenting the new content. It is for this reason that UNESCO (2012) recommends the use of African languages as both medium of instruction and languages for examinations in schools.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, according to Ouane (2012) there are between 1, 250 and 2,100 languages. However, school children in this region very rarely have chances to receive their education in the mother tongue. Many African countries still use colonial languages as a medium of instruction at different learning levels. Kuper (2013) reports that 22 out of 39 African countries, primary education still uses one of the colonial languages. Only three countries: Ethiopia, Erithrea, and Tanzaniaemploy the mother tongue for the whole duration of primary education.

Mebratu (2016) points out that learning using the mother tongue is relatively not a new phenomenon in Ethiopia. It dates back to the early 1990s when the Traditional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) issued an interim education and language policy. The TGE administered the country on the basis of a transitional charter which recognized the rights of people, nations, and nationalities to self-determination, their rights to develop and defend their culture and history as well as nurture their languages. In 1992 the TGE introduced new measures concerning primary education in ethno-national languages. Among the languages the policy stipulated that the Afaan Oromo, Wolaita, Sidama and Tigrinya languages should be used as media of instruction from 1991-1992 school year.

Mebratu (2016) also points out that in Tanzania; Swahili is used in primary schools and adult education as a medium of instruction, whereas English is used in secondary schools and universities as a medium of instruction. In Zimbabwe, Shona and Ndebele are used in education

as media of instruction until the fourth grade. From the fourth grade, English becomes the medium of instruction. The use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the lower levels of education is a subject of endless debate in Ghana and other educational jurisdictions in Africa. However, research is conclusive on the view that mother tongue at that level enhances comprehension and helps prepare children to become adult critical thinkers. This is because naturally, it is assumed that human beings think better in their mother tongues. To actualize this assumption, the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service (GES) have initiated the National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP). The initiative is meant to enhance comprehension and promote literacy and numeracy among the pupils of Kindergarten and lower primary - Primary One to Primary Three - through the use of local dialects (Francis, 2016).

In South Africa, students are taught primarily in their home language from Grade 0 up to Grade 3. From Grade 4 onwards, English is the default language of learning and teaching, except for a minority of schools where Afrikaans is used. The national curriculum requires that all students study at least two official languages as separate subjects, one of which must be studied at home language level and the other at least at first additional language level. The most common home language among the school population is isiZulu (Foley, 2013).

In addition, Tshotsho (2013) points out that the South African Constitution guarantees learners the right to receive education in the language of their choice. Furthermore, most current research suggests that learners entering school are able to learn best through their mother tongue, and that a second language is more easily acquired if the learner already has a firm grasp of their mother tongue. Also, the poor dropout rates in South African schools at the moment, where barely a quarter of African language learners who enter the school system are likely to reach Matric, seems to indicate that the current practice of using English as the initial language of learning and teaching is at least one contributing factor to this problem (Foley, 2013).

Eswatini released an Education for All Status report that incorporates a summary of the interventions the country has made, and plans to strengthen the country's education system.

This Education for All Status Report 2000-2015 maps out the progress Eswatini has made in achieving the Dakar goal agreed at the world Education Forum in 2000. The goals agreed in Dakar helped Eswatini to refine the implementation of the National Development Strategy (NDS) of 1997 which guides development and growth of the education and training sector. The country has been able to re-strategize and prioritize education in the national budget resulting in increased spending on education in real terms (The Swaziland Education For All Review Report, 2000-2015).

Since 2010, the country has made progress in expanding access to primary education for all children including orphaned and vulnerable children as well as children with special education needs. The country has also made significant progress in improving access to literacy programmes and eliminating in -equalities such as rural-urban and gender disparities in primary and secondary education. Furthermore, Eswatini has taken significant steps in terms of providing policy and strategic direction in the provision of Early Childhood Development Programmes through the development of the ECDE policy (which is still a draft policy) and the adoption of the Early Learning and Development Standards (The Swaziland Education For All Review Report, 2000-2015).

The Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy (2011) is one of the country's achievements. The language policy stipulates that siSwati and English are both regarded as official languages in the constitution of the Kingdom of Eswatini, which provides the necessary guidance for EDSEC policy. While this implies that either language may be used as a medium of instruction, the policy's directive is that the mother tongue siSwati shall be used officially as a medium of instruction for the first four grades of school, after which English shall be the medium of instruction.

Statement of the problem

The problem in the study emanates from the pronouncement that the indigenous language, siSwati, must be used as a medium of instruction in the first four grade levels of primary school.

