



Mother-Tongue Education in Botswana

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Abstract

The paper examines mother tongue education in Botswana. For comparison purposes the paper includes a discussion of mother tongue education in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, especially those in Southern Africa. The paper is a survey of the research in these countries. The research reveals that mother tongue education is generally confined to the first two years of primary school after which a former colonial language, such as English takes over as the medium of instruction. The paper also reveals that studies in this region point to the fact that there are some serious impediments to mother tongue education, which include the colonial legacy of these countries. Their colonial heritage includes challenges such as linguicism and the hegemony of the former colonial languages such as English, which limits the domains of use of the local languages. The paper concludes that the extension of mother tongue education in Botswana to the fifth year of primary school could go a long way in helping students enjoy its benefits at this crucial foundational stage.

Keywords: Colonial language, Mother tongue education, Hegemony, Indigenous children, Competence, Vernacular.

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INTRODUCTION

The paper examines mother tongue education in Botswana. For comparison purposes the paper includes a discussion of mother tongue education in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, especially those in Southern Africa. The paper is a survey of the research in these countries. It also discusses mother tongue education in the light of the belief that students tend to learn best when taught in their mother tongue. It argues that while research in Botswana and other Sub-Saharan countries has shown that in many of these countries English medium or French medium or Portuguese medium education may be a problem for primary school pupils (Arthur, 1994, 1998; Heugh, 2003; Phaswana, 2003; Bamgbose, 1991; Adegbija, 1994), mother tongue education beyond primary school may lead to the further marginalization of the countries in the light of the hegemony of these languages in these countries, especially English, which has assumed global hegemony.

The purpose of this study is to make education practitioners, policy makers, mother tongue education advocates, senior government officials and other stakeholders in education to be aware of the challenges that mother tongue education is facing, which is advocated world-wide. Mother tongue education can be used to overcome challenges in educational development.

The implementation of mother tongue education with maximum benefits and minimal adverse effects is beneficial for educational development. It is hoped that this paper will contribute towards extending education to indigenous and minority groups in Botswana, whose access to education is currently limited by lack of mother tongue education, and suggesting ways it could be introduced.

BENEFITS OF MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION

Mother tongue is regarded as crucial for the education of the child. For instance the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) policy regarding migrant education states that the mother tongue plays a very important part in a child's identity and self-esteem (OECD, 2010). It further says that the mother tongue provides the basis for the child's ability to learn. The child finds it easier to learn their second language and other school subjects. It is of considerable advantage to society if many people are multilingual. It has also been argued that children should be taught mainly through the medium of their mother tongue in school for the first 6-8 years (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Stegen, 2005; Phongsathorn & Person, 2013).

The reason many language learning scholars support mother tongue in the early years of schooling is that when children come to school, they can talk in their mother tongue about concrete everyday things in a face-to-face situation in their own environment where the context is clear: they can see and touch the things they are talking about and they get immediate feedback if they do not understand (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009). They speak fluently, with a native accent, and they know the basic grammar and many concrete words. They can explain all their basic needs in the mother tongue and they have basic interpersonal communicative skills. This is usually adequate for the first grades in school where teachers are still dealing with things that the child knows. But later in school children need abstract, intellectually and linguistically much more demanding concepts; they need to be able to understand and talk about things that are not within their immediate environment, such as geography or history or things that cannot be seen such as mathematical and scientific concepts, honesty, constitution, fairness, democracy. They need to be able to solve problems using just language and abstract reasoning, without being able to do concrete things. Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) asserts that the cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP) that is needed to handle school subjects in later grades in primary school, in secondary school and later in life, develops slowly. Children need to develop these abstract concepts on the basis of what they already know in their mother tongue. Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) further asserts that if the development of the mother tongue CALP is cut off when the child starts school, s/he may never have an opportunity to develop higher abstract thinking in any language

If teaching is in a language that the indigenous/minority child does not know (e.g. Setswana), the child sits in the classroom the first 2-3 years without understanding much of the teaching, he/she may repeat mechanically what the teacher says, without understanding, without developing her capacity to think with the help of language, and without learning almost anything of the subjects that s/he is taught (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009). This is why many indigenous/minority children leave school early, not having learned much Setswana or any of the majority languages, not having learned properly how to read and write, not having developed their mother tongue, and almost without any school knowledge (Mokibelo & Moumakwa, 2006; Mokibelo, 2010; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009)

Scholars have argued that if the child has the mother tongue as the teaching language, he/she understands the teaching, learns the subjects, develops the CALP in the mother tongue, and has very good chances of becoming a thinking, knowledgeable person who can continue the education (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Phongsathorn & Person, 2013).

