

The evaluation of Malawi's language-in-education policy from 1968 to the present

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Introduction

This paper is divided into four major sections. The first section presents a general background of language-in-education policy and planning in Malawi and reviews related literature to provide a background against which Malawi's language-in-education policy should be evaluated. The second section discusses the methodology on how sampling, data collection and data analysis were done. It then presents and discusses the main findings in relation to the set objectives and the related literature and finally concludes by making some recommendations based on the study's major findings. The paper argues that for Malawi's language-in-education policies to be successfully implemented, there is need for the involvement of various stakeholders in the policy formulation and implementation process with the aim of making such policies responsive to the needs of learners and the entire nation; that proper teacher training and deployment policies be established; that proper teaching and learning materials be developed and distributed; and that proper policy monitoring strategies be put in place to find out whether the policy is achieving the intended goals or requires to be modified or to be completely overhauled.

Background and literature review

Background

At independence in 1964, Malawi inherited a language-in-education policy in which Chichewa (then called Chinyanja), Chitumbuka and English were recognized as media of instruction (Vail and White 1989). However, this policy was changed in 1968 when the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) at its annual

convention declared that English and Chichewa be the official languages of Malawi and that Chichewa double as the national language while all the other local languages continue to be used in private in areas where they are spoken (MCP Annual Convention Resolutions, 1965-1985:6). This translated into a language-in-education policy that saw the introduction of Chichewa as a medium of instruction in Standards 1 to 4 of the country's primary education system and as a subject of study throughout Malawi's entire education system in the 1969/70 academic calendar. English became the medium of instruction from Standard 5 into university education and was made a compulsory subject of study throughout the education system (Kayambazinthu 1998; Kishindo 1998; Mtenje 2002). In March 1996, government reversed this policy by decreeing that local languages or mother tongues be used as media of instruction in schools located in areas where particular language are spoken (MoE Circular Ref. No. IN/2/14). English retained its status as a compulsory subject of study and as medium of instruction from Standard 5 while Chichewa remained as medium of instruction in Standards 1 to 4 in areas where it was spoken and as a subject of study. A follow-up press release by MoE in July the same year sought to clarify issues. Among other things it explained the intention of the policy, which was to give teachers an opportunity to use languages that are commonly spoken in the area where schools are located; that all pupils in the targeted areas would learn in a language commonly spoken in the area regardless of where they came from (and therefore, regardless of the language that they spoke or understood); and that the policy would not in anyway affect the posting of teachers as they would not be posted based on the languages that they spoke (Kishindo 1998:271).

The 1996 policy was instituted on the basis that children learn faster through mother tongue than through an unfamiliar language; that use of mother tongue as medium of instruction enhances concept formation, especially in science subjects as it has a psychological reality in the child's mind; and that it eases communication between the teacher and the learners and provides the latter with relevant learning experiences in socio-cultural awareness (MoE 1999:5). It has to be pointed out from the outset that although the 1996 language-in-education policy has attracted a lot of debate, Parliament is yet to ratify it. This might explain the Ministry of Education's inability to act accordingly.

The study, on which this paper is based, was conducted to evaluate Malawi's language-in-education policy practices to find out whether such a policy is known by those who are supposed to implement it, the teachers and also to find

out how the policy is being implemented in schools. Specifically the study sought to find out the following:

- Whether or not teachers, head teachers and district education managers (DEMs) and other MoE officials were knowledgeable of language-in-education policy in Malawi
- The goals of language-in-education planning in Malawi
- How policies were being implemented
- The actual language practices taking place in classroom
- The impact of policy on pupils

Literature review

This section reviews related literature to enable us see what other scholars and researchers have said about the language-in-education policy evaluation process in general and the language-in-education policy in Malawi, and therefore, assist us in contextualising our study within the literature that will be reviewed. Bamgbose (1999:19) observes that although policy making is a component of language planning, it is also important that policy formulation be accompanied by, among other things, constant evaluation and reassessment. Rubin (1983:338 as cited in Kaplan and Baldauf 1997:90) is also convinced that constant evaluation and revision of a plan during the implementation phase of the language planning process is a characteristic of good rational planning although in practice such evaluation is rarely done. Kaplan and Baldauf (1997:92) similarly believe that the evaluation of any language policy should take place at every stage of the planning process in order to find out whether a policy is being successfully implemented. In addition, they observe that such evaluation provides constant feedback for the implementation strategy so that it can be corrected in the wake of information flowing from the evaluation phase (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997:38).

Similar observations are made by Kamwendo (1997:212) who points out that policy evaluation is central to good language planning. Kamwendo (1997) views periodic evaluation of language policy as something that cannot simply be done away with if progress is to be achieved. Lo Bianco (1991 as cited in Kamwendo 2000:5,6) outlines a number of features of a good language policy. Lo Bianco (1991) believes that a good language policy must be defended with evidence from research; must be realistic by taking into consideration the availability of resources; must be humanitarian, democratic and just; and must

adequately address national interest without actually compromising the linguistic needs of the various social or linguistic groups in a country.

