

Potholes in the Teaching of Zambian Languages in Secondary Schools: A Case of Bemba Language

Pethias Siame

Department of Literature and Languages, Kwame Nkrumah University, Kabwe, Zambia

Abstract

This paper presents the potholes in the teaching of Bemba language which is spoken in Zambia. Potholes in this context are hindrances. Bemba is classified as M42. As a regional official language, Bemba is taught in five provinces, namely, Central, Copperbelt, Luapula, Muchinga and Northern. The study used qualitative approach, interviews and document analysis methods. Cummins' threshold hypothesis theory guided the research. The study shows that potholes exist in the teaching and learning of Bemba in secondary schools. At the center of common critical potholes is negative attitude by administrators, teachers, pupils as well as parents. There are inadequate teaching and learning materials for effective teaching of the subject. The second pothole is that there is limited time allocated to Bemba. The other pothole is language barrier. The study also shows that there is lack of motivation to teachers of Zambian languages in secondary schools. It is further envisaged that lack of qualified and experienced teachers to teach senior classes is yet another pothole in the teaching of Zambian languages. The above common potholes have contributed to poor academic performance among the Grade Nine and Twelve learners in Bemba in secondary schools in Zambia.

Keywords: barriers; mending; potholes; teaching; threshold hypothesis

1. Introduction

According to Guthrie (1948), Bemba language is classified as M42. Bemba is spoken in Zambia which lies in the center of the Bantu-speaking area. In the context of this paper, a pothole can be described as a hindrance to effective teaching and learning of local languages. In the Zambian education system, Zambian languages belong to the Department of Literature and Languages. The aim of the paper is to contribute to documentary applied linguistics by establishing factors that hinder the effective teaching of Zambian languages in secondary schools. The aim is achieved by identifying the common potholes which affect the effective teaching and learning of Zambian languages. It is also achieved by outlining the possible measures that can be used to alleviate the challenges of effective teaching and learning of Bemba language as a subject.

Bemba is one of the mandated regional official local languages (henceforth, ROL) in Zambia which is spoken in five out of Zambia's ten provinces which include; Northern, Muchinga, Luapula, Copperbelt and the central part of Central Province (Nkolola, 2013). Bemba is among the seven ROL which are taught in Zambia, namely; Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale and Kaonde (cf. Nkolola, 2010). The seven recognized and mandated ROL in Zambia came into force after the change from a one-party system to multiparty democracy in 1991 (cf. Marten and Kula, 2014).

Nkolola (2013) states that although the seven regional lingua franca have been adopted for official use in designated parts of Zambia, their status is unclear and their use in government is ultimately dependent on political whim. The situation is principally based on the Zambian Constitution ACT No. 1 (5) which provides for the use of English as the national official language. The above assumption shows that, although zoning of Zambian languages has been done and that seven languages have been granted regional official status, English language still remains the national official language and medium of instruction in schools and government. However, with about 72 dialects spoken in the

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: psiam@yahoo.com



country, Zambia deserves to be described as a multi-ethnic and multilingual nation (Banda, 1996). The above notion is affirmed by the Ministry of Education in Zambia in the curriculum framework which adheres to the reinforcement of language zones and initial literacy to be conducted in local languages to the first graders (MoE, 2013). The above framework overlooks teaching of local languages in secondary schools and tertiary institutions.

It is envisaged that African languages still hold a low status even after so many years of being independent. It is sad to note that out of 65 countries, indigenous African languages are recognized as official languages in only 10 countries, Arabic in 9, and the remaining 46 African countries have adopted foreign languages as official languages as follows: French in 21 countries, English in 19, Portuguese in 5 and Spanish in 1 (Bamgbose, 1991). Bamgbose (2000:44) qualifies the above argument by stating that affairs of the government are run in foreign languages in most of the African countries such as the media, education and judiciary. This situation limits citizens' participation in the affairs of the nation and is considered as violation of their language rights.