THE PRICE OF SUPPRESSION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

Phongsathorn and Person (2013) contend that suppression of indigenous languages and cultures often results in the exclusion of indigenous peoples from basic social services, such as health care and education, lack of access to land and resources, and limited employment opportunities. This is

particularly true with education. Forced to study unfamiliar concepts in a language they do not understand, indigenous children fare worse than their non-indigenous peers in terms of school enrolments, retention rates, literacy levels and academic achievement. Mokibelo and Moumakwa (2006) and Mokibelo (2010) found Phongsathorn and Person (2013) assertion to be true in their study among both primary and secondary Khoe learners from Motehegaletau, a remote village in Botswana.

MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

In many African countries, at primary school level or during the first years of primary school, mother-tongue education is the norm, followed by second language education, mostly an ex-colonial language like English, French, or Portuguese (Bamgbose, 1991). With regard to South Africa, (Heugh, 2003) argues that mother tongue education should be implemented in South Africa as students tend to learn best when taught in their mother tongue. She argues that despite the inequitable intent of Bantu education (Bantu Education was intended to give Africans an education that made them docile servants of white South Africans), the school leaving pass rates of African language speaking pupils steadily increased after its introduction, with eight years of mother-tongue education. She further contends that after a revolt against Bantu education in 1976, the change from mother tongue to second language medium (mostly English) was brought back to the fifth year of school. She goes on to argue that instead of pass rates improving, as many parents expected, they began a downward trend. Though the value of mother-tongue education cannot be denied, it is rather simplistic to blame the downward trend of pass rates after 1976 in former apartheid South Africa, solely on the bringing back of mother-tongue education from the eighth year of school to the fifth year.

After the student revolt of June 16, 1976, the educational climate in South Africa never really stabilised for normal educational activities to go on. Chick (1996,p. 34) claims that the uprising “spread to the rest of the country, almost assuming the proportions of a full-scale civil war”. Chick (1996) also maintains that the Bantu education system made it a point that most of the teachers in the home-lands like Kwa-Zulu, did not speak English with confidence or fluency, used outmoded materials, and had almost no contact with English speakers. She also makes the point that following the shift to English as medium in primary schools from the fifth year onward, no changes were made to the syllabus for English to prepare the ground linguistically and conceptually for its use across the curriculum. As a result black primary school students were not adequately prepared for the sudden transition to English after the fourth year of schooling concurrently with the broadening of the curriculum to ten subjects.

She further argues that the English competence required for reading content subject text books in the fourth and fifth years of schooling, was far beyond the English competence that might have been expected from a student who had optimally benefited from English as a second language teaching materials then used in junior primary schools. Because of this situation, Chick (1996) argues, teachers tended to resort to providing notes that the students were required to memorise. She further asserts that in 1989, while 100% of teachers in schools for whites were professionally trained, in the sense that in addition to having at least matriculation or higher academic qualifications, they also possessed teachers’ certificates or diplomas, only 20% of teachers in black primary schools and 10% in black secondary schools were professionally qualified. Therefore, in view of the above points raised by Chick (1996) many factors beside the language one may have contributed to the downward trend of pass rates after 1976. Valid though Chick’s (1976) arguments are, they do not discount the fact that with mother education students performed better in their examinations, despite the evil intent of Bantu education.

BARRIERS TO MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION

The Hegemony of English

Bourdieu (1991) offers an interesting aspect to the relationship between language and power. He contends that the linguistic relation to power is not completely determined by the prevailing linguistic forces alone. He asserts that by virtue of the languages spoken, the speakers who use them and the groups defined by possession of the corresponding competence (ability to speak a language), the whole social

structure is present in each interaction (and thereby in the discourse uttered). He further argues that what happens, for instance, between an employer and an employee or in a colonial situation between a French speaker and an Arabic speaker or in the post-colonial situation between two members of former colonized nation, one Setswana speaking and the other English speaking—derives its particular form from the objective relation between the corresponding languages or usages, that is, between the groups who speak those languages.