The Language in Education Policy (2011) stipulates that siSwati, the indigenous language of the Swati people, should be used as a medium of instruction in the first four grade levels at primary school; that is grade one to four, thereafter English should be used (Language in Education Policy, 2011). This is a problem because the situation with regards to the education system of Eswatini is that learners can only progress to secondary school if they pass English. Again, books as well as curriculum materials for primary schools are written in English with the exception of siSwati materials. This therefore renders English an important language as well as subject in the primary school curriculum which learners have to be competent in for them to progress smoothly with their education.

Objectives of the study

    (a) Establish teachers' perceptions on using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels of primary school.

    (b) Suggest ways of how best the mother tongue may be used as a medium of instruction in the lower levels of primary school

Theoretical framework

This study is framed in Adegbija's Social Linguistic theory of language attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa (Adegbija, 1994). This theory is based on the notion that indigenous African languages have been abandoned and have been replaced with European languages by most African countries. This act by Africans has degraded the value of indigenous languages so that more value is now attached to the European languages. Adegbija also postulates that one of the reasons why Africans attach so much value to European languages is that they consider Europeans as conquerors of Africa as they were able to colonize most African countries. Another reason is that the Europeans established language policies that would ensure that their own languages had more value than the African languages and this resulted in the European languages being used in important places as well as being used a medium of instruction or subjects of value in the schools such as passing or failing subjects (Adegbija, 1994).

Adegbija also observes that even in countries where indigenous African languages are used as medium of instruction in schools, this is only done for the first four grade levels of primary school learning; this brings forth the impression that indigenous African languages are only appropriate for the lower levels of primary school and not higher ones (Adegbija, 1994). Such a perception and treatment of indigenous African languages will make them to be unrecognized unless a new perception and treatment is adopted more especially in the school system.

Adegbija'stheoryattempts to offer some answers to the problems that such a language scenario pose for language policy planning and implementation in these societies in general, and in education in particular. Adegbija's analysis also provides a timely and very desirable sociolinguistic overview of one of the most neglected areas of academic research.Adegbija's theory further provides reasons why there are disproportionate attitudes of superiority toward European languages in sub-Saharan Africa, while there are attitudes of low esteem and inferiority toward indigenous African languages.

In our view, the situation on indigenous languages, more especially in the school system in Eswatini, is similar toAdegbija's observation because for a long time emphasis has been on the European languages where English has been used as a medium of instruction and learners were forced to speak in English during school hours. Even after the pronouncement of the Language in Education Policy (2011), emphasis on the use of the indigenous language (siSwati) is only in the lower grade levels, after which English has to continue being used. In addition to English being used as a medium of instruction in the upper grade levels, it is also used as a measure for the learners' progression from one grade level to the next. This further boosts the position of English in the education system of Eswatini and disadvantages the indigenous siSwati language.

Review of related studies

Available literature reveals that teaching in African languages is challenging because of lack of teaching materials, trained African cadres, and teachers who are native speakers of the child's mother tongue. A study by Gobana (2014) reveals that when teachers are not native speakers of the child's mother tongue or lack sufficient training on how to carry out mother tongue based

teaching, they revert to old systems of teacher controlled interactions, where pupils are merely required to repeat content after the teacher and given little room to ask any questions or express themselves thus learning is compromised. The study conducted by Gobana (2014 reveals that systems that attempt to institute policies that encourage learning through a child's home language suffer from an acute shortage of teachers who speak or have access to these home languages, yet one of the criteria for effective usage of local languages for instruction is that there must be enough teachers to teach in it. In this regard, training on how to use the mother tongue for teaching purposes is essential for teachers.

In a similar manner, resource materials written in the language of instruction are a requirement for success when the mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction. Thus, if a specific vernacular language is made the official language of instruction in schools, then, ideally, reading materials (textbooks, journals, Internet materials, etc.) written in that vernacular language should be made available (Ball, 2012).In the light of this, the study by Gobana (2014) suggests that the implementation of local languages as media of instruction should be done in a restricted or gradual manner to allow for the production of materials that have been written in the mother tongue and the training of staff on mother tongue instruction.

Literature further reveals that choosing a language that is going to be used as a medium of instruction is a cumbersome task because many African countries are multilingual and therefore choosing one language of instruction over others may be seen as the rejection of the others. There may also be little/no agreement within minority communities with regards to the dialect to be used in schools (Khan, 2014) and this might destroy the delicate national unity of a country (Orekanka, 2012). Another challenge is thatMother tongue based education promotes the mother tongue at the cost of the bridge languages that would enable the students to connect with the rest of the world (Khan, 2014).