It is disheartening to note that while foreign languages have enough teaching and learning materials in African countries, African languages are still struggling with teaching and learning materials in schools. Lack of teaching and learning resources is the more reason African children fail to read and write their own African languages. Benson (2005) notes that learning to read is most efficient when students know the language and can employ psycholinguistic guessing strategies. Similarly, pupils can communicate through as soon as they understand the rules of the orthographic or written system of their language. This can only be achieved with the availability of resource books.

Experiences in Africa and many parts of the world have shown that cognitive development is achieved faster by using the mother tongue as language of instruction in primary education (Kethelen et al, 2006). Learners find it easy to grasp contents that are taught in their familiar language as opposed to a foreign language. This shows that there are strong links between language of instruction and the participation in a learner centered classroom set up. When learners are taught by a teacher who speaks their local language, it enhances their learning process. Learning in a familiar language also enhances parents' participation in the learning of their children.

This paper problematizes the real life challenges that hinder the effective teaching and learning of Zambian languages in secondary schools with focus on Bemba language. The paper also provides some alternatives that can be used to eradicate the potholes in the teaching of Zambian languages in the light of Bemba to uplift the status of local languages in the country. The paper proceeds as follows: methodology, theoretical framework, results or presentation of findings, discussion of findings and conclusion.

2. Methodology

This was a qualitative study. Data were collected using interviews and document analysis methods. Qualitative research refers to holistic, non-numerical, inductive, subjective and process-oriented methods which are used to understand, describe, interpret and develop a particular theory on a particular setting that is chosen to guide the study (Burns & Grove, 1997). By using abstract thinking processes which qualitative research encourages, meaning and theoretical implications emerge, thereby, satisfying the notion which says qualitative research design is flexible and unique and evolve throughout the research process (cf. Burns & Grove, 1997). The findings of the present study are reported descriptively using sentential expressions to justify the potholes in the teaching of Zambian languages (cf. Mutch, 2005).

The research was conducted in five provinces in Zambia where Bemba language is taught, namely; Copperbelt, Central, Luapula, Muchinga and Northern. Three secondary schools were sampled purposively from each of the named provinces to ascertain the potholes in the teaching and learning of Zambian languages. The sample comprised fifteen secondary schools. Each secondary school had a Head of Department (HoD) and a teacher of Zambian languages (Bemba). Therefore, the study involved thirty respondents tabulated as follows: fifteen HoDs and fifteen subject teachers of Bemba language. Both simple random and purposive sampling were used in this study to ensure that it captured the intended sample. Simple random sampling was done to come up with three schools from each province while purposive sampling was used to come up with fifteen HoDs and fifteen subject teachers of Zambian languages. The researcher used purposive sampling because the study targeted a group of teachers who needed to be

reliable, competent and trustworthy (cf. Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Purposive sampling procedure acted as a guide to the researcher to dwell only on schools that offered Bemba as an optional subject, teachers of Bemba and Heads of Department for languages who had relevant information for the study.

Data analysis went hand in hand with data collection (cf. Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). This involved elicitation, analytical observation, and document analysis as well as reflecting on the comments that were recorded and written down during data collection. This is in tandem with White (2005:186) who says, ‘analysis of qualitative data takes place simultaneously with data collection where the first step requires managing the data so that they can be studied.’ The findings were first transcribed and afterwards presented as verbatim under results section. Some direct quotations from respondents’ responses were included in the text to ensure that the data were authentic. This helped to establish the linguistic competence of the teachers of Bemba and the understanding of the learners. Based on the responses from the interviews, the data were grouped into the identified five common themes or categories. Using the identified themes, interpretations and discussions of findings were made.

3. Theoretical Underpinning

This study adopted Cummins’ (1976) threshold hypothesis theory. The threshold hypothesis theory tries to explain academic achievement differences among bilingual students. It posits that language minority children undergo native language loss, or a shift in language dominance from the first language to the second language, and that the level of linguistic competence attained by a bilingual child may mediate the effects of his or her bilingual learning experiences on cognitive growth (Cummins, 1979). The potholes in the teaching of Zambian languages in secondary schools may be attributed to the fact that pupils may not have reached the highest threshold of linguistic competence in both languages. This can be associated with the abrupt transition of pupils from local languages to English which is done before learners reach linguistic competence in the first language. The lower linguistic competence of pupils continues to secondary level without attaining the highest threshold linguistic competence in both languages.