Bourdieu (1977) further expands on the above point by asserting that a language is worth what those who speak it are worth. He argues that at the level of interactions between individuals, speech always owes a major part of its value to the person who utters it. Language cannot be viewed independently of the speaker's social status; the evaluation of competence takes into account the relationship between the speaker's social properties and the specifically linguistic properties of his/her discourse, i.e. the match or mismatch between language and speaker. According to Bourdieu sometimes the dominant class can make deliberately or accidentally lax use of language without their discourse ever being invested with the same social value as that of the dominated. What speaks, according to him is not the utterance, the language, but the whole social person. Perhaps this might explain why in Botswana, in the past and to a lesser extent even now in certain schools, most private English medium primary and secondary schools where the dominant classes or the ruling elite send their children preferred to employ first language teachers of English either from the United Kingdom or the United States to teach in their schools. English first language speakers from these countries are symbols of the power of those countries.

During colonisation of countries in Africa, Asia and South America the Other, the subjugated oppressed colonised peoples internalised racist discourses and started to see themselves in the stigmatised light their oppressors saw them. Bourdieu (1991) also asserts that in order for one mode of expression or language among others to impose itself as the only legitimate one, the linguistic market has to be unified and the different class or regional languages or 'dialects' have to be measured practically against the legitimate language. This implies that important linguistic markets such as education, administration or government have to be unified in promoting the dominant language. This was exactly the case in colonial times where in the important linguistic markets only the colonial languages were promoted, and the languages of the colonised peoples were stigmatized as dialects, vernaculars, and patois.

The colonised peoples accepted their stigmatised position and in order to better their lot began to strive to be like the norm, i.e. the Self. In many African countries, especially in so-called French and Portuguese Africa, there were many Africans who gained the coveted status of 'assimilado' by learning the language and culture of their colonial oppressors. Gaining this status literally meant one had joined the oppressors/masters through gaining the citizenship of the colonial power (Adegbija, 1994). The British policy tended to be subtler than the assimilation policies of the French and Portuguese, in that even though competence in English did give Africans in the colonies power and influence among their own people they were never really trained to identify with and to behave like their British masters. Nevertheless those in the British colonies who strived hard to learn the English language and culture gained prominence in the eyes of their fellow Africans because of having learned the language of power and gaining employment in the colonial administrative system as clerks and teachers in the primary schools (Adegbija, 1994). This is the background of why former colonial languages, such as English in Botswana, have continued to be regarded as languages of power and hence the emphasis on their teaching, and local languages not regarded as that important and hence their neglect in education.

Linguicism

Linguicism is defined as ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, regulate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (Phillipson 1992 & Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). In Botswana linguicism, operates at two different levels. First it operates at the level where English is used as the official language and language of education while local languages are seen as vernaculars, dialects or patois. While English is the language of power used by the ruling elite, the local A team (who are linked to the A team in the developed countries) and the Centre of the Periphery and those holding prestigious jobs in the Civil Service and the Private Sector or are entrepreneurs, the local languages are

used by the Periphery of the Periphery constituting the urban working class and rural folk who do not have much access to power and material resources.

Secondly, linguisticism operates with regard to the relationship between Setswana, the language of the largest ethnic group, which plays the role of national language and the other local languages that are excluded and not even recognised as languages by the government. The very same discourses that were used by western imperialist powers to discredit and stigmatise African languages are used by the local A team or the local Centre in the Periphery that is in Botswana. A hierarchical opposition between Self, Us (speakers of a language, Setswana; therefore worthy of a nation-state of our own called Botswana) and Other, Them (speakers of dialects, vernaculars or patois, such as Ikalanga, Shekgalagari, Sesubiya, Sebirwa and others; therefore to be subsumed under a nation-state) has been created. All the other local languages are regarded as dialects or patois and only Setswana is regarded as a language worthy of recognition and support by the government. Therefore, Setswana speakers are regarded as a nation, and speakers of other local languages as tribes. It should be noted that there is a grading of languages in Botswana as far as their functions are concerned. English is given first priority in that it occupies important linguistic markets such as education, administration and government; Setswana is given the second priority as the national language and local lingua franca; and other local languages are given the least priority and do not occupy any important linguistic markets.