Researchindicates that a number of countries worldwide have experienced challenges when using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, like in 2012 in Philippine, the department of

education implemented the teaching of the mother tongue – based multilingual – lingual education among the kindergarten, grades 1, 2 and 3 learners. The focus was on the four skill areas which are reading, writing, speaking and listening (Denzin & Lincoln (2013). For listening it was found that there was unavailability of audio materials that can strengthen the listening skills of the learners. There was also limited Hiligaynon (local dialect) vocabulary of the teachers and the unfamiliarity of the words. With speaking, it was discovered that it was difficult for teachers to speak fluently in Hiligaynon. The challenge was that teachers previously taught the different subjects using the second language which is English. The challenge with readingwas limited reading materials. The issue of understanding intense Hiligaynon terminologies was also another challenge with reading. With writing, teachers lacked resources which could improve the learners'writing skills. The challenge with spelling of the Hiligaynon was that some words are long and difficult to spell (Denzin & Lincoln (2013).

The review of related literature also reveals that teachers can ignore the language that has been set up as the medium of instruction. In Kenya, the Ministry of Education sent out a memo in1976 to all schools to inform them of the new policy on mother tongue instruction, and the memo was ignored. The reason for ignoring the memo was based on that English would be the language of instruction in higher classes and of examinations, as a result they chose to use English as a medium of instruction as opposed to the mother tongue. Again, the teachers were motivated by the mistaken belief that the earlier English is introduced as a language of teaching and learning the faster pupils are likely to attain competency in it (Burton, 2013).

Research Methodology

The interpretive paradigm

In this research the interpretive paradigm was used to explore the teachers' perceptions on the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels of primary school in the Manzini region. The interpretive paradigm was used with the understanding that, among other things, research is about social meanings being created and resulting from interactions between the researcher and the participants (Viriri, 2014). In consideration of this, the researcher interacted with teachers for purposes of getting their perceptions on the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels of primary school in the Manzini region.

Research approach

This research work was established using the qualitative research approach. The qualitative approach was used based on that it is an approach that is appropriate for investigating people's attitudes, views, insights, beliefs and perceptions. Its use also unearths tendencies in thoughts, views and opinions as it plunges deeper into the problem (Foley, 2013; Heugh, 2012& Creswell, 2013). The qualitative approach was used as it enabled teachers to providedata that are descriptive and also for that the data collection instruments yielded descriptive/ qualitative data.

Research design

In this study the researchers used a descriptive case study research design. Lara- Stephanie (2018) states that a case study is suitable in instances where an investigation is done for purposes of learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation/phenomenon. This is confirmed by Creswell (2013) when he states that in instances where the researcher wants to learn more about a little known situation or phenomenon, the case study is the perfect design to use. The issue of the use of an indigenous language (siSwati) as a medium of instruction is a new phenomenon in the Kingdom of Eswatini since it has just been declared in the Education Sector Policy (2011) and therefore not much is known about it. It is for this reason therefore that the case study design was used in this study.

Target population

A population is a complete set of elements (persons or objects) that possess some common characteristics defined by the sampling criteria established by the researcher. There are two types of population in research; these are target population and accessible population (Chumbow, 2012). Chumbow (2012) further adds that the target population refers to the entire group of individuals or objects to which researchers are interested in generalizing the conclusions. The target population usually has varying characteristics and it is also known as the theoretical population. The target population contains members of a group that a researcher is interested in

studying. The accessible population is the one in which the researcher can apply their conclusions.

This population is a subset of the target population and is also known as the study population. It is from the accessible population that researchers draw their samples. The results of the study are generalized to this population, because they all have significant traits in common (Creswell, 2014). The target population for the study was all primary schools in the Manzini region of Eswatini. There are one hundred and eighty primary schools in the kingdom; however, since it was not possible to engage all the primary schools in the study, only one was engaged. The school that took part in the study was therefore the accessible population in this study.

Sampling and sampling procedures

In this study the researchersused non-probability sampling in the form of purposive sampling. Defining a purposive sample, Creswell (2014), states thatitis a type of sample that is selected based on the characteristics of a population and the objectives of the study. Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling (Creswell, 2014). Purposive sampling types include maximum variation/ heterogeneous purposive sample, homogeneous purposive sample, typical case sampling, total population and expert sampling (Maxwell, 2013). Purposive sampling can be very useful in situations when the researcher needs to reach a targeted sample quickly, and where sampling for proportionality is not the main concern. This type of sampling is appropriate in instances where the researcher knows that the participants have the information that is required in the study (Creswell, 2014).

The selection of the teachers was done using purposive sampling. The justification for the use of purposive sampling was that it is a simple method of sampling, where the researcher chooses participants that have the information that is sought. It also ensures that the population will be evenly sampled and so reliable conclusions can be drawn, this method is comparatively economic in terms of time, labor and money and it systematically eliminates the clustered selection of the subjects.