Cummins classified bilingualism in terms of competence in three levels, namely, balanced bilingualism, dominant bilingualism and semi bilingualism. The cognitive benefits depends on what level a learner has attained. Thus, a balanced bilingual would be a person who is equally highly competent in both languages, whereas a dominant bilingual is more competent in one of the languages. A third group is for a semi-lingual for a person who is not sufficiently competent in either of the languages (Skutnabb-Kangas & Taikmaa, 1976). The effects of bilingualism on learners are in two ways, either positive or negative. If a child has not reached the highest threshold level of bilingualism competence in both languages, his or her cognitive ability will be negatively affected. On the other hand, if a child reaches the highest threshold level of bilingualism competence, that child will have positive cognitive development.

The figure 1 illustrates the levels of bilingualism and their cognitive effects on learners. Based on the threshold hypothesis theory, it can be argued that some of the potholes in teaching and learning Bemba language are as a result of most pupils not reaching the higher threshold level of bilingual proficiency because of the abrupt transition from local languages to English at lower primary level. This in the end affects their performance in Bemba language even at tertiary education level. Cummins (1976) notes that a threshold level of linguistic competence must be attained in order for the beneficial cognitive aspect of bilingualism to come to light.

It can be argued that in as much as the threshold level of linguistic competence influences cognitive development in children, school conditions also play a vital role in ensuring that children reach the highest threshold level of bilingual competence in order to have positive cognitive effects. Learners should have enough time of exposure to learn both languages if they are to attain linguistic competence in both languages. Rossell & Baker (1996:22) argue that ‘The ‘time-on-task’ principle [is] ...the notion that the amount of time spent learning a subject is the greatest predictor of achievement in that subject.’ On the other hand, Porter (1990: 119) defines the time-on-task principle in this way: ‘The more time spent learning a language, the better you do in it, all other factors being equal’. The above arguments justify that enough time should be spent learning Bemba language.

Cummins (1976) does not affirm that linguistic factors on their own are sufficient to explain the positive effects of bilingualism on cognitive development. However, the scholar suggests that the level of competence in both languages

can influence the learning experience and language development. Since the attainment of these threshold is determined by social, attitudinal, educational, and cognitive factors combined, threshold attainment can be said to be an intervention measure rather than a basic casual variable in accounting for the cognitive growth of bilinguals. Apart from linguistic factors, there is need to incorporate other factors such as adequate teaching and learning materials, positive attitude towards the learning of a language from both the learner and the teacher, teacher qualifications and experience among other factors that can help a child to reach the highest threshold level of linguistic competence in language learning. Children need to be helped to reach the highest threshold level of linguistic competence if they are to develop a positive cognitive effect.