In a paper titled 'The Evaluation of Language Planning in Education,' Noss (1985) asks important questions that should guide the evaluation of any language-in-education policy evaluation programme. According to Noss (1985:86), any language-in-education policy evaluation programme should set out to find whether the content of a given language programme is relevant to the needs of the learners; whether given the available resources and constraints, a given language programme is teachable and manageable; whether the content of a given language programme is learnable given the nature of the existing school population that is to be served; and whether a given language programme motivates pupils to learn effectively and teachers to teach and manage effectively within their capabilities given the attitudes of the various stakeholders concerned with and affected by the policy. The observations made by various scholars reviewed in this subsection emphasize the importance of evaluating our language-in-education policies and also guide us on how to go about the exercise of evaluating Malawi's policies.

Our literature review revealed that much of the studies, reviews and comments on Malawi's language-in-education policy began to appear after the 1996 declaration by government that mother tongues be used as media of instruction. These studies, reviews and comments range from sociolinguistic surveys, scholarly papers presented at language symposia organized by University of Malawi's Centre for Language Studies (CLS), to articles in scholarly journals.

In his discussion of the 1968 language policy, Mvula (1992) gives the impression that the policy was accepted without any reservations by all Malawians. He contends that by the time the MCP convention of 1968 recognized Chinyanja (which after the convention was changed to Chichewa) as a national language, the language had already attained the status of a lingua franca in the central and southern regions of Malawi (Mvula 1992:43). This to him signified that the policy could be implemented without creating enormous financial constraints on government budget and also that its implementation provided a framework for national identity as it narrowed ethnic differences among Malawians. However, Mvula's claims have been disputed by other scholars such as Moto (1999) and Moyo (2001). Also other findings from studies dispute the claim that the 1968 policy was accepted wholesomely. For example, Nyirenda (1994) found that while teachers favoured the use of

Chichewa for instructional purposes, tutors in Malawi's teacher training colleges were not in support of the idea as they felt that the language did not have sufficient vocabulary for expressing mathematical concepts and that the use of Chichewa was unnecessary because pupils would eventually unlearn the Chichewa terms when they moved to senior classes where English was the medium of instruction. Nyirenda's study sought to evaluate the implementation of national curriculum changes in mathematics and science in Malawi with reference to parallel changes in England and Wales.

In the case of the 1996 policy, the literature review revealed that when the policy was announced, it met public hostility. In his opening address at a national language symposium organized by CLS in 1999, the minister of Education then alluded to this fact (See Mpinganjira, 1999:6). Similar observations have also been made by Kishindo (1998), Moto (1999) and Mtenje (2002). However, such reports of negative perception of the new mother tongue medium of instruction policy contradict the findings of sociolinguistic surveys in the four Malawian languages of Chilomwe, Chisena, Chitumbuka and Chiyao conducted by CLS between 1996 and 1998. The surveys established that there was a general acceptance on the use of the four languages as media of instruction in the respective areas where they were spoken; that there was a general acceptance of Chichewa as national lingua franca; and that there was a general awareness of the problems associated with the introduction of the four languages as media of instruction (CLS 1999:82). The study by CLS was conducted just after the new policy was instituted although it was not an evaluation. However, it was in the interest of our study to find out how the recommendations made by CLS have been taken on board to inform implementation strategies to do with teacher training, and the development and distribution of teaching and learning materials.

In 1997 Mwalwenje, Phiri and Kadyoma conducted a follow-up study on the implementation of four educational policies, among which was the 1996 language-in-education policy. One of the objectives of the study was to find out whether the policies were being effectively communicated and implemented. Findings from the study revealed that of the four policies, the language-in-education policy was the least known (Mwalwenje, Phiri and Kadyoma 1998:11). Although the purpose of the study by the trio might seem to have been similar to the purpose of our study, its scope was different in that it sought to establish whether the policy had any impact in improving girl children's

access to education. Besides, it can be contended that the study was conducted between June and October 1997, only a year and a few months after the policy had been declared. One would, therefore, argue that the period was rather too short to gauge the impact that such a policy would have made, let alone if it was being successfully implemented. However, the findings from the study were equally important for our study as they assisted us in evaluating the policy almost a decade after it was declared.

Most of the studies and comments on Malawi's language-in-education policy have largely focused on the implementation aspect. Scholars have commented on the need for relevant pre-service and in-service training for teachers and the development and distribution of relevant teaching and learning materials.

Chilora and Harris (2000:194) acknowledge the fact that the 1968 policy made some impact on the Malawian education system. They attribute this to the fact that programmes for training teachers on the use of Chichewa as medium of instruction were developed and implemented, that attempts were made to standardize the Chichewa language, and that pupils' textbooks were also written in the language and widely distributed. However, they observe that in areas where Chichewa was not the local language, teachers often gave instruction in a local language that they were familiar with except when district education inspectors were visiting them. On the other hand, Chilora and Harris (2000) observe that the 1996 policy faced problems related to its implementation. Chilora and Harris (2000) established that in areas where Chichewa was not the local language, pupils in Standards 1 to 4 were learning some subjects in multiple languages due to the fact that while pupils' textbooks were in Chichewa, their teachers developed lessons in English and delivered content in the local language spoken in the area where the school was located.

