

Language ideology, policy and classroom practices in Oshiwambo speaking areas, Northern Namibia

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Abstract

The study problematized language ideologies and policy to explore the efficacy of using English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) among Oshiwambo speaking learners in the Omusati region of Northern Namibia. Focus group interviews with ESL teachers, interviews with the English Head of Departments (HODs), classroom observations and informal chats with the grade 12 learners were carried out at six secondary schools. The study finds that students struggle to partake in meaningful classroom interaction and to comprehend instruction and content in English. Although students may express themselves better in Oshiwambo, they are not allowed. Some ESL teachers would use Oshiwambo to maintain order in class, but avoid using Oshiwambo to help struggling learners believing this would negatively impact learners' English proficiency. Some ESL teachers were also found to blame ESL content subject teachers for learners' poor English proficiency, as they used Oshiwambo in class to teach and explain content. We conclude that ESL classroom practice is teacher-centred by default, and students are muted as they find themselves with no voice to express themselves efficiently and efficaciously, and deaf to classroom content delivered in an unfamiliar language, English.

Keywords: Language, ideology, Oshiwambo, Policy, teacher-centred, Namibia, ESL, Translanguaging

INTRODUCTION

According to Amukugo (1993), formal education in Namibia was first introduced by the missionaries, namely the London and Western Society (1805), Rhenish Missionary Society (1842), and the Finnish Missionary Society (1870). These were followed by the Anglican and the catholic missionaries (Amukugo, 1993). These missionaries established schools in order to reinforce the work of Christianization as well as to change cultural norms which were considered to be pagan at that time (Katzao, 1999). Because different missionaries established their own schools among specific ethnic groups in Namibia, they did not use the same LiEP (Amukugo, 1993). For instance, the Rhenish missionaries adopted Cape Dutch as their LOLT, whereas the Anglican and Catholic missionaries adopted English (Amukugo, 1993). In contrast, the Finnish missionaries adopted Oshindonga (a Namibian indigenous language) as their LOLT after they had learnt it (Amukugo, 1993). Hence, given the manner in which the formal education was introduced by different missionaries in Namibia, one could conclude that during the time when the education in Namibia was under their administrations (missionaries), there was no uniform LiEP for schools.

Moreover, apart from the arrival and presence of different missionaries in Namibia, it is important to mention that Namibia was colonized by Germany and South Africa respectively. During this era, education in Namibia was administered differently and therefore the two countries (Germany and South Africa) handled the issue of the LiEP differently (UNIN, 1984). For example, during the time when Namibia was colonized by Germany, from 1884 to

1915, German was introduced as an official language and hence a LOLT (Cluver, 1992). On the other hand, under the administration of South Africa, Afrikaans, German and English were the medium of instructions (Cluver, 1992). This implies that some schools used German, some used Afrikaans and some used English. That is why according to Cluver (1992), the main objective of the language policy of the South African government was political not linguistic. "It was aimed at promoting Afrikaans as the official language and as the lingua franca so as to reinforce the link between Namibia and South Africa as well as at promoting indigenous languages as means of promoting ethnicity and separateness between the various linguistic communities of Namibia (Cluver, 1992: 142).

At the dawn of Namibian independence, English was adopted as the new official language. Afrikaans, Namibia's lingua franca by then, was not considered by the country's new leadership because it was perceived as a language of oppression (Totemeyer, 2010). Hence, the new LiEP which was adopted immediately after Namibia's independence in 1990 was an abrupt switch from using Afrikaans as LOLT to using English as LOLT. This switch, according to Totemeyer (2010) was problematic in Namibian schools because both learners and teachers found it difficult to cope with English as a sole LOLT. As Totemeyer notes: "Within a couple of years after the abrupt switch to English medium education, it became clear that teachers and many learners were not enjoying education in the schools" (Totemeyer, 2010: 15). Moreover, since the introduction of the new LiEP, government documents and other literature revealed poor

performance by learners and falling of standard of teaching (Benjamin, 2004). Although teachers and learners were not comfortable with the LiEP because of the poor results, the policy continued and has continued to date. The question is why there have not been any protest or complaint from parents and learners against the use of English as LOTL despite the poor academic results. As will also be shown in this study, even teachers discourage or shy away from using Oshiwambo to help learners understand content subjects, which are in English.

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Namibia is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the republic of Angola and Zambia to the North and North-East respectively and the republics of Botswana and South Africa to the east and south respectively (SACMEQ, 2018). "It covers some 824 000 km² and is 1 440KM at its widest point and it is 1 320 KM from North to South" (Harris, 2011: 10). Furthermore, Namibia is demarcated

into 14 political and educational regions, one of which is Omusati, and this is the region in which the current study was carried out.