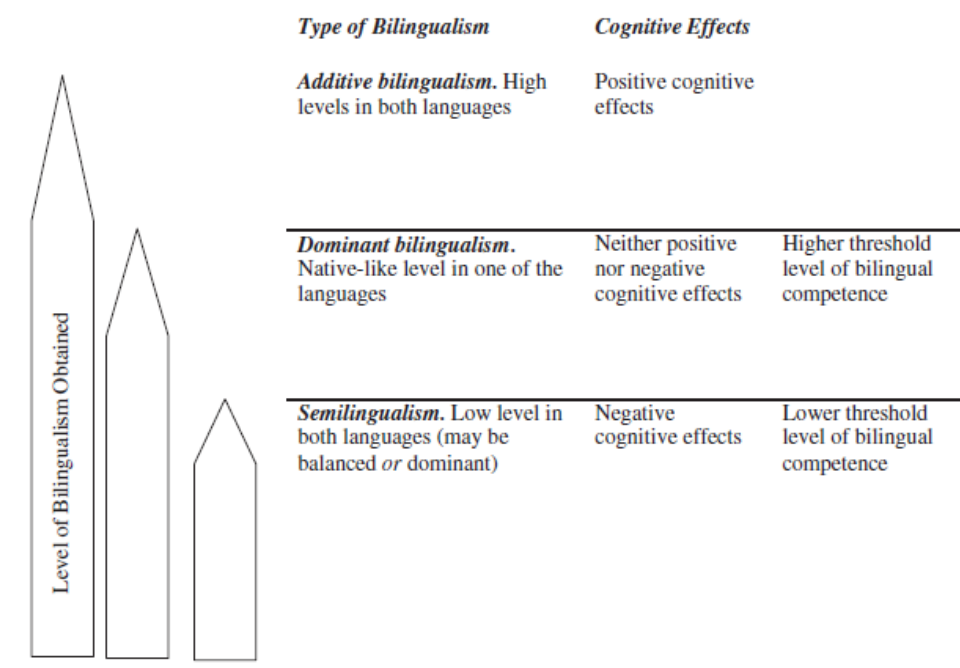


Figure1. The Threshold Hypothesis (Adapted from Cummins, 1979, p. 230)

4. Results of the Study (Presentation of Findings)

The findings revealed some of the challenges that teachers and learners face in the teaching and learning of Bemba. The common challenges are presented using five themes as follows: most schools lack learning and teaching materials, less time allocated to Bemba, language barriers, lack of motivation and inadequate trained teachers in Zambian languages. The results of the study are presented in two categories, namely, findings from interviews with the subject teachers of Bemba followed by interviews with Heads of Department.

4.1 Responses from Subject Teachers on Potholes in the Teaching and Learning of Bemba

4.1.1 Lack of Teaching and Learning Materials

The most prominent challenge of teaching Bemba language in the sampled secondary schools was lack of teaching and learning resource materials. Out of the fifteen schools, only one secondary school said had enough teaching and learning materials for Bemba except for Literature texts. The responses from the other fourteen schools were that, teaching and learning materials were a critical challenge. Every time it was a period for Bemba, pupils just shared books especially Literature texts. In most cases schools just had one copy of each novel in the syllabus. When it was time for Literature in Zambian languages, one pupil read to the whole class while the rest of the class remained quiet to listen attentively.

Another concern was that despite not having enough teaching and learning materials in schools, bookshops too did not seem to have enough stocks of Bemba materials especially Literature books. One subject teacher said:

Some novels that are included in the syllabus are too old to be in curriculum. This becomes very difficult for schools to access them or individual pupils. A novel like 'Africa kuti twabelela uluse lelo teti tulabe' (Literary: Africa can forgive, but cannot forget) is difficult to find and most of the bookshops do not have such old books in stock and yet it is still appears in the syllabus for Literature in Zambian languages.

Teachers of Bemba language attributed the shortage of Literature books to the constant change of novels in the syllabus. They said that Literature books for both junior and senior secondary school grades were changed every year. Each grade had different sets of five novels to read. This made it difficult for schools to purchase three different sets of five books for each stream at senior level per year. This challenge came out in almost all the sampled schools. Another teacher submitted:

The syllabus for Literature in English changes books in the syllabus after five years. Grade Tens, Elevens and Twelve have the same type of novels to read until after a period of five years. The syllabus changes after five years. Nonetheless, the change does not affect all the five books in the syllabus, maybe only one or two texts are changed. The truth is that inconsistency in Bemba Literature syllabus contributes to not having enough materials in schools because administrators are not willing to buy a set of five books for each senior stream taking Bemba. Based on the above reason, most schools do not have enough Literature books. Some administrators would rather buy just a copy for the teacher and maybe a few copies for pupils to share.

It was also observed that there were no textbooks for Grade Twelve learners. The only textbooks available at senior level were for Grade Ten and Eleven learners. Some schools still did not have Grade Eleven textbooks in stock. Even with the same textbooks which were published by Michael Kaingu, commonly known as MK, teachers complained that the contents were below senior secondary standards. One teacher submitted:

I prefer using the old junior textbooks when teaching Grade Twelve to using MK Grade Ten and Eleven textbooks which are not written to senior standards and are full of competence and performance linguistic errors.