Thodi (2000) makes similar observations. Thodi (2000) examines some problems associated with using teaching materials developed in English for teaching in Chichewa, and the challenges that exist when trying to develop teaching and learning materials in the mother tongue. He observes that teachers who have not received any formal training face difficulties in transferring knowledge or skills from English to Chichewa (or any other language) concerning the background information and suggested activities (Thodi, 2000:179). According to Thodi (2000), this problem gets compounded when the teacher's knowledge of Chichewa is limited. His observations are based on the fact that although the 1996 policy required teachers to teach using mother

tongues in subjects other than Chichewa and English, teachers' guides and pupils' textbooks were still in English and Chichewa respectively. Thodi (2000), therefore, recommends that teachers be trained on how to use mother tongues as media of instruction; that appropriate teaching and learning materials be developed in these languages, among others. Our study sought to find out whether these aspects of implementation have been addressed.

Studies from elsewhere also seem to indicate that while mother tongue medium of instruction policies may be declared, lack of implementation strategies often seems to be the obstacle to the realization of the goals that such policies were supposed to achieve. Kamwangamalu (2001) discusses how a new language – in-education policy for post-apartheid South Africa that aimed at promoting additive multilingualism through the use of more than one language of learning and teaching has made very little progress because of the negative perception attached to the new African languages that have been incorporated into South Africa's new official language policy that recognizes 11 official languages.

Although Tanzania is often regarded as a shining example of an African country that has carefully and successfully implemented a language policy that requires the use of an African language as medium of instruction, the process of transforming Swahili into a medium of instruction was itself riddled with challenges such as lack of vocabulary for technical terms that were previously in English, shortage of textbooks and supplementary reading materials, the use of a new language of instruction to teach an old curriculum whose materials were still in English, and change of language of instruction without restructuring the education system so that it should reflect new realities (Institute of Educational Planning 1997:42-45).

Other scholars that have commented on language practices in classroom situations in Malawi include Case (1968) and Kishindo and Kazima (2000). In her preliminary survey of problems that Malawian teachers teaching in English to pupils whose mother tongues were Bantu languages encountered, Case (1968) found that direct translation of concepts from mother tongues to English resulted into grammatical as well as conceptual errors. Kishindo and Kazima (2000:113) also observed that lack of coordination in the development of Chichewa terminology, especially for science subjects has led to indiscriminate borrowing by both teachers and publishers of terms that do not have a formal or conceptual motivation in Chichewa. In extreme cases, this lack of appropriate

terminology has led to outright “Chewanization” of mathematical terms. Kishindo (1998:277) attributes the lack of Chichewa terminology to the fact that although Chichewa has been used as medium of instruction for so long, the 1968 policy favoured English more than Chichewa, which resulted into stagnated planning for the latter. Our study sought to find out how teachers teaching in local languages grappled with issues to do with lack of appropriate terminology and the existence of lexical gaps in these languages, and how these impacted on lesson delivery and comprehension by teachers and pupils respectively.

Scholars advocating the use of local languages as medium of instruction have often supported their stand with a number of reasons. UNESCO (1974) took the lead when at a symposium observed that the use of languages that pupils do not understand easily confuses them as they have to first of all struggle to learn the unfamiliar language before they begin to grasp the concepts that are being taught. It is within the UNESCO spirit that Mtenje (2002) dispels “myths” that have surrounded local languages and have been used to justify their exclusion from being used as media of instruction. Mtenje (2002) suggests that contrary to the negative perception attached to local languages, these languages when used as media of instruction impact positively on the learner. Studies by CLS (2000) and Kaphesi (2000) seem to support these observations. Centre for Language Studies (2000) established that the use of Chichewa as medium instruction among Chiyao-speaking pupils was the highest ranking school-related factor for drop-out, failure, and repetition because most pupils had problems in speaking and understanding the language as they mostly spoke Chiyao both at home and at school. Kaphesi (2000:104), on the converse, found that the use of Chichewa as medium of instruction as compared to the use of English led to pupils expressing themselves more when learning. Our study sought to find out how the use of local languages as media of instruction impacted on pupils.

Studies reviewed in this section point to the need for the availability of teaching and learning materials that are in tandem with the existing policy, the provision of relevant teacher training programmes and also the need for a sound teacher deployment mechanism, among others, as precursors to the successful implementation of any language-in-education policy. Our study sought to evaluate how such issues have been taken into consideration by the relevant authorities, especially bearing in mind that the 1996 policy had been in place for close to a decade when our study was conducted.

Methodology

This section will discuss different methods and principles that have been used in the study. These will include sampling procedures used, data collection tools and techniques, and methods of data analysis.

Methodological approach

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection were used although the research was largely qualitative in nature. The qualitative method was used to collect data on the perspectives of pupils, teachers, head teachers, MoE officials and officers from the CLS on various issues related to language-in-education policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The quantitative method was used to illustrate certain impressions emerging from the data collected using the qualitative method.

Sampling techniques

The sample

Information was sought from different subjects in 8 different primary schools in Zomba, officials from MoE and CLS. The samples of the study were as follows:

The schools: A total of 8 primary schools in Zomba urban and rural were visited, namely; Bwaila (urban), Malemia (rural), Matandani (rural), Matiya (urban), Mkanda (rural), Mulunguzi (rural), Ndangopuma (urban), and Songani (rural).