According to the Omusati Regional Council (2018), the Omusati region borders Angola and three other regions in Namibia; Oshana, Oshana and Kunene. The region is the second highest populated region in Namibia, with the population of 243 000 and density of 17 people per square kilometer (Omusati Regional Council, 2018). In addition, this region is known for its abundance of mopani trees, and is predominantly an agricultural region focusing on both livestock and crop farming.

Moreover, the Omusati region has a total number of 282 schools, of which 13 are senior secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2018) and six of these 13 secondary schools were randomly selected to be part of the current study. One thing which is worth mentioning about these schools is that nearly all of the teachers and the learners at these schools speak seven dialects of Oshiwambo language, which are mutually intelligible (See table 1 below).

Table 1: Number of teachers and learners who speak Oshiwambo and who do not

School	Learners			Teachers		
	Oshiwambo speaking	Non-Oshiwambo speaking	Total	Oshiwambo speaking	Non-Oshiwambo speaking	Total
A	807	5	812	30	2	32
B	625	0	625	27	1	28
C	658	2	660	29	0	29
D	513	1	514	19	1	20
E	650	0	650	24	0	24
F	769	43	839	36	2	38

As seen in the table above, the schools that were part of this study are dominated by Oshiwambo speaking teachers and learners. This means that both teachers and learners would find it difficult to speak English at school, except probably during lessons. Hence, one can argue that the school environments in Northern Namibia might not be conducive in terms of reinforcing and fostering English as LOLT. To make matters worse, and in part as a result of the legacy of apartheid, as Beyer (2010: 30) argues “the majority of Namibian children grow up in a homogenous linguistic community, where the use of English is extremely limited”. Hence, one can argue that the Namibian LiEP is ideologically skewed towards a language few Namibians speak or have access to. It is therefore not surprising that in 2014, among the 3204 grade 12 learners who wrote school leaving examinations, only 14% passed and hence qualified for tertiary institutions (Ministry of Education, 2014). Despite this kind of a challenge, teachers including ESL teachers, parents and other educational stakeholders support the use of English as a sole LOLT (Wolfaardt, 2002; Harris, 2011). Here, it is important to mention that in 2003, an attempt was made to adapt the LiEP considering Namibia’s language situation. However, what emerged from the deliberations remains a “discussion document” up to today and therefore the LiEP adopted at the dawn of Namibia’s independence is still the official language policy for schools in Namibia.

THE LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION POLICY (LIEP): POST INDEPENDENT NAMIBIA

Immediately after Namibia’s independence, the then Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport had a responsibility of formulating a language policy which enabled English to be the medium of instruction in Namibian schools (Swarts, 1995). “It was not so much a medium of communication because by then, constitutionally, English had already been accepted as the official language and therefore, the issue was more of the medium of instruction from the pedagogical point of view” (Swarts, 1995: 17).

Moreover, according to the current Namibian LiEP, mother tongues are used as media of instruction from grade one to three while English is taught as a subject (Otaala, 2001). English is introduced as LOLT in grade four; it is also taught as a subject, and remains the LOLT up until grade twelve and beyond (Ipinge, 2013, 2018). It is important to emphasize that from grade four, the mother tongues are taught as school subjects until grade twelve, but they do not play any other roles within the Namibian education system. In actual fact, the Namibian LiEP does not provide explicit guidelines on how different mother tongues should be used in schools (Ipinge, 2013, 2018).

Furthermore, the English proficiency of the majority of the Namibian teachers has been found to be not up to standard (Wolfaardt, 2002; Harris, 2011; Ipinge, 2013, 2018). According to Wolfaardt (2003), this is not a strange phenomenon because many teachers in Namibia (before independence) were trained in Afrikaans

and have only done English as a second language. At the same time, although their English proficiency is inadequate, they still prefer teaching in English rather than teaching in the languages they speak very well. For instance, Iipinge (2013) found that the majority of teachers in Northern Namibia prefer to teach in English despite admitting that their English proficiency is not up to standard.

To conclude this section, it is important to emphasize that considering the fact that English is not widely spoken in Namibian communities and therefore learners do not have proper exposure to it. This, together with the issue of teachers lacking desirable English proficiency, make one to conclude that the current Namibian LiEP has negative consequences on the teaching and learning process of different school subjects including English as a second language (ESL).

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

According to Makoe and Mckinney (2014: 2), language ideologies refer to “the set of beliefs, values and cultural frames that continually circulate in society, informing the ways in which language is conceptualized and represented as well as how it is used”. Makoe and Mckinney (2014: 2) further explain that “language ideologies include the values, practices and beliefs associated with language use by speakers, and the discourse which constructs values and beliefs at state, institutional, and global levels”. Apart from Makoe and Mckinney (2014), Brown (2014: 19) defines language ideology as “the body of assertions, beliefs, and aims that constitute a sociopolitical system within a group, culture, or country”. This implies that all users of language and all

speech communities have ideological structures that influence choice, value, evaluation and how language is used (Mcgroarty: 2010).