It should be noted that the support given by the A team or the local Centre to the development of the national language, Setswana, is only a token one. This is indicated by the fact that the ruling elite has firmly refused to expand the use of Setswana to more domains, such as the Public Service, Government, Judiciary and Education. This is not unique to Botswana, as Myers-Scotton (1990) has observed that in most sub-Saharan Africa a local elite (the local A team) has taken over political power from the former colonial ruling elite and they continue to use the same tools to exclude the poor majority from the corridors of power, including language. Pennycook (1994) also argues, in relation specifically to the hegemony of English in education, that in many educational systems around the world, language has become the power tool of inclusion into or exclusion from further education, employment, or social positions. In many former British colonies, he further contends, particularly in Africa, small English-speaking elites have continued the policies of the former colonial elite, using access to English language education as a crucial distributor of social power, prestige and wealth. So English is used by the ruling elite to exclude the majority of the people in Botswana, who are not competent in English, from participating fully in the economic and social affairs of the country. One of the aims of BGCSE English syllabus, which is to prepare students “for their personal, social and economic future so that they can make a full contribution to a democratic society” (Education, 2000), p. ii), lend support to this view, since it implies that one needs to know English in order to make full contribution in society.

Batibo (2005) has identified 28 languages that are spoken in Botswana and has categorized them into four groups according to their status and prestige in the country. The first group consists of the ex-colonial language with the highest prestige and status, the second of the nationally dominant language which is second in status, the third of a really or regionally dominant languages, and the fourth one of the minority languages. In the Botswana language situation English has the undisputed supremacy as the sole official language and would therefore give advantage to those who happen to be proficient in it when it comes to participation in the public, economic and political life of the country.

Even in South Africa, where there is a multilingual policy, giving official status to nine African languages alongside English and Afrikaans, the elite seem to have found a way around that policy and use English to exclude the overwhelming majority from participating fully in the affairs of the country. For example, Phaswana (2003) found that in spite of the multilingual policy, of the speeches given by Members of Parliament (MP), the majority of whom represent speakers of the nine African official languages, 80-90 per cent were delivered in English, 10 per cent in Afrikaans and the balance in African languages. Phaswana interviewed the MPs to find out why they were ignoring the language policy. Some MPs said that the language policy was just an ideal that does not work in practice. One of the MP is reported to have also said that a speaker of any African language is perceived as uneducated and uncivilised whereas speakers of English are perceived to be well informed and better educated. He is also reported to have said that people do not feel honoured when using their African languages. He is further

reported to have said that because of colonisation Black South Africans see themselves as inferior to their white counterparts.

Kamwangamalu (1997) reporting the experiences of black students and teachers in South Africa quoted one student saying:

“In my school, if you know English, you are everything. We identify education with English. Once you see a person reading Zulu, you think that person is not educated” (p. 243).

The above comment reveals the tendency by many former colonised people of equating proficiency in an ex-colonial language, such as English, with being educated. As discussed earlier on these kinds of attitudes towards African languages by the Africans themselves and also towards themselves as people were internalised through imperialist, racist and linguists discourses. The ‘whites’ and their languages were seen as the glorified Self while the ‘blacks’ and their languages were seen as the stigmatised other. The language of the ‘whites’ English, was the glorified Self, giving power and education (in fact in the eyes of most Africans in sub-Saharan former British colonies English is synonymous with education because it has always been the language of education since the introduction of western education) while the African languages were the stigmatised Other, regarded as deficient (vernaculars, dialects and patois only used for cultural purposes).

Other revealing comments were to the effect that if one does not know English, no amount of formal education helps because white people think education is not education unless it has taught a person English. In the Transkei, one of the former Bantustans (so called black homeland meant for the Xhosa speaking Africans in former apartheid South Africa) where mother tongue education used to be followed from year one up to year eight of school, Kamwangamalu (1997) reports that employers complained that when graduates of matric (year 12) came to them looking for employment, it seemed as if they were not telling the truth when they said they had passed matric, because they could not speak English. This shows that in South Africa education is associated with a good proficiency in English by most ordinary black and white people. These attitudes are not unique to South Africa, but are found throughout sub-Saharan Africa. They explain why after so many years of independence sub-Saharan African countries still have former colonial languages such as English or French as their official languages instead of an African language. It will only take what (Ngugi, 1987) calls the decolonisation of the minds of the African people for things to change.