Pupils: 24 pupils from each school were interviewed. 6 pupils from each targeted class i.e. standard 3, 4, 5, and 7 were interviewed. Pupils were involved in this study because they are the 'consumers' of the policy and may therefore assist in verifying whatever aspect of the policy.

Teachers and head teachers: Data was also collected from 4 teachers at each school, with two teachers from the lower section and the remaining two from the upper section of primary education. The assumption was that since these were directly involved in the implementation of the policy, they would be in a better position to offer valuable insights with regard to various aspects related to policy implementation. In addition, a total of 8 head teachers (1 per

school) were also interviewed. These were identified because it was assumed that they were directly involved in monitoring the policy implementation process and relaying of feedback to the Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education Officials: About four officials from the Ministry of Education were interviewed. These include the Director of Basic Education (DBE), Director of Planning (DP), District Education Manager (DEM) and Primary Education Advisor (PEA). The DBE and DP were targeted because they are directly linked with the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of the policy. The DEM and the PEA were targeted because their offices are responsible for policy dissemination, implementation and monitoring as well as relaying feedback to the ministry.

Centre for Language Studies officials: two officers from the Centre for Language Studies (CLS) were interviewed. The CLS was targeted because it is one of the key agents on the formulation, implementation, as well as evaluation of the policy.

Procedure

Purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used in order to obtain a sample.

The schools: The number of schools was arrived at bearing in mind time, distance and resource constraints. The schools were selected on the basis of their location as urban and rural. The hypothesis was that classroom language practices would be different between schools located in Zomba urban and those in Zomba rural because of the possibility that classes in schools located in the former would be relatively more linguistically diverse than those in the latter.

The pupils: The number of pupils took into consideration issues of time and resource constraints such as paper. Standards 3 and 4 were chosen on the basis that they belong to the lower section of the primary school, which is the target of the current school language policy on the use of mother tongues as media of instruction. It was also felt that pupils from these classes would express themselves relatively well than those in the infant section (i.e. Standards 1 and 2). Standard 5 was identified because it is a transitional class from the section where mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction to one where English is the medium of instruction. Standard 7 was identified because it is a class that is close to the end of primary education at the end of which pupils are expected

to sit for national examinations that are tested in the English language except for the exam in Chichewa subject.

The teachers and the head teachers: the number of the teachers was arrived at because the assumption was that there is at least one teacher per class. The number of head teachers corresponds with the number of schools visited.

Research techniques

In this study a combination of research techniques were used to collect data, namely: the survey and key informant interviews.

Tools for data collection

The survey: A questionnaire was used. It was self-administered to pupils by the researcher. The researcher asked questions and recorded on the questionnaire the pupils' responses and the pupils had to answer to questions orally. The questionnaire sought to find out, among other things, the pupils' demographic information (specifically age, tribe, first language, second language, years of stay in the area, class of study etc.), the effect of the medium of instruction on the learning process, the pupils' language preferences, the problems that arose due to the medium of instruction used in class, and how such problems were solved.

Key informant interviews: An interview guide was used as a research instrument for this technique. Teachers, head teachers, the DEM, the PEA, the DBE, the DP, and the officers from the CLS were asked questions by the researcher and their responses written down. Teachers in the lower primary school section were asked questions pertaining to their knowledge of the policy, whether they received any training on teaching in mother tongue, the linguistic composition of their classes and how it influenced their choice for a language to be used as the medium of instruction, the impact that the language of instruction had on their lesson delivery and pupil performance, whether they experienced any problems as a result of this policy and how they solved them, and how they rated the importance of mother tongue medium of instruction, among others. Similar questions were also put to teachers from the senior section. In addition, they were also asked to explain how they helped pupils manage the transition from mother tongue medium of instruction classes in the lower section to English medium of instruction classes in the senior section, the impact that the change in terms of medium of instruction had on pupils'

instruction had on pupils' performance in various subjects, and whether there were any problems on their part due to this change and how they solved such problems.

The head teachers were asked to explain some of the problems (if any) that teachers brought to them in the course of implementing the policy and how they were assisted, to explain the criteria that they used in allocating teachers to either the lower section or upper section, how they felt about their role in the implementation of the policy, and how often they supervised their teachers to ensure that they were putting the policy into practice, among other things.

MoE officials (the two directors, the DEM, and the PEA) were asked to explain why they brought the 1996 policy, the processes that they followed in order to come up with the policy, the measures they had put in place to ensure that the policy succeeded, especially on issues relating to teacher training and deployment, development of teaching and learning materials, monitoring and evaluation, just to mention a few.

Officers from CLS were asked to explain some of strategies they adopted in trying to promote language in education policies, especially the 1996 policy, and whether the strategies were achieving the intended results. They were also asked to explain the principles that guide their institution on issues relating to language-in-education policy planning, to describe the level of collaboration that exists between the Centre and various stakeholders, more especially MoE and the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) on issues relating to policy formulation and implementation, and also to explain on the feasibility of the 1996 policy in Malawi. All respondents were also asked to make recommendations on issues concerning teacher training and deployment, development and distribution of teaching and learning materials, the process of choosing the language(s) to be used as medium of instruction, and policy implementation monitoring that the researcher felt are necessary ingredients to any successful policy implementation.