Data Collection procedures

Permission to collect data was obtained from the Ministry of Education and Training and the head teachers of theschool involved. After permission was given the researchers visited the selected school; set time for the study; identified the participants and gave them the consent forms to sign as an indication that they were agreeing to take part in the study.Interviews were conducted with the teachers at the agreed upon venues. The researchers made two visits to the schools.

Data collection instruments

The researchersused a semi-structured interview guide to collect data. In this kind of interview, questions asked and procedures to be followed are the same for all the subjects and are organized in advance (Creswell, 2014). What the researchers did in this study was to include the first five questions for all the participants in the interview guide. Other questions emerged as the researcher was probing for more information. The teachers were therefore interviewed on a one on one and as the interview progressed the researcher was able to read other behaviors such as frowning, nodding and other gestures, apart from what the interviewee was saying. These provided valuable data in the study. Interviews also enable interviewees to ask for clarifications where they do not understand. This ensures that they provide relevant responses to the questions. Again, the researcher can also probe for more information if responses are not precise (Willis, 2014 & Creswell, 2013).

Data analysis

The qualitative data collected from this study were analyzed using thematic content analysis. According to Walter (2014) and Creswell (2013) content analysis is a generic approach not necessarily linked to a particular or any theoretical perspective. All or parts of the data are coded, that is, identified as representing something of potential interest and this is labeled. Codes of the same label are grouped together as a theme. Codes and themes occurring in the data can be determined inductively from reviewing the data and or relevance to the research questions, or

theoretical considerations. The themes, according to Walter (2014) then serve as a basis for further data analysis and interpretation. Thematic content analysis makes substantial summaries of the themes that emerge when the data are read several times. Finally, it can be used on a purely descriptive or exploratory basis, or within a variety of theoretical frameworks.

In this study, thematic content analysis was used to analyze the narrative data gathered from the teachers using the interview guide. What the researchers did was to read and re-read the responses given by the participants. Reading and re-reading the responses given by the teachers was done so that the researchers could understand what the teachers had said. It was also done in line with Powell and Renner (2003)'s view that good understanding of the data results in good analysis, interpretation and presentation of the data. The researchers also re-visited the research questions and compared them with the responses given. The responses for each question were then put together. As this was done themes emerged and these formed the topics and sub-topics under which the presentation and analysis of data were based. During data presentation, the researchers used verbatim quotes and these were written in italics. They denoted the exact words that had been given by the respondents and these were followed by brief summaries of the responses that had been made.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Using siSwati as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels of primary school

This theme was based onwhat teachers perceivedon the use of siSwati as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels of primary school. The teachers stated that the challenge with using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction was that siSwati, the mother tongue of Emaswati is not standardised and also that in Eswatini people speak different dialects where a word can be have many interpretations. According to the teachers there was also no one to one correspondence between siSwati and English words. Explaining this one of the teachers said;

The problem is that the mother tongue of Eswatini is not developed or rather standardized so that every Swati person speaks the same dialect. Emaswati would interpret one word in different

ways. For the word 'zero,' some would sayit means nothing, others would say it means a circle while some said it is 'an egg.' (Teacher 1, school A).

Another teacher said:

It is at times difficult to find a siSwati word that matches the English word. (Teacher 2, school A).

Another challenge according to the teachers was that the English medium is used at pre-school level so using the mother tongue means taking them back to it yet most of them are already accustomed to English. According to one of the teachers:

Most learners are from English medium pre-schools and they have kind of acquired the English language. Teaching such learners using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction is difficult, (Teacher 3, school A).

The study also revealed that another problem was that due to the varied nationalities of people living in Eswatini learners have different mother tongues so teaching them in siSwati only benefits Emaswati and not the other children. One of the teachers pointed out that:

Most schools these days admit multi racial learners and these have a problem in understanding the mother tongue. (Teacher 4, school A.).

Another problem that was pointed out by one of the teachers was that the mother tongue medium will stall the learners' progress in attaining competency in the English language yet English is a global language which every learner should master. Explaining this, the teacher said:

English is a global language and has, in fact, contributed substantially to the growth of Eswatini economy……If they learn in English at the beginning, they are unlikely to struggle to learn the language at a later stage (Teacher 5, school A).

Another problem that was raised by the teachers was that some of the teachers use the siSwati medium even when learners understand the English medium.According to the teachers most of the teachers who do this are those that lack competency in the English language.

