An Exploration of Multilingualism and Zimbabwean Language Policy as an Impact to Child’s Holistic Development

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ABSTRACT

The language policy of Zimbabwe observes all 16 languages as official. However, it is a contradiction of what the Zimbabwean market dictates. The job market dictates that the English language should be passed to either access the higher institution of learning, the higher secondary education and the job market. The move by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education to promote the learning of science, technology, mathematics and engineering (STEM) as paradigm shift is also elevating the English language as the only language to explicate reality in science and the business fraternity. The learning of indigenous languages currently is of no benefit to an individual yet language competence in the second language is guaranteed by a proper bilingualism initiation at the proper linguistic level of the child. This article analyses English language performance at “0” and the University level to uncover if multilingualism is a resource or problem in Zimbabwe. The study observes both the “0” level and first year university student competence through essay writing.

KEYWORDS

Bilingualism, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Language Acquisition, Language Competence, Technology

INTRODUCTION

This research describes the language situation in Zimbabwe, highlighting the consequences of a limited in scope of the present-day language policy in the key sectors of education, curriculum innovation-development and subsequent economic segmentation. The current language policy is blamed for a lack ok initiation and home-grown solutions to the economic crisis the country currently suffers from. According to Makanda (2006) in post-colonial Zimbabwe, the near absence of a coherent language

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policy framework encourages the perpetuation of the under-development of African indigenous languages. Such perspectives support debates suggesting a paradigm shift in terms of curriculum especially at higher learning. In line with this thinking, the current research observes the failure in the socio-economic development as a failure in policy formulation especially in terms of fully participation of all ethnic group in nation building hampered by a linguistic selection of the code to use in the articulation of socio-economic issues. The discussion further observes that patterns of language use in Zimbabwe are characterized by diglossia and code switching, with the nominal national languages, Shona and Ndebele and the other fourteen indigenous languages continuing to be vernacularized and enjoying low status and prestige. At the same time English remains firmly entrenched as the official language that is used in all the important domains (Chimhundu 2006). In support of the fore going discussion, Chimhundu further articulates that, the marginalization of the indigenous languages is even greater for the fourteen minority languages, which have been neglected for a long time and the current language situation has seen them theoretically being elevated from minority status to indigenous language which has seen the current language situation somewhat peculiar.

This argument further insists that, Education language policy refers to language(s) recognized by education authorities for use as medium of instruction at various stages of public and private education. The choice of what language to use in education is a sensitive and problematic one in any multilingual country (Fasold, 1997). An effective education language policy has to consider the political, pedagogical, economic, socio-cultural, sociolinguistic and theoretical determinants as well as the historical background of a country. The six determinants are very difficult to meet at once because they have different expectations which would make it impossible for policy makers to come up with an all-embracing policy or proposal. However, when making an education language policy there is need to keep these variables in mind and try to give them reasonable weighting so that the policy would be generally observed as a way to fully utilize the available resources abounding in the nation. Thus, a language policy in Zimbabwe cannot be seen as emanating from a rational policy planning model but more so from an arbitrary approach to policy planning. The planning phase has resulted in a policy which is not functional and discriminating in terms of both participation and contributing towards nation building.

The nation is limited in terms of participation due to the linguistic hindrance as has been observed. The children at early childhood join the school in terms of the expectation of the family. The aim for acquiring education according to Jongore (2014) is to enhance one’s social standing and be marketable. The Diaglosic situation in Zimbabwe sees very few parents encouraging their children to be competent in their first language but rather learn English at a very early age. It is mandatory for one to have passed English to enter the job market or better still gain access to higher education. Jongore (2014) observes that there are basically no immediate incentives that come with proficient in the indigenous languages. It is however an established fact
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