Data processing procedures

The data collected from pupils, teachers and head teachers was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The data generated consisted of frequency distribution because of the nature of the questionnaires and the size of the sample. Cross-tabulations were also used, especially, for the data from pupils, to examine pupils' language preferences. The qualitative data

collected from CLS and MoE officials was simply summarized due to the size of the sample, the nature of the questionnaire, and the data collected.

Results and discussion

This section presents an analysis and discussion of the results in relation to the objectives of the study. The interpretation of the data was also tied to the literature reviewed within the theoretical framework of ecological language planning.

Knowledge of language-in-education policies

The study sought to find out whether or not teachers know the current language-in-education policy. Respondents were asked to state what they understood about the policy, how they got the information about the policy and whether they had received any orientation on what the policy is all about. This was done in line with Noss' (1985) observation that policy evaluation should, among other things, aim at finding out '...whether a given language programme motivates ... teachers to teach and manage effectively within their capabilities given the attitudes of the various stakeholders concerned with and affected by the policy....'

Teachers' knowledge about the policy

When teachers were asked to state whether they were aware of the 1996 language-in-education policy or not, it was encouraging to note that, out of all the teachers involved in the study, 90.6% indicated that they were aware of the policy.

On where they got the information about the policy, different sources were mentioned. A significant proportion of the teachers (37.5%) got the news about the policy from radio. These results are consistent with the findings by Mwalwenje *et al* (1998) who also found that up to 36% of the teachers got the information from the radio. Both relying on radio as well as having different sources of information regarding language in education policy has serious implications on the knowledge and understanding of the policy especially its content. The problem was compounded by the fact that orientation was not taken seriously in as far as this policy was concerned. Only 6.25% of the teachers interviewed said they had received some orientation whereas 93.75% said they had received none.

In a nutshell the results presented here show that the dissemination of information about the policy to teachers, who are supposed to implement it, was not properly and adequately done. This does not augur well for the policy's successful implementation.

Goals of language-in-education planning in Malawi

Apart from knowledge of the policy by teachers, this study also sought to find out the goals of language-in-education policy and planning. To do this, different stakeholders such as teachers, MoE officials and CLS officers were asked to state the goals of language-in-education policy and planning in Malawi.

Teachers' views on goals of language-in-education policy

When teachers were asked whether they knew the goals of language teaching in Malawi or not, 65.6% of the 32 teachers interviewed said they knew the goals of language teaching whereas 34.4% said they did not.

Perhaps an interesting question could be, are these goals being achieved? A clear cut answer may not be readily available but on the basis of our findings, one may be tempted to conclude that the goal of facilitating teaching and learning is being achieved. When the pupils were asked if they understood content taught in Chichewa, 97.7% said *yes* and 2.1% said *no*. On the issue of whether they had problems understanding books written in Chichewa 15.2% said *yes* and 84.8% said *no*. On performance, about 77.7% said the use of Chichewa had affected them positively and about 22.3% said it had no effect on them. The pupils attributed their performance to the fact that Chichewa is easy to understand. However, two points must be made clear. This study did not go beyond what the pupils said to verify whether indeed their performance was impressive. Secondly, even if their performance was any better, it would have been difficult to attribute such gains to the use of a familiar language because one may not be certain as to whether Chichewa was a language familiar to the pupils at the time they enrolled in the schools or the pupils developed the familiarity of the language through its use in the schools since the pupils that were involved in this study had been in school for three or more years.

When we look at these results it is apparent that not all players in the education system understand the goals of the policy fully.

Policy implementation

Bamgbose (1991) cited in Gadellii (1999:6) pointed out that policy making without implementation does not lead to much progress, whereas implementation without policy decision is difficult to achieve. With this in mind, this study sought to find out how the language-in-education policies in Malawi were actually being implemented. Respondents were asked to explain how the actual policy formulation process was done, whether teachers were trained or not and how they were deployed, and whether appropriate teaching and learning materials were developed. This was done because, according to the literature reviewed, one of the guiding principles of a policy evaluation program is to find out '...whether given the available resources and constraints, a given language programme is teachable and manageable...' (Noss, 1985). In addition, respondents were also asked to explain whether there is any monitoring and periodic evaluation of the policies.

Policy formulation

When four senior officers from MoE were asked to state the processes the Ministry had undertaken so as to come up with the policy, their responses were varied and are summarised as follows:

- 2 (50%) said they did not know
- 1 (25%) was not sure because currently the policy in use is the 1968 one
- 1 (25%) said no processes were required because the mother tongue policy was not a new policy

These results vindicate Bamgbose's (2000: 103) contention that in most African countries '...what we have are arbitrary decisions and decrees which apply with immediate effect' and that 'the incidence of arbitrary language policy decisions...imposes an entirely new paradigm on the process of language planning.' Indeed this is the case because when both the 1968 policy and the 1996 policy were announced, they had never been preceded by wider consultations let alone sociolinguistic surveys that would inform the adoption of such a policy. In both cases, language planning bodies came into existence after the policies had already been rolled out instead of the normal procedure. In the former case, the Chichewa Board came into existence in 1972, four years after the policy had been declared while in the latter, CLS came into operation on 1 April 1996 (Kayambazinthu, 1998:411) after the policy had already been proclaimed in March of the same year. In fact, according to CLS (1999: 7) the

first sociolinguistic survey to inform this policy was done on Ciyawo ‘between the 9th to 28th April, 1996.’