In Botswana, the same attitude of denigrating African languages and glorifying English, the former colonial language prevails. In fact most of the ruling elite do not send their children to public schools, where they would have to be taught in Setswana, the national language, for the first two years of school. They instead send their children to private English medium schools where they are taught in English from the first year of school. The environment in private primary and secondary schools is very different from what it is in public primary and secondary schools. The medium of instruction and communication in the private schools is strictly English and many the teachers in these schools are mostly first language speakers of English. On the other hand the medium of instruction in public schools from year one to two is Setswana, and from year three to the last year of secondary school is English. However for most of the times the medium of communication in all the years in primary schools is Setswana (Arthur, 1994). At secondary school, while the medium of communication between students and teachers is mostly in English, most communication among the students themselves is mostly in Setswana. The ruling elite doesn’t seem to think that the learning environment in public schools is good enough because of its policy of mother tongue education up to standard two (grade two), hence they send their own children to private English medium schools.

In Botswana, Arthur (1994) studied classroom interaction in standard 6 (grade 6). Before 1994 the medium of instruction was Setswana up to standard four. The second year after the introduction of English as the medium of instruction found that teachers also used outmoded teaching methods that included the same rhythmic chorusing prompts and responses. The studies of Chick (1996) in South Africa, Brock-Utne (2005) and Bunyi (2005) in Kenya, and Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir (2004) in Tanzania, maintains that the limited roles played by English at societal level in the country were

paralleled in the classroom by a limited functional range in which English is only used for instructional purposes. English is only used for the delivery of the lesson which were heavily teacher-centred and not for ordinary communication in the classroom. She asserts that the consequences of the limited range of English use in the society are reflected in an instructional style in which formulaic memorisation plays a central part. Arthur (1994) concludes that the policy of English medium from standard six (usually standard five) is a handicap to teachers and pupils in their pursuit of meaningful learning.

Mokibelo and Moumakwa (2006) and Mokibelo (2010), conducted studies among both primary and secondary Khoe learners from Motehegaletau, a remote village in Botswana, and found that the language of instruction, English, was a barrier to learners' acquisition of reading skills. However, it is interesting to note that primary school teachers actually support English medium education despite the fact that many of them find it a challenge to teach in it. Arthur (1997) reports the findings of a survey with Botswana primary teachers in which they were found to support English medium on account of both its symbolic role as the language of educational achievement and its practical role in the national examination system.

The teacher' attitudes towards English medium education reflect the sociolinguistic status of English in Botswana, in which it is considered a marker of social mobility and a language of power. The present English medium education policy is also informed by it. This was clearly demonstrated when a Presidential Commission on Education consulted with people around the country on educational policy between 1992 and 1994. One of the public's popular demands was that public primary schools be turned into full English medium schools like private schools. Though not fully embracing this demand the government changed the policy and brought forward the introduction of English as a medium of instruction from standard 5 to standard 2 (Government of Botswana, 1997).

While it is true the practice of English medium education in the last three years of primary school is a problem, especially in the rural areas where exposure to English beside the classroom is minimum, the main handicap is not necessarily the policy but the instructional styles of the teachers, which might be due to the poor qualifications and training of the teachers. In the private primary schools where the teachers are well trained, though English medium education begins at standard one, the pupils cope with it. In Botswana primary schools there are still many teachers (17.3% according to Ministry of Education 1994 Education statistics) who are untrained (National Development Plan, Government of Botswana, 1997). There are also significant number of teachers whose highest academic qualification is only the primary school leaving certificate and a two year Teachers Certificate (Government of Botswana, 1997). The highest academic qualification of the majority of primary school teachers is only form three (year 10) with PTC as their highest professional qualification. Such teachers' English competence is likely to be inadequate.

However, in the secondary school system teachers' educational level and professional qualifications are much higher than those of their primary counterparts. At junior secondary level the lowest academic qualification is form five (year twelve) and the lowest professional qualification is a three year teachers' diploma after form five. There are also many teachers at junior secondary school who hold bachelors degrees plus post graduate certificates and/or diplomas in education (Government of Botswana, 2003). At senior secondary level the lowest academic qualification is a bachelor's degree and almost all the teachers also have post graduate certificates or diplomas in education. Many senior secondary school teachers also have master's degrees in education (Government of Botswana, 2003).