One of the teachers pointed out that:

Some teachers lack competency in the English language, as a result they use the mother tongue as a medium of instruction even when the learners have no difficulty understanding the English language(Teacher 6, school A).

The teachers also highlighted the unavailability of resource materials as well as teachers who are trained in mother tongue instruction as another challenge of using the mother tongue for instruction.

Discussion of findings

The analysis of data gathered from the teachers revealed that some teachers considered the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction unfavorable to the learners' education. The teachers stated that the challenge with using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction was that siSwati, the mother tongue of Emaswati is not standardised and also that in Eswatini people speak different dialects where a word can have many interpretations. This according to the teachers could pose problems as both teachers and learners could use dialects that are different which could lead to learners' misunderstanding of concepts. The teachers also said that the mother tongue medium of instruction was problematic in there was no one to one correspondence between siSwati and English words and this would create problems. Another challenge was the unavailability of resource materials that have been written in the mother tongue as well as trained teachers on mother tongue instruction.

According to the teachers there are terms in Mathematics and Science which are difficult to interpret in the mother tongue. According to the study by Ball (2012) in the literature review, it is imperative that resource materials that have been written in the mother tongue be available so that learners can fully benefit from mother tongue instruction. It is also equally important that teachers be trained on mother tongue instruction and also that teaching using the mother tongue should be gradually introduced to allow for the production of resource materials and the training of staff (Gobana, 2014).Another challenge noted by the teachers was that most primary schools in Eswatini have learners who are from English medium pre-schools and have kind of acquired

the English language; some of them even have difficulty speaking the mother tongue. The teachers therefore felt that teaching such learners in the mother tongue would be derailing their progress in the English language. This view by the teachers is an indication that they misunderstand the policy. According to the policy the siSwati medium can only be used if learners do not understand English, if they do teachers should use the English medium (The Education and Training Sector policy, 2011).

The teachers also reported that most schools nowadays admit learners who are multi- racial and these have a problem in understanding the mother tongue. This again is still an indication that teachers do not know all the clauses of the policy on the medium of instruction. The policy states that in instances where learners seem not to have a problem understanding English instruction, teachers should teach them in the mother tongue (The Education and Training Sector Policy, 2011).Teachers also pointed out that English is a global language and has contributed substantially to the growth of Eswatini economy and therefore, English medium, and not mother tongue instruction, can have a significant impact on students' employment prospects, when they grow up. The teachers also pointed out that if the learners learn English from the beginning they are unlikely to struggle to learn the language at a later stage.

It also emerged from the data analysis that teachers were not trained on how to teach using the mother tongue. The syllabus in the teacher training colleges is silent on this and does not include any guidance on mother tongue instruction. Another challenge of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction according to the teachers was that all the textbooks, except for textbooks for the siSwati subject, are written in English. Again, the internal and national examinations are set in English and therefore learners introduced to English as early as grade 1 or pre-school, are advantaged. Those learners who have not mastered the fundamentals of the English language are disadvantaged. Such candidates may not understand what is required of them and when they try answering the questions they may lack the appropriate language to express themselves. These responses indicated the teachers' misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the policy because the policy states that in cases where learners understand English, English should be used as a

medium of instruction (EDSEC Policy, 2011). So, learners who have difficulty understanding the siSwati medium and also those that are multi racial are catered for in the policy.

It also emerged from the data analysis that some teachers lacked competency in the English language, as a result they used the mother tongue as a medium of instruction even when the learners have no difficulty understanding the English language. This response was given by one teacher and it indicated that this teacher understood that the policy was open to the use of English in instances where learners understood English.

A majority of the teachers who participated in this research work were for the idea that therewere challenges in using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels in the primary school would negatively affect teaching and learning. The teachers pointed out that there is a lack of instructional materials in the mother tongue and that hinders teaching and learning in the mother tongue. The teachers also mentioned that since teachers are not trained in the mother tongue, there is a problem on the ability of teachers to efficiently and effectively transmit cognitive skills and values in the learners' first language. In this sense, teaching and learning is hugely affected.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- ❖ Teachers should be trained at college level to teach the subjects at primary school, in the mother tongue.
- ❖ Curriculum materials, teaching and learning materials should be written in the mother tongue.
- ❖ Teachers need to be educated on the policy so that they know all its contents in the different clauses.

Conclusion

This study concluded that there were challenges of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower grade levels of primary school. The study further outlined how the

challenges of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction affect teaching and learning in the lower grade levels of primary schools. The study further revealed that some teachers do not know all the clauses of the Swaziland Education and Training Sector policy (2011) on the medium of instruction. The policy is open to the use of both English and siSwati depending on the language that is understood by the learners.

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