However, when respondents from CLS were asked to state principles that should guide language-in-education planning in Malawi, their responses were detailed and articulate. For instance, among others, they spelt out the following principles:

- linguistic make-up of the country
- proportion of speakers for each language
- the language needs of the learners and the nation based on empirical research findings

Despite such well-articulated principles Malawi’s language-in-education policy planning has for the past years militated against them. The fact that such principles do not inform Malawi’s language-in-education planning efforts may also be an indication of lack of collaboration between CLS and MoE. The study established that while some collaboration seems to exist between CLS and the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE),¹ there is little collaboration between CLS and MoE. This is an obstacle to the successful implementation of the policy as pointed out by Kamwendo (2000). The impression one gets from the study is that while CLS advises MoE on the language policy, the latter has not been keen to take such advice.

Teacher training and deployment

Mchazime (1999:47) argues that any policy must address issues to do with both teacher training and deployment for it to be successfully implemented. The literature reviewed reveals that when the 1968 policy was declared teachers were not trained on how to use Chichewa as the medium of instruction in Standards 1 up to 4 (See Chilora 2000:3; Mussa and Agabu 2000:175). Training of teachers began after the policy was already put in place. In addition, teachers were at first posted anywhere in Malawi without taking into consideration the region where the teacher came from. Chilora (2000) further observes that although teachers eventually started to be trained on how to teach in Chichewa, the truth of the matter was that the policy was in some areas being implemented by teachers who could not speak Chichewa fluently because it was not their vernacular language. Even for those teachers whose first language was Chichewa, this was not adequate enough because as Moyo (2001:132) observes speakership alone does not grant a teacher the necessary expertise to teach in

Chichewa, this was not adequate enough because as Moyo (2001:132) observes speakership alone does not grant a teacher the necessary expertise to teach in the language. In fact, Kaplan & Baldauf (1991: 130) emphasise that when the language policy has been drawn there is need to have 'a group of teachers trained in the pedagogy and reasonably fluent in the target language.'

This study has established that there was no training given to teachers on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. 13 (81%) of 16 teachers that were interviewed in the junior section said they did not receive any training. When officials from MoE were asked as to why there was no training of teachers with regard to the 1996 language in education policy, they responded differently as follows:

- One officer (25%) said that this was a directive and not a policy
- One officer (25%) said that teachers already speak the languages
- Two officers (50%) said that training requires huge sums of money

The impression one gets from the last two responses is that these officials seem to generally suggest that mother tongue instruction can still be implemented even without training teachers in the use of mother tongue contrary to Sibayan's (1999:42) comments on the Singapore experiences where similar assumptions led to the abandonment of the use of vernaculars in class.

Our study also established that the exercise is being done without taking into consideration the language that the teacher knows. All the MoE officials interviewed indicated there was no teacher deployment programme based on the 1996 policy. The reason given by one MoE official for this state of affairs was that a system was already in place whereby only teachers that are familiar with the language of the area where the school is located were the ones handling the lower primary section while the rest were allocated to teach in the upper classes. However, this study found that the actual practice contradicts the situation described by the official. Some schools visited such as Malemia and Songani were in Ciyawo speaking areas but it was established that very few teachers allocated to the junior section could speak Ciyawo fluently. This was regardless of the fact that 13 (about 41%) of all teachers interviewed indicated that they could communicate in Ciyawo. These results show that the claim by the MoE official is rather out of touch with what is happening on the ground.

While the Ministry officials played down the need for training in the use of mother tongue and a programme for teacher deployment all the teachers, head teachers and CLS officers that were interviewed indicated that there was need to have such kind programmes.

Development of teaching and learning materials

According to Mchazime (1996 as in Chilora 2000:3), although the 1968 language-in-education policy came into effect in the 1969/70 academic calendar, it was only in 1989 when government approved that all pupils' textbooks (except for those of the English subject) for Standards 1 up to 4 should be in Chichewa while all teachers' guides should be in English. The reason for leaving the teachers' guides in English was that the use of English in the guides would serve as a backup to teachers whose knowledge of Chichewa was weak (Chilora 2000).

Our study revealed that the situation with the 1996 policy is the same as described by Mchazime (1996) above. 94.8% of the pupils interviewed in standards 3 and 4 indicated that their textbooks for all the subjects excluding those for English Language were written in Chichewa. When MoE officials were asked what the Ministry was doing on material development in relation to the 1996 language in education policy they said that this was not necessary. What this suggests is that MoE is satisfied with the status quo. But all teachers interviewed in this study indicated that they faced some problems in translating content in the teacher's guides because some of the English terms did not have equivalents in Chichewa. If MoE were serious, the problem of terms could have been eased because this falls within the domain of CLS, an institution established by government to deal with such matters, among other things. Contrary to the thinking of MOE officials, there is need to develop materials in all the languages that would be used as media of instruction. This ensures that the languages are standardised and terminologies developed to avoid inconsistencies in the use of some terms, which may confuse pupils. In fact Thodi (2000) observed that most teachers fail to translate the content in an effective way, since most of them have not been trained on how they can translate the contents of the guides. This clearly shows that there are gaps in the implementation process because according to Noss (1985), implementation, among other things, involves allocation of the norm. These results also confirm the observation made by Kshindo and Kazima (2000:112) that 'in Malaŵi... there does not seem to be any awareness of the necessity of tackling the problems of terminology in any systematic way.'