Furthermore, Weber and Horner (2012) identified five types of language ideologies. However, for the purpose of this article, we will only focus on two types of language ideologies. These are ‘language hierarchy ideology’ and ‘one–nation one-language ideology’. We believe that these two types of ideologies have enforced English as a LOLT within the current language in education policy for Namibia.

Language hierarchy ideology

Antia and Dyers (2016: 530) contend that “[w]hen language hierarchies exist, there is usually one dominant language, followed in order of decreasing importance by other languages or varieties”. This usually entails giving some languages higher status than others, through labelling them as national or official language (Abongdia & Foncha, 2014). Hence, this ideology (language hierarchy) is relevant to the Namibian situation as determined from the Namibian language policy which stipulates that “English is the sole medium of communication in all executive, legislative and judiciary bodies from the central government level down to the grassroots” (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2001:307). The dominance of English is seen in the fact that it is the official and national language of Namibia and in the educational arena, and it is used as LOLT from grade four to tertiary levels. On the other hand, Namibian languages are in the lower ranks, which reflects their lower status, as they are only used as medium of instruction in the three lower primary grades (Brock-Utne, 2001).

As Antia and Dyers (2016: 529) point out, “ideologies about languages can underpin, determine and affect many other domains of human activity such as people’s responses towards the use of particular languages in certain spaces. It appears that in Namibia, people have developed an ideology that English is a better language for socioeconomic mobility compared to Namibian African languages. For example, it has been argued that Namibians have negative attitudes to education in indigenous languages, and that they feel that they (indigenous languages) cannot be used as media of instruction because this would affect the standard of education negatively, and that this would slow down the growth of science and technology, as well as that of national development (Sukumane, 1998).

The one- nation one-language ideology

According to Weber and Horner (2012) as cited by Abongdia and Foncha (2014: 52), “the one-nation one- language ideology makes language equal to territory and national identity”. In other words, this ideology is shown by the belief that monolingualism or the use of one single common language is important for social harmony and national unity (Piller, 2014). In the USA for example, the one-nation- one language ideology has a long history because English, and English only has been seen as a prerequisite for social cohesion (Piller, 2014). Apart from the USA, the ‘one- nation- one language ideology’ is also reflected within the Namibian language policy because “choosing an official language and hence the language of learning and teaching for Namibia had two related purposes; the need to combat the South African engineered divisiveness and the unity of

all Namibians” (Brock-Utne, 2001:306). In other words, the official language (English) was deemed necessary for strengthening national cohesion as well as for reducing competition among indigenous Namibian languages (Iipingge, 2013) because it was seen as an unbiased language (Sukumane, 1998). In schools for example, learning and teaching through the medium of English would mean teachers, learners and other educational stake holders would be unified, contrary to what happened in the past. In sum, English was deemed necessary for achieving cohesion and national building through reducing possible competitive or unruly sociolinguistic forces (Iipingge, 2013).

Furthermore, the argument that a language can be used to facilitate national cohesion is debatable. According to Bunyi (1999), while indigenous languages have been said to have the potential of dividing people along ethnic lines, English may divide them a long class line. For instance, in Zambia, English is said to have been adopted by competing ethnic groups in the education sector (Cooke & Williams, 2002). However, rather than smoothening ethnic differences, English can be said to have introduced another boundary: those who speak it, that is the elite, and the typical members of poor urban and rural groups who do not (Cooke & Williams, 2002). Similarly, it can be argued that in the case of Namibia, using English as language of teaching and learning for the sake of unity instead of using mother tongues is not helping much. In actual fact, this ideological view is more political rather than linguistic. As Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir (2001: 304) claim, “the principal aspects of the Namibian language policy were already formulated and adapted before independence in the year of the liberation struggle”. Thus,

the current Namibian language policy is more influenced by political ideology than linguistic theory.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

This study was informed by data from ESL teachers' focus group interviews, that the first author conducted at six different government secondary schools in Omusati region, Northern Namibia. In focus group interviews, "participants are able to build on each other's ideas and comments to provide an in-depth view not attainable from individual interviews" (Maree, 2014: 90). Consequently, we opted for focus group interviews rather than one-on-one interviews. Of course, these focus group interviews allowed us to get ESL grade 12 teachers' contrasting and converging perspectives on a number of issues pertaining to the teaching of ESL in Northern Namibia- Omusati region, at one time and space. It is noteworthy that at all schools where the focus group interviews were conducted, the number of ESL teachers within the groups was either five or six, which is in line with what Ary et al. (2014) recommended. The English HODs were interviewed separately to enable the teachers answer questions freely without fearing retribution from their immediate seniors.