When asked how they were managing to teach Grade Twelve learners without textbooks, one teacher responded:

Teachers improvise the teaching and learning materials especially for senior grades. Sometimes, teachers use past papers which have proved to be helpful when teaching Grade Twelve learners more especially comprehension lessons. In many situations, English books are used to extract passages for topics such as translation. We just improvise our own materials to help us teach the learners. In order to teach Grade Twelve pupils effectively, one has to be very resourceful and innovative.

The cry of not having enough teaching and learning materials was heard in almost all the sampled secondary schools where Bemba is taught. The greatest challenge being Literature books where some of the books that were included in the syllabus were too old to be used and were no longer published. This made it difficult to find such books on the market. Sadly, for the books which were found on the market, schools just had a copy for the teacher of each novel in the syllabus, and if they had more, they were not enough to cater for all the pupils taking Bemba. Grade Twelve textbooks were not available because they had not yet been published. The findings show that there was a great challenge in schools for both teaching and learning materials.

4.1.2 Inadequate Time Allocation

Another challenge that was mentioned was inadequate time allocated to Bemba language on the timetable. Teachers complained that time was not enough to cover the syllabus. One teacher submitted:

Bemba language is just the same as English. It is also a language which should be allocated equal periods with English. It is not fair that English should have more periods than Bemba when both are languages and both require enough time for effective teaching and learning to take place.

Another subject teacher added:

Even if Bemba language is allocated less periods than English, it is more bulky than English because of the Literature component. Literature in English is taught as a subject but for Bemba it is combined and taught as one subject. This makes it bulky and difficult to cover the syllabus in the less periods that are allocated to Bemba language.

Teachers also complained about secondary school administrators who had reduced the time allocation for Bemba in order to benefit other subjects. One teacher lamented on less time allocated to Bemba at the expense of other subjects regardless of what had been stated in the education curriculum framework (MoE, 2013). The teacher submitted that:

According to the curriculum framework, Bemba is allocated 5 periods per week, but this is not what is obtaining on the ground. In reality, schools have allocated less periods to Bemba. Like at this school, only 4 periods have been allocated to Bemba per week. The other period has been given to English language.

This tendency by administrators of allocating less periods than what has been approved in the education curriculum framework is a serious pothole which must be checked and requires mending. Subject teachers of Bemba language condemned the act by some administrators and indicated that it was one of the reasons they failed to cover the syllabus on time.

4.1.3 Language Barriers

Language barrier is the inability to communicate between people who are unable to speak a common language. It is experienced by people or groups of people who speak different languages or even dialects and are found in the same environment. The findings show that language barrier was a major problem that both teachers and pupils faced when it came to learning of Bemba. All the sampled teachers mixed Bemba with some English words when teaching. When asked why, one teacher who was trained to teach both languages, that is, English and Linguistics and African languages responded:

It is not easy to stick to Bemba language when teaching. This is because I teach both English and Bemba and there is interference between the two languages. So, I find myself code-switching when am teaching Bemba.

Another teacher who had been posted from Southern Province where Tonga is the ROL to Northern Province where Bemba is spoken gave his views on language barrier:

The Ministry of Education should take note of the language background of teachers before they post them. I have a lot of challenges in teaching Bemba because I am not fluent in Bemba. Due to lack of teachers to teach the subject, I have no option, but to come in to cover for the shortage of Zambian languages teachers regardless of the challenges I have with Bemba language.

The language barrier was as a result of some teachers and pupils migrating from other non-Bemba speaking provinces to the five provinces under study where Bemba is the ROL.

Another teacher submitted the challenges of teaching Bemba at senior level:

Some of the pupils who are allocated Bemba have no background of the language. Some of them attended private schools where Bemba was neither spoken nor taught. This makes it difficult for them to learn this language. On the contrary, some pupils came from provinces where Bemba was neither taught nor used for communication. It becomes difficult for them to start learning Bemba in Grade Ten. This is the reason our results in Bemba are usually poor.