It should be noted that the official policy indicates that English medium education begins at grade two in primary school (Government of Botswana, 1997). However in practice anecdotal evidence indicate that teachers continue to follow the old policy of English medium education from grade five onwards because it is more realistic than the present one. In view of the above there is no compelling reason for a major change of the present practice of four years of mother tongue education. This practice should be recognized by making the policy of mother tongue education five years instead of the current two. Mother tongue education should not be just limited to Setswana speakers but be extended to speakers of other local languages in Botswana. This will give the pupils a little more time to acquire more English from their ESL class before they switch to English medium education. After that through five years of being taught English both as a subject and a medium of instruction as part of nine years of free basic education should extend English proficiency to as many people as possible in Botswana so that, with

time, it stops being used by the elite as the power tool of inclusion into or exclusion from further education, employment, or social positions.

There are compelling reasons why English medium education should be maintained in Botswana. It should be noted that English medium education has a number of advantages in third world countries. First English opens up vast amounts of knowledge written in the English language. (Crystal, 1997): 220) referring to the status of English as a global language asserts that “access to the emerging global language-widely perceived as a language of opportunity-needs to be guaranteed.” It is important to note that this goal is close to being realised in Botswana in the sense that access to education (and to English because it is taught as a subject from standard one to form five and as a medium of education from standard five onwards) is almost 100% and free from standard one (grade one) to form three (year 10).

The less than 10% who still do not go to school do not do so due to economic reasons but linguistic and cultural as research by Mokibelo and Moumakwa (2006) and Mokibelo (2010) found out. Once mother education is introduced in the first five years of school, this group would cease to exist. For instance, some children of hunter/gatherer communities do not go to school due to the fact that they do not understand the medium of instruction in class and also due their mobile life styles. In Botswana by form three (year ten), which is ten years of learning English, a learner is able to communicate in English. This is important because in Botswana since 1994, unlike in the rest of Africa access to English is extended to every child, not just to the children of the ruling elite (Government of Botswana, 1997).

Pakir (1999)) describes the importance of English as a global language in the following terms:

English is a global vehicle that refuels at every stop, creates economic and other opportunities, and returns to its home bases, each time upping the financial ante for English users. English has become a global commodity that seems to have no sell-by date attached to it (p. 104).

Pakir (1999) further contends that the fact that English is the main language of the Internet has globalised it even more. She perceptively argues that small countries like Singapore and Brunei have little choice, but to connect or plug into the international grid of business and finance. Botswana is in the same position as these small countries, and at the moment the country is in the process of establishing itself as an International Financial Service Centre (IFSC) in Southern Africa (Government of Botswana, 1997). This project could not be easily accomplished without the use of English as the medium of communication in business in Botswana. The country with its small population of about two million is too small to be inward looking when it comes to the language of education and wider communication. English is therefore, the best choice considering its status as a global language, and it serves the country well by connecting it to the rest of Africa and the rest of the world.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Existing research suggests that mother tongue-based bilingual education programs benefit children’s language skills and overall academic achievement, along with their self-confidence and cultural pride. Mother tongue-based bi/multilingual programs enable learners to begin their education in the language they know best. Later, a lingua franca and an international language can be introduced as subjects of study and eventually as additional media of instruction.

However, research shows that in Botswana and most sub-Saharan Africa mother tongue education is confined to the first two years of education. After that education in a former colonial language is introduced before pupils develop cognitive-academic language proficiency in their mother tongue. This may disadvantage them as they may never have an opportunity to develop higher abstract thinking in any language.

With regard to Botswana both the hegemony of English and linguisticism has led to a situation where children from indigenous/minority groups are confronted with two strange languages (Setswana and English) on their first day at school. This has led to some children from indigenous/minority groups dropping from school. In the light of this a policy that combines both mother tongue education at lower and mid primary levels and English medium education from upper primary upwards would be the wiser

choice considering the status of English as a global language, which would serve the country well by connecting it to the rest of Africa and the rest of the world.

The best policy at this stage is for the government to recognise that Botswana is a multilingual country and to commit itself to the development and using all its local languages as mediums of instruction for pupils who speak them as their mother tongues in the first five years of school and also offering all its local languages as optional subjects in the schools. In other words a new language policy is needed that promotes mother tongue education and considers the multilingual nature of the country as a positive feature and not as a problematic situation. The policy should consider the various languages of the country as resources to be exploited for the benefit of the country as a whole and not as sources of problems, as seems to be the case now.

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