However, it is important to emphasize that the HODs were asked the same questions asked during the ESL teachers' focus group interview because the aim of the interviews was the same. That is, to get the teachers and HODs perspectives on a number of issues related to the Namibian LiEP as well as to teaching and learning of ESL.

After interviewing the ESL teachers and their HODs, the first author went on to observe them teaching in order to get the actual picture of what really happens

in the ESL classes. As sian et al. (2009:366) suggest, "after interviewing the teachers, one still need to observe them teaching because they (teachers) may tell you only about their most successful strategies. Granted, this was the main rationale for using classroom observations as one of the data collection method in this particular study. Additionally, there are three important points that need to be mentioned about the classroom observations in questions. Firstly, during the classroom observations, the role of the first author was basically to observe, but not to participate in whatever was happening in the ESL classes when the teachers were teaching. Secondly, each participant was observed at least three times. Thirdly, to record data obtained during classroom observations, the first author used an 'observational protocol'. This observational protocol had two columns. In one column the first author recorded and noted the aspects of learning and teaching that were observed as well as other relevant characteristics of ESL classroom as required by the research questions. In the other column, the first author recorded his personal thought such as assumptions, feelings, difficulties, and impressions.

Moreover, the current study was also informed by data from the informal conversations which the first author had with the grade 12 learners at all the schools that were part of the study. These informal conversations were meant to reveal how the learners are coping with English as a sole LOLT, and as a school subject. Besides, the informal conversations were also aimed at establishing how the ESL teachers use Oshiwambo to facilitate the teaching of English. Furthermore, it is important to mention that to make learners more comfortable and freer to talk, the first author decided to chat to them in the

mother-tongue (Oshiwambo) and then whatever they said was jotted down in the 'field notes' in English. The data from these field notes together with data from other sources as explained earlier in this section were then analyzed accordingly.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Teachers and HODs interviews

As mentioned earlier, among others, the current study was informed by data from ESL teachers and HOD's interviews. The main aim of these interviews, as mentioned before, was to get their (ESL teachers and their HODs) perspectives on the Namibian LiEP, as well as on issues related to the teaching and learning of ESL in Northern Namibia- Omusati region. Additionally, it is important to mention that the teachers' focus group interviews and the HOD's interviews were conducted and analyzed separately. However, because the teachers and the HODs were asked similar questions and that the findings were similar and overlapping, it was deemed necessary to present and discuss these findings within the same section. Finally, it is important to mention that the interviews were structured in nature and an interview schedule was used. Therefore, the discussion of the results from these teachers' focus group and HODs' interview will be laid out according to the order of the questions which were asked of the participants.

Using Oshiwambo to help learners understand English lessons

The ESL teachers and their HODs were asked to talk about how they use Oshiwambo to help their learners understand English lessons. Here,

the participants had mixed opinions. The majority said that they do not use Oshiwambo at all, while a few teachers said they use it quite often. The respondents who do not use Oshiwambo in class said they do not use it because it is not allowed by the language policy. Besides, they feel that it would be of no use using Oshiwambo in the English class because the examination would be exclusively in English and therefore using Oshiwambo in class would imply that learners would not learn English effectively. Furthermore, on contrary, respondents who use Oshiwambo in their English lessons mentioned that they do so because they believe that using it will facilitate learning English better. Commenting on the issue of using Oshiwambo to help learners understand the English lessons, some of the respondents said:

Teacher 1: *"Like in my case...I do not use Oshiwambo. I decide I better not talk to them in Oshiwambo so often. Because they get used to Oshiwambo too much, and they will not have that chance during the examination. It is better for me to force them down for them to use English".*

Teacher 2: *"Oshiwambo...I avoid doing that because I believe that the moment I start explaining in the Oshiwambo, then they understand better...then they will get used and they will never understand in English. So, what I do...I try to explain in English and that is it. If they do not understand, they can ask the others. I do not really try to explain in Oshiwambo".*

Teacher 3: *"Like when you are teaching active and passive...there I can use Oshiwambo, just to identify this one is a...Oshiningwa (Object), this one is Omuningi (Subject), this one is what... there they can get you.*

HOD1: *“Not at all...especially in the teaching of English you do not use Oshiwambo. But...errr what is really discouraging is that...yes we have a language policy at school that says all the subjects should be taught in English... the medium of instruction must be English. Only those Oshikwanyama and Oshindonga where they can use their mother tongue. But in some of the subjects for instance Biology and other teachers, they do not have a problem... Agriculture! You find them teaching in Oshiwambo. So, sometimes that will not help. Even if you now try to be strict with English, in our English lessons, other teachers they use Oshiwambo.*

These findings indicate that the respondents believe that Oshiwambo should not be used in the ESL class to facilitate the teaching and learning process. In actual fact, most of them reported that using Oshiwambo in the ESL class would hinder the learners from learning English effectively, and therefore using English only medium of instruction is a necessity for effective teaching and learning of English. This is a clear indication that the ESL teachers hold a monolingual ideology which entails that the teaching of English should be done solely through English medium and that the use of mother language in the English classroom would negatively affect the learning of English (Phillipson, 1992). However, it is important to point out that the monolingual ideology informing the ESL teachers' perceptions is reinforced by the LiEP because it dictates that English should be the only LOLT.