One teacher complained on how the language had been diluted with words which are not Bemba. The teacher said:

Bemba which is spoken in the five sampled provinces is diluted. Pupils do not speak or write the standard Bemba which is found in books. This makes it difficult for them to read and comprehend standard Bemba which is written in textbooks.

Another teacher added:

Compositions in Bemba that some of our pupils write are so pathetic that you cannot figure out what language they have used. Our Grade Twelve learners write like Grade Eights. Even when you are marking, you have to concentrate to get sense from what they have written before you award marks.

The provinces under study face great challenges in terms of learning the standard Bemba which is used in textbooks because they are multilingual societies. This is so due to variations in the phonotactics between dialects and Bemba which is the ROL of the five sampled provinces.

4.1.4 Lack of Motivation

Another challenge was that teachers feel unappreciated. They complained about not enjoying certain benefits of being teachers of Zambian languages such as promotions, workshops and sponsorship to upgrade from the government which is different from the way teachers of science and mathematics are treated. For instance, they are sponsored under fast track program. One teacher submitted:

There is no motivation in being a teacher of Zambian languages. That is why Zambian languages teachers change at degree level and study other courses. This is so because teachers of Zambian languages are in most cases not considered for promotions. Heads of Languages Department in most secondary schools are those that have done English language and not Zambian languages.

Lack of motivation by either administrators or the Ministry of Education explains why there is critical shortage of teachers of Zambian languages in secondary schools.

Another teacher submitted that:

Zambian languages teachers are given a lower status in schools. Even when it comes to attending workshops, Zambian languages teachers are left out. In most cases, teachers of English are the ones who are invited for workshops. It is highly pronounced that workshops are good for professional development, but with Zambian languages teachers, the case is different as we are not given that chance to develop professionally through workshops.

Regarding the issue of professional development, one teacher stated that teachers of Zambian languages are usually left out even in programs that directly concern them, such as, Grade Nine final examination marking exercise. The teacher lamented that:

It is so unfortunate that at Grade Nine marking centres, teachers of Home Economics are engaged to mark Bemba scripts leaving us who are trained to do the work. We feel so inferior and greatly demoralized. Zambian languages are taken for granted where any person can do the work even when one is not trained. This is unacceptable!

Teachers of Zambian languages feel unappreciated as they do not enjoy certain benefits that teachers of other subjects enjoy, such as attending workshops, promotions to head departments as well as marking final examination scripts for junior secondary school learners. This tendency affects teachers of Zambian languages and consequently demotivates them. Some teachers end up changing their subjects at degree level. They switch to other subjects which they think would be beneficial to their future endeavours which consequently leaves Bemba section understaffed.

4.1.5 Lack of Qualified Personnel to Teach Bemba

The study shows that the majority of the teachers had been trained to teach Bemba at junior secondary level but not qualified to teach senior classes. Those who were trained to teach junior classes used their experience to teach the subject at senior level. From the 15 subject teachers who were sampled, seven teachers were seconded to teach Bemba, three teachers had diplomas in Zambian languages, two teachers had degrees in Linguistics and African Languages while the other three teachers had diplomas in Zambian languages but had obtained degrees in other subjects which replaced Zambian languages.

Bemba is perceived to be a subject where one can teach even when not trained to teach the subject. When teachers of Bemba were asked if there was any need for qualified teachers to teach Zambian languages or to just use the experience one had with the spoken language, this is what one teacher had to say:

There is need for teachers to be trained in Zambian languages such as Bemba. The reason is that there is more to Bemba as a subject than what people perceive it. Most people think that Bemba is all about ampinda nensoselo 'Proverbs and sayings'. When they hear you reading novels of Bemba, what comes into their mind is that you are just telling fairy tales.

Another teacher added:

Spoken Bemba and written Bemba are two different things and one needs to learn the rules and principles of grammar before one can deliver to the class. One needs to learn the morphological and phonological aspects of the language before one can enter a class of Bemba to teach. This can only be done through training. Some people think that by virtue of being Bemba by tribe, it is a qualification enough to teach the subject, which is a wrong perception.