Policy monitoring and evaluation

Literature reveals that the 1968 policy was monitored to see whether teachers were following it or not. The literature reviewed indicates that in areas where Chichewa was not the local language, teachers resorted to using the local languages and only switched to Chichewa when inspectors from the district education office visited their classes (Chilora 2000). The importance of monitoring cannot be overemphasised. Monitoring offers a means of assessing 'the way in which a policy or programme is being implemented so as to provide feedback which may improve or promote successful implementation' (Sapir 2004:190).

Teachers and head teachers on policy monitoring and evaluation

On the 1996 policy teachers, head teachers and MOE officials were interviewed to find out whether the policy was being monitored or not. Teachers from both the junior and senior section were asked to rate the amount of supervision and guidance related to the policy that they received from the head teachers and the PEAs. 37.5% said there was no supervision at all; 15.6% said they were often supervised. 43.8% said that they were supervised but were not sure whether or not the supervision was related to the policy. When the head teachers were asked as to how often they supervised and gave guidance to the teachers, 50% said frequently, 25% more frequently and 25% said they never supervised their teachers. The head teachers also agreed with the teachers that their supervision was not specifically for the policy since no one had been trained on the policy. This is worrisome as it implies that there are no mechanisms to provide feedback into the system to see whether the policy is being successfully implemented or not.

MoE officials were asked whether the Ministry was monitoring the implementation process and whether at one time they had carried an evaluation exercise to see if the policy was working, or whether it was relevant to the learners' language needs or not. On monitoring, 3 indicated that this was not being done. The remaining one said that monitoring was being conducted by inspectors and PEAs but pointed out that this inspection monitored teaching in general and not specifically in relation to the policy. Thus these results generally show that there are no mechanisms put in place to monitor and evaluate the policy.

When the same officers were asked to state whether or not the policy was being implemented, the answers were varied. One officer strongly pointed out that inspection reports indicated that teachers were implementing the policy. The basis for this conviction was that most teachers who were recruited in 1994 are not adequately trained and have a poor English proficiency hence they were at home with local languages. However, one wonders as to whether this is the best way to plan and implement a policy that would have a significant bearing on the socio-economic development of the nation.

Actual language practices in classrooms

The other objective of this study was to find out the actual language practices taking place in the classrooms since the 1996 directive decreed that teachers should use mother tongue as a medium of instruction from standard 1 to 4 and English from standard 5 to 8. When MoE officials were asked whether or not teachers were implementing the 1996 mother tongue policy, 3 officers (75 %) out of the 4 interviewed said that teachers were implementing the policy. They based their response on inspection reports and pupils' improved performance. The other basis was that most teachers especially those employed in 1994 were not trained and that most of them were not good at English and therefore found it easy to teach using vernacular languages. However, all the head teachers said that teachers are still using Chichewa as a medium of instruction. All the teachers as well as 99% of the pupils confirmed this. In the senior section, 93 pupils indicated that their teachers used English as the medium of instruction when teaching all the other subjects except when teaching Chichewa language. The current situation is somehow tricky. This is because when we look at the population of pupils in terms of first language we may be tempted to agree that indeed the policy is being implemented. 79.2% of the pupils said that Chichewa was their first language compared to 19.8% for Ciyawo. But if we go back to the inadequacies we saw from policy dissemination, knowledge of policy and goals, and the implementation process, one may also be tempted to suggest that teachers are just continuing with the 1968 language-in-education policy. This was confirmed by some of the responses teachers gave when they were asked to state how and why they choose Chichewa as a medium of instruction. Some of their answers included the following:

- 5 teachers (about 31%) said that Chichewa was common among pupils
- 3 teachers (about 19%) said that Chichewa was chosen by government for use in schools.

- 2 teachers (about 13%) said that Chichewa is a national language
- 1 teacher (about 6%) said that Chichewa is chosen for pupils' better understanding
- 2 teachers (about 13%) said that pupils' books are written in Chichewa

It is apparent from these results that the 1996 policy is not being implemented because an appropriate response here could have been only the first one. What these findings suggest is that what is happening in the classroom is not exactly what the policy stipulates. It would appear that when choosing a language of instruction, teachers are applying strategies that are convenient to them. This is happening because the policy did not state, in very clear terms, strategies that the teachers would use to deal with the choice of language of instruction. This situation corresponds with Bamgbose's (1999:19) observations that [planners in Africa tend to build] 'into the policy escape clauses and leaving implementation strategies unspecified as to modalities, time frame and measures to ensure compliance.'