Moreover, these findings reveal that the ESL teachers stick to English-only medium of instruction without considering the pedagogical implications of doing so. They are oblivious to research

indicating educational or academic benefits of using one language to teach knowledge and skills of another language (Banda, 2018; Clegg & Simpson, 2016). Using mother tongue when teaching the second language would impart positive learning outcomes (Ouane & Glanz, 2011; Early & Norton 2014; Prah & Brock- Utne, 2009). That is why in South Africa for instance, Tylor and Coetzee (2013) as cited by Trudell (2016: 101) found that “mother- tongue instruction in early grade significantly improves English acquisition as measured in grades 4-6”.

Content subject teachers and the use of Oshiwambo

After listening to how respondents use Oshiwambo to help their learners understand English lessons, it was also necessary to get the opinions on whether the content subject teachers use Oshiwambo to explain their subjects. The idea was to establish perceptions on why the content subject teachers use or do not use Oshiwambo in their lessons. Surprisingly, the principal finding here was that ESL teachers regularly use Oshiwambo in their lessons. Some ESL teachers felt that the content subject teachers use Oshiwambo in their lessons because they want learners to understand their lessons better. This clearly indicates that these ESL teachers know the importance of using mother tongue to facilitate and reinforce the learning of different content subjects that are offered in English.

Furthermore, other ESL teachers felt that the content subject teachers use Oshiwambo in their classes because their English language proficiency is poor and therefore it is difficult for them to stick to English during their lessons. On the other hand, the HODs felt that content subject

teachers use Oshiwambo in their lessons because learners' English background is not good and hence using Oshiwambo would help the learners understand the content better. These were some of the respondents' key comments:

Teacher 1: *"The content subject teachers are mostly teaching in Oshiwambo and as per their says, they are doing it to help their learners understand better... the subject. They say it makes it easier for learners who have a problem understanding English to understand the topic being taught".*

Teacher 2: *"Yes they do! Content subject teachers also experience difficulties in using English and that situation forces them to use Oshiwambo during their lessons."*

HOD 6: *"I think they use Oshiwambo... err because they can see the background of the learners is very poor. For learners to understand very well. But you know those content subject teachers sometimes they do not really look at grammar. They only look at the content. But in English here we have to make sure that everything is correct".*

The above findings are not new in Namibia because Wolfaardt (2002) for example, has also found that teachers code-switch from English to mother-tongue to make the subject matter clear so that all learners can understand them. Apart from Wolfaardt (2002), Iiping (2013) found that content subject teachers encounter a lot of problems when teaching through the medium of English and therefore resort to code-switching or what is now known as translanguaging (Banda, 2018; Iiping, 2018) to ensure that their students understand the concepts that are being taught. Consequently, based on what ESL teachers and their HODs said on the issue of content subject teachers using

mother tongue to facilitate learning, and of course considering the studies done by Wolfaardt (2002) and Iiping (2013), we can argue that using mother tongue in Namibian classroom should not be an option but a necessity.

Moreover, some ESL teachers said that the content subject teachers used Oshiwambo in their classes simply because their language proficiency was poor. Again, these findings are not peculiar in Namibia because Wolfaardt (2002) has also found that teachers who code-switch to mother language when teaching have been described by other teachers as weak and lacking decent English language proficiency. This possibly implies that some teachers in Namibia, especially the English teachers, have very positive attitudes toward English and therefore would always be against the use of Oshiwambo as LOLT alongside English irrespective of whether it will be beneficial to use it (Oshiwambo) or not (Harris, 2011). Hence, we argue that teachers need to change their attitudes towards the use of Oshiwambo in teaching English and content subjects because teaching learners in an unfamiliar language implies that learning outcomes will be poor. That is why in Tanzania for example, "the use of English as the LOLT serves as a barrier for learning of subject matter for millions of youngsters" (Brock-Utne, 2004: 81). Besides, Bamgbose (2005: 253) maintains that "educational failure largely arises from a mismatch between subject matter and the language of instruction". We therefore argue that the content subject teachers revert to using Oshiwambo in their classes because they believe that sticking to English only as per the LiEP is not working well for their learners.

Changing Namibia's pro-English policy

After discussing how content subject teachers use Oshiwambo in their classes, the discussion was shifted to the issue of changing the Namibian pro-English policy. Consequently, the ESL teachers as well as their HODs were asked to give their opinions on whether the Namibian pro-English policy should be changed to include the use of indigenous languages in education. Most of the teachers indicated that the Namibian pro-English policy does not need to be changed because there are no teaching materials written in Oshiwambo and that the use of Namibian indigenous languages in education would mean that learners will not have enough time to learn English. These teachers have actually reported that the learners are coping well with the language policy even though they are failing English. However, there were exceptions with very few teachers arguing that the LiEP needs to be revised. Additionally, apart from the teachers, all the HODs said that the Namibian pro-English policy should not be changed to allow the use of indigenous languages in education because the examination will never be written in indigenous languages. These were some of the teachers as well as HODs' key comments:

Teacher 1: *"I think the teaching should be just in English. Strictly in English, because as far as I am concerned, I have not come across any other content subject materials that are written in Oshiwambo. So, for long as subjects are written in English, it should be just taught throughout in English".*

Teacher 2: *"Yes, the policy needs to be changed...because learners prefer their mother language than English. They also need to be taught in the way they*

will understand and learn better."

Teacher 3: *"Oshiwambo is their language and they like it very much. So, having a policy that allows them to do that and they know it is a policy, they will have no time for English. Most of their time is for Oshiwambo. They still like it, it is their local language, they understand each other very much in their local language. It will be worse... look at this time now that we have...the policy allows them to speak English only, but we do not really do that, most of the time they are speaking their language. Only in English period...that is when they speak English."*

HOD 2: *"Practically if we are to change the policy, I think it will not be beneficial to our learners because now we are trying to teach our learners...when we have an English lesson and then we choose to explain things in another language, vernacular language? I see it as spoiling learners. Because these learners they will never be asked to write an examination and explain in Oshiwambo. That part will never be there. So, I think the policy is so fine. It's just us teachers to adjust and at least keep the policy."*

As it can be seen in the above quotations that the majority of the ESL teachers who were part of this study do not support the idea that the Namibian pro-English policy should be changed to allow for the use of indigenous languages in education. The teachers are concerned about changing the policy because they think that there are no printed materials to support the new policy and that using indigenous languages in education will minimize the time for learning English. Similarly, the findings of this study show that the HODs have negative attitudes towards the use of Oshiwambo in the classroom because of its low status in the Namibian education system. They

argued that Oshiwambo should not be used in the teaching of different school subjects because the examination will be solely in English. However, we argue that the reasons provided by the teachers as well as the HODs are not genuine, but ideologically influenced, and that their negative attitudes incline them to oppose the use of indigenous languages in education.

The revelation disclosed within the previous paragraph is not new in Namibia. Ipinge (2013) for example found that the majority of teachers were against the amendment of the Namibian pro-English policy because they felt that examinations are not written in Oshiwambo and that some learners might want to study abroad after completing their secondary schools. Accordingly, we argue that the teachers will only support the amendment of the current LiEP to allow the use of indigenous languages in the teaching of different school subjects if these languages (indigenous) are accorded better status, as opposed to the current situation.

Classroom observations

As mentioned earlier, the classroom observations were needed in order to give the actual picture of what happens in the ESL classrooms. As a result, the first author used an unstructured observational protocol to record relevant observations as they occurred in the ESL classrooms. After wards, at least three relevant themes were created from the unstructured observational protocols. These are: learners' inadequate English proficiency, how ESL teachers use Oshiwambo in their classes, and ESL English proficiency and knowledge of English as a subject.

Learners' inadequate English language proficiency

After observing a number of lessons, it was concluded that the majority of learners at the schools which were part of this study lack sufficient English language proficiency. There are a number of things that indicated that the learners in question are not good at English. Firstly, the learners tried to speak to their teachers in Oshiwambo during the English lessons. For example, in one of the lessons, a learner stood up trying to leave the class and then the teacher asked; "Where are you going?" Unhesitatingly, the learner answered in Oshiwambo; "Kwathelandje Miss, otandi kiipemba" (May I please go and clean my nose?). Secondly, the learners themselves had clearly indicated that they can express themselves better in their mother tongue (Oshiwambo). For example, in one of the classes, the teacher asked the learners to explain the use of the 'present perfect tense' and none of the learners could do it. Later, one of the learners said "Sir, I can only explain it in Oshiwambo, not in English". In another instance, it was observed that a teacher chased out two learners from her lesson because they refused to perform a role play. These learners were willing to perform the role play as requested by the teacher. However, their poor English proficiency did not allow them to do so. Finally, one of the observations that was made was that a number of learners were reluctant to ask questions during the ESL lessons because it appeared that they were not confident enough to express themselves in English. Therefore, even though there was something that they did not understand, they just kept quiet.

The findings above clearly indicate that learners in Northern Namibian did not participate fully during the ESL

lessons because their English language proficiency did not allow them to do so, and that the LiEP dictate that their mother tongue should not be used in the teaching of ESL. It is important however, to note that this predicament is not new in Northern Namibia because Shaalukeni (2002) also found that learners in the same regions had serious problems expressing themselves in English. Therefore, one can easily conclude that avoiding using mother tongue in the teaching and learning of English has negative implications on the learning outcomes. As Simasiku, Kasanda and Smit (2015: 322) argue, “English only medium of instruction restrains learners from participating in ESL classroom”, and hence poor academic performance in ESL can be anticipated. Moreover, Banda (2010, 2018), following his study of language practices in classrooms in black and coloured schools on the Cape Flats concludes that prohibiting learners using their home languages not only deprives them from using beneficial knowledge embedded in cultural knowledge; it also denies them the means to express both school- and home-based literacies and knowledge effectively. Such policies essentially mute the learners (Banda, 2018), as has also been illustrated above where learners have no voice when denied use of Oshiwambo.

How ESL teachers use Oshiwambo during their lessons

One of the main observations which emerged from the classroom observation is that the ESL teachers use Oshiwambo when trying to maintain order in their lessons. In one instance for example, one of the learners asked the teacher; “*What is the meaning of the word ‘several’?*” The rest of the class started giggling and immediately the teacher said in

Oshiwambo; “*Omuntu nge okwapula itashititi okwapuka*” (It is not wrong to ask a question). In another scenario, a teacher saw two learners at the back of the class who were not paying attention while he was teaching and immediately said to them in Oshiwambo; “*Hey! Umentu nee... andimudhemge nena!* (Hey! You boys... I will beat you!). Furthermore, although the ESL teachers use Oshiwambo to maintain order as explained within the above scenarios, they hardly use it to facilitate the learning of English. For example, one of the teachers was teaching the ‘active voice and passive voice’. After giving several explanations, he realized that the learners did not understand. Instead of using Oshiwambo to explain the topic better, the teacher said to the learners; “Do you have passive voice in Oshiwambo? Yes! You can connect to Oshiwambo”. Instead of asking learners to use Oshiwambo and also to give examples of Oshiwambo passives, what the teacher asked is for learners to use English to discuss Oshiwambo passives, which does not solve the language problem barrier.

These findings suggest that teachers are aware of the fact that their learners understand them better when they talk to them in the vernacular language (Oshiwambo). However, it appears that the teachers are reluctant to use Oshiwambo when teaching ESL because the language policy does not allow it. Besides, ESL teachers have a general negative attitude to using mother tongue in the ESL classroom. This is worrying because sticking to English only as the language policy dictates means that learners are unlikely to learn effectively. As Brock- Utne (2004: 60) laments, “teachers who are faithful to the policy of using English only as medium of instruction in secondary schools are just concerned with teaching, not with learning”.

ESL teachers and the learner-centred approach

Shaalukeni (2002) suggests that the Namibian ESL Syllabi and the ESL subject policy necessitate ESL teachers to use the learner-centred approach in their teaching. Accordingly, the study looked at how the ESL teachers implemented the learner-centred approach, given the fact that their learners' English proficiency is not up to standard. Unsurprisingly, it was observed that virtually all the ESL teachers were using a teacher-centred approach instead. In actual fact, all the ESL lessons observed were dominated by teacher-talks. The teachers kept on talking and asking a number of questions while the learners gave answers to the questions individually and so on, but in a rote-memory or routine fashion. For example, in one of the lessons, the teacher was teaching how to skim-read, and this is how the lesson proceeded:

Teacher: *When do we read?*

Learner 1: *Gave individual responses.*

Teacher: *Why do we read?*

Learner 2: *Gave individual responses.*

Teacher: *How do we read?*

Learner 3: *Gave individual responses.*

Teacher: *What is to Skim?*

Learner 4: *Gave individual responses.*

These findings clearly illustrate how ESL teachers in Northern Namibia do not employ the learner-centred approach, while learners remain quiet or give set answers. Similarly, Shaalukeni (2002) found that in ESL classes in Namibia, teacher talk dominated over learner talk. It could be argued that it is no easy for ESL teachers to use the learner-centred approach because the learners do not have adequate English language proficiency. Therefore, when teachers stick to the teacher-centred approach, it

is obvious that learners will have limited chances of participating in the classroom. When they do they provide memorised answers. This implies that they do not learn reflectively and effectively because they are just passive recipients of knowledge and information. We therefore concur with Prah and Brock-Utne (2009: 43) who lament that "using the foreign language as medium of instruction prevents learner-centred and interactive teaching methods, thus becoming a barrier to critical thinking and understanding of academic subject matter".

Findings from informal conversations with ESL learners

At all the schools that were part of this study, informal conversations were done with at least six learners. The main aim of these informal conversations was to elicit learners' perspectives on how their ESL teachers handle or perceive the use of Oshiwambo in the ESL classroom. In particular, the idea was to establish whether the learners were allowed to use or to speak Oshiwambo during the ESL lessons. For instance, are they allowed to ask questions in Oshiwambo? Are they allowed to comment or to give suggestions in Oshiwambo especially when they are unable to express themselves well or meaningfully in English?

The main finding from the informal conversations with the grade 12 ESL learners was that their ESL teachers do not allow them to speak Oshiwambo during the English lessons:

Learner 1: *"If a teacher asks a question and then you answer in Oshiwambo, the answer is not accepted".*

Learner 2: *"If you speak Oshiwambo in our English lesson, the teacher tells you to put it in English; he tells you he does not understand Oshiwambo. Moklasa*

Oshiwambo kandishishi" (When I am in class I do not know Oshiwambo).

Learner 3: "One day I asked my English teacher (in Oshiwambo) to explain something in Oshiwambo to us, and then he was angry with me because he just said...I hate such stupidity! Who will explain in the exam for you in Oshiwambo?"

It is clear from the above that the ESL teachers do not allow their learners to express themselves in Oshiwambo because they (ESL teachers) assume doing so will lead to learners not passing English examinations. Not only that, but it also appears that the ESL teachers do not allow their learners to participate in classroom discourse using their mother tongue because of the ideology that using Oshiwambo compromises successful acquisition of English.

However, not allowing learners to use their mother tongue in the ESL especially those with poor English proficiency might affect the teaching and the learning process negatively. For example, they are unlikely to learn reflectively and critically because they are unable to ask questions, to give critical analysis and to collaborate meaning with their teachers, as well as their fellow learners because of language related problems. Consequently, we argue that for effective teaching and learning of English to take place, learners should be allowed to use Oshiwambo in the ESL lessons to facilitate teaching and learning of English. As Pica (1994) argues, depending on psychological, linguistic and cultural factors, learners' first language can powerfully influence second language development. Banda (2018) has argued that not allowing learners using their mother tongues limits their capacity to engage with teaching and learning, as they are unable

to take advantage of their multilingual repertoire.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that learners in Northern Namibia are experiencing a lot of problems as a result of the English only language in education policy. Secondly, the ESL teachers in Northern Namibia are not willing to use Oshiwambo to facilitate the learning of English because of the colonial language ideology enforced by the Namibian LiEP. The ESL teachers do this despite knowing that their learners understand them better when they talk to them in Oshiwambo. Additionally, this study has revealed that learners in Northern Namibia have poor English language proficiency. Hence, given the fact that they are not allowed to use their mother tongue (Oshiwambo) in the ESL, the teaching and learning of ESL is negatively affected. Firstly, many learners are reluctant to ask questions and have extended discussions during their English lesson. This means that even though there is something they want to say, they just keep quiet. In other words, learners' participation is decreased by the language obstacle created by the enforced use of English only. Obviously, this is not good for learning because for learners to learn reflectively and rationally, they need to participate fully in the classroom discourses and this includes asking questions and getting involved in discussions. Furthermore, it appears that learners' poor English proficiency leads to teachers reverting to the teacher-centred approach instead of using the learner-centred approaches as required by the ESL syllabus and the ESL subject policy.

In summary, the Namibian pro-English language policy hinders the successful implementation of

learner-centred approach and effective teaching and learning generally. The situation does not encourage learners to be active constructors of their own knowledge. This also hinders learners from learning to successfully speak and improve their English language competence. In other words, learners are muted as they find themselves with no voice to express themselves and are also deaf to classroom content delivered in unfamiliar language.

From the findings, it can be concluded that the language hierarchy ideology and the one-nation one-language ideology have connived to hamper teaching and learning in Namibia. The language hierarchy ideology has led to indigenous languages such as Oshiwambo to be at the lower rungs in the social structuring of language. This has compromised the status of indigenous languages so that not just teachers and learners, but even parents perceive them as not desirable for education and socio-economic mobility. On the other hand, the one-nation one-language ideology has only worsened the position of indigenous Namibian languages. This ideology does not only ignore the multilingual situation in Namibia, it also stifles the languaging practices that this entails. More importantly, it raises a single language, in this case, English, to the status of national language when very few people use it as their language of everyday communication. It is ironic that the same ideologies on which oppressive practices that hinder efficacious delivery and consumption of education are based, are the same ones that attract parents, learners and teachers to them, leading to a vicious cycle.

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