Another teacher explained why teachers of Bemba needed to have both the experience and training. She stated that:

Teachers of Zambian languages need training just like teachers of other subjects. Those who know very well how to speak Bemba and think they can teach it as a subject, they are mistaken. When speaking the language, people use sentences anyhow as long as the listener understands what is being said. However, when it comes to written discourse, the sentence must be well structured and must follow the rules of grammar for you to be marked correct. This can only be understood by a person who has been trained. There are so many aspects of a language that an untrained teacher of language cannot understand. Aspects such as the phonology, morphology, syntax and the semantics of language. All these components need to be mastered for someone to be deemed fit to teach Bemba. People who claim that they can teach Bemba without any training should be considered to be ignorant of what they claim to know.

Another teacher further stressed the importance of training. She submitted that:

One needs to be trained in order to know how to handle the subject in class. It is during the training course that the methodology is taught. All the techniques and approaches on how to handle the subject in class are learnt during the course of training. Hence, one cannot be an effective teacher of Bemba or any other Zambian languages without undergoing training. The teachers who are seconded to teach Bemba struggle at first, but through experience and help from trained teachers they get acquainted to the rules and grammar of the subject. Nonetheless, their effectiveness in teaching cannot be compared to those who have been trained to teach Zambian languages either at diploma or degree level.

The teacher who was seconded to teach Bemba was asked to comment if one needs to be trained or not in order to teach the language based subject effectively. His response was:

Yes, one needs to be trained to be able to teach Bemba. I have been teaching Bemba because the school lacks teachers of Zambian languages. What has helped me a lot is studying a lot of materials in Bemba. At first it was not easy, but with commitment and love for the subject, I have improved my teaching skills. I actually enjoy teaching Bemba more than my subjects in which I was trained which are History and physical Education. In fact, I have more classes and periods of Bemba than classes of Geography and Civic Education. I can say the fifteen years of experience that I have in teaching Bemba have made me a better teacher in Bemba. I have succeeded through commitment to reading enough books that I found relevant to the subject which has helped me especially materials from Africa correspondence college in those days.

The above responses show that it is necessary for teachers to be qualified to teach Bemba and other local languages both at junior and senior secondary levels.

4.2 Responses from Heads of Department on Challenges of Teaching Bemba

On teaching and learning materials, most Heads of Department (HoDs) said that, the allocation that departments were given was not enough to cater for the purchase of books in all the five sections of the department which include; English, Literature in English, French, Chinese and Zambian languages. HoDs said that, sometimes the Ministry of Education assisted in providing teaching and learning materials for English section in the department.

Another challenge was that some of the books were not readily available in bookshops where they could be purchased. Photocopying them was another challenge as most of the books had big volumes. One of them narrated how they had gone to buy some Bemba novels only to be told that they were not in stock in bookshops. One HoD narrated that:

Apparently the school central administration gave us some money to purchase Literature books and textbooks in Bemba. However, when we went round the bookshops, we did not find the books we were looking for. The shortage of Bemba books in bookshops is another challenge which we are facing.

When Heads of Department were asked if administrators had supported them when it came to purchasing of teaching and learning resource materials; some said they did, but that it also depended on the financial stand of the school if it had money to purchase books. One HoD said:

All departments in the school are allocated 10 percent from the school income. From that 10 percent, all the departments in the school are supposed to share and purchase books for their sections. Now when you look at 10 percent to be shared among all the departments in the school that, the amount is too little to even meet half the needs of one department.

Another HoD submitted:

It all depends on the nature of an administrator because some administrators have no interest in promoting the teaching and learning of Zambian languages. This makes administrators adamant to the plea when we ask for the purchase of Zambian languages materials.

Lack of teaching and learning resources is a challenge which HoDs cannot address without the support of administrators. HoDs also said that the negative attitude towards the subject by both teachers and pupils had made Bemba to lose popularity and phased out some classes in most of the schools.

5. Discussion of Findings

The challenges which were common were that teaching and learning materials were not adequate in secondary schools especially at senior level, time allocated for Bemba was not enough to cover the syllabus, language barrier and lack of motivation to teachers teaching Bemba in terms of promotions sponsorship for upgrade and attending workshops as well as unqualified staff. The above five themes are analysed below:

5.1 Lack of Teaching and Learning Materials

The findings reveal that teachers improvise their own teaching materials to use which include past papers. This correlates with Banda et al, (2012) who outline that the problems which Zambia is facing include lack of teaching material in African languages and high pupil-teacher ratio which leads to overcrowded classes. This pothole makes understanding and comprehending of learners difficult as they do not have hands on what they read. Lack of teaching and learning resources in schools have resulted in most pupils not knowing how to read and write despite being in senior grades. Pupils do not have access to Bemba books for them to practice how to read and this makes it difficult for them to improve their reading and writing skills. It hinders them from reaching the linguistic competence which may result into a positive cognitive effect hence improving their performance in Bemba (cf. Cummins, 1976 & 1979).

The findings of the study show that some pupils from Grade Ten to Twelve term one had never had chance to hold a novel. Benson (2005) suggests that learning to read is most efficient when students know the language and can

employ psycholinguistic guessing strategies. This shows that learners can communicate effectively when they understand the rules of the orthographic or written system of their local languages. Psycholinguistic guessing can only be possible where pupils are able to see what is being read and when they are in contact with what they are reading (cf. Benson, 2005). This can be possible where textbooks and supplementary books are enough for secondary school pupils to read even in their spare time. The scarcity of teaching and learning materials hinders the effective teaching and learning of Bemba. Lack of teaching and learning materials also makes teaching and learning of Zambian languages less effective. Textbooks make the lesson to run smoothly as both the teacher and pupils follow each other well at every stage of the lesson. It is important to note that there are concepts which cannot be clearly explained by the teacher, but can best be understood by seeing them illustrated in a textbook. Therefore, lack of teaching and learning resources makes the teaching and learning of Bemba difficult for both the teacher and the pupils.

The findings also show that teachers preferred using junior secondary textbooks to Grade 10 and 11 textbooks published by MK. The reasons were that books published by MK were of low standards and were full of unbearable errors. This shows that it is difficult for a teacher to do a good work with a dull text (cf. Nuttall, 1982). The study shows that teachers found it difficult to teach Grade Twelve learners due to lack of teaching and learning resources in schools. Teachers had to be resourceful and innovative for them to teach effectively.

The study also reveal that school libraries and Bemba section in Languages Departments were poorly stocked with Bemba books. Schools libraries had no study materials for Bemba, but were well stocked with books and past papers for other subjects. This shows that teaching and learning resources as well as study materials for Bemba were not adequate in secondary schools. It can be argued that there is a positive relationship between instructional resources and academic performance which shows that schools which are stocked with more materials perform better than schools that have less materials.

5.2 Inadequate Time Allocation

Time allocated to Bemba on the school timetable was not enough to cover the syllabus. Some sampled schools had four periods while others had three periods per week. The four periods were divided into two periods of double periods each implying that teachers met pupils twice per week. On the other hand, schools with three periods per week had a double and a single period. Looking at the number of periods allocated to Bemba in the sampled schools, it is clear that schools are not operating according to the education curriculum framework (MoE, 2013) which has allocated five periods to Zambian languages and six periods to English language. This made it difficult for teachers to cover the syllabus adequately. The study also shows that Zambian languages were more bulky than English language because of the component of literature where pupils are supposed to read five novels and answer four in the examination at senior level. This affected pupil' performance because by the time they were to write the examination, they would not have covered the syllabus especially in literature. As Rossell & Baker (1996:22) puts it, 'The 'time-on-task' principle [is] ...the notion that the amount of time spent learning a subject is the greatest predictor of achievement in that subject.' This shows that allocating less time to Bemba is an indirect way of asking learners to fail the subject.

The study further reveals that Bemba lessons were taught in haste due to inadequate time allocated to the subject. Stern (1992:298) advocates for well-defined periods to be allocated to learning the mother tongue, in which the use of mother tongue is allowed so that questions can be asked, meanings can be verified, uncertainties can be removed, and explanations given which would not be accessible to the learner