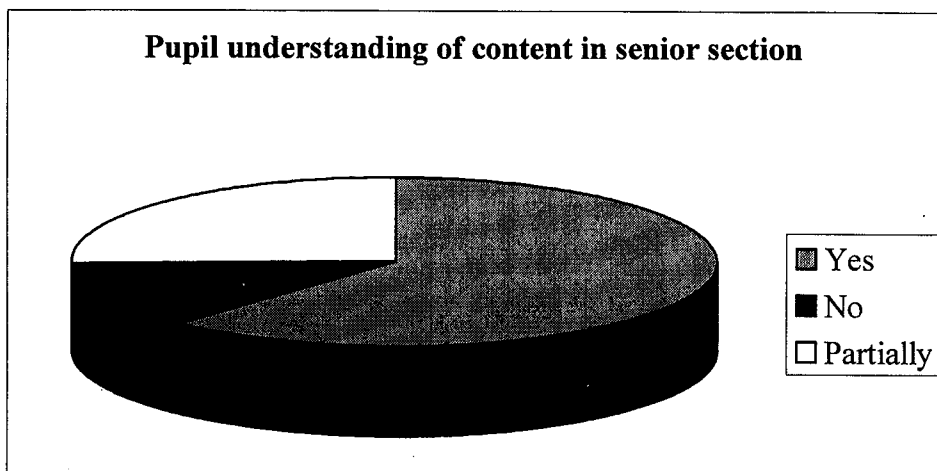
Impact of policy on teaching and learning

The study also sought to find out how the policies impacted on teaching and learning. This was done so as to find out '...whether the content of [of this] language programme is relevant to the needs of the learners,' (Noss, 1985).

Pupils in both sections were asked to indicate whether they felt the policy had positively or negatively affected them in terms of their understanding of content and performance in class, and whether they faced problems as a result of the language of instruction that is used in their class. In the junior section, 97.9% of all the pupil respondents indicated that they understood what they learnt in Chichewa and that their performance was good. However, this situation is rather tricky because it is somehow difficult to attribute these gains to the 1996 mother tongue policy considering the fact that what is happening in the classroom reflects more of the 1968 policy than that of the former. Perhaps this is why Kathewera's (1999: 109) observes that 'despite the Ministry's statement about the use of Chichewa, teachers are still using it in schools. Even in areas like Phalombe, Mulanje and Mangochi, the medium of instruction is Chichewa.'

When pupils from the senior section were asked whether they understood the content when they learnt using English, 61.7% said that they understood the

content without any problems. However, the study discovered that the teachers often translated the content into Chichewa in the course of teaching and this could be the reason why many pupils found English easy to understand. A summary of the results on pupils' understanding when English is used as a medium of instruction is presented in the figure below.



When teachers were asked about the impact of the language of instruction on pupil performance and understanding of content they all confirmed that the use of Chichewa has assisted pupils in the lower classes in the understanding of content thereby improving their performance. However, the teachers also pointed out that problems still existed due to language differences, the presence of mathematical terminology that are difficult to translate into Chichewa and differences between the teacher's dialect of Chichewa and that of the pupils.

In terms of preferred language of instruction, 52% of all the pupils interviewed preferred to be taught in English compared to 44% who preferred Chichewa, while only 4% indicated they preferred Ciyawo.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study has evaluated Malawi's language-in-education policies from 1968 to the present. In trying to evaluate, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used for data collection. Eight primary schools from Zomba urban and Zomba rural were used as samples for the data that was used in the evaluation

process. In addition, the Ministry of Education and the Centre for Language Studies were also used as samples. Below are the major findings of the study and some recommendations by those who were interviewed.

Major findings

- There are serious variations in terms of knowledge of the language in education policies among the respondents, which reflects weaknesses in the dissemination process.
- Malawi's language teaching goals are not clear. As the study has revealed, these goals are known differently at different levels.
- The implementation of language-in-education policy has not been properly done. Appropriate teaching and learning materials are lacking, there are no sound teacher training and deployment programmes. The implementation practice in Malawi has always favoured the English language first and the Chichewa language second to the detriment of other languages.
- The mother tongue policy is not being implemented in the schools that were under study because there is a mismatch between what the policy says and what is happening in the schools. Thus the schools are still using Chichewa as a medium of instruction despite the fact that some schools are located in Yao speaking areas.
- When Chichewa, which is a local language, is used as a medium of instruction pupils understand the content easily than when English is used. But the study argues that the good performance reported by the various respondents cannot squarely be attributed to the 1996 mother tongue policy because in the schools visited, this policy is not fully implemented.

Recommendations

- Various stakeholders including teachers and head teachers should be involved in the policy formulation process.
- Formulate a comprehensive and clear language-in-education policy for the country. Such a policy needs to include clear goals, strategies for implementation, monitoring and evaluation etc.
- Policies should be preceded by fact-finding missions before being implemented

- Teaching and learning material should be written in the language that is used as a medium of instruction. Thus teacher and pupil's books should be written in the same language as the language of instruction so that teachers are eased from the pain of trying to translate the content into local languages.
- Train teachers on how to use mother tongue as medium of instruction. This is crucial. Letting the issue of language to sort itself out through the linguistic inability of untrained teachers is like glorifying evil just because it is helping us hide certain serious flaws.
- Appropriate teacher deployment programmes should be put in place before policy is implemented.
- Strengthen communication links between and among offices within the Ministry of Education. Clear and strong modalities must be put in place to ensure that the policy is effectively disseminated, (if already in place, they should be enhanced).
- Policies should be monitored and periodically evaluated to make them responsive to the needs of the learners and the entire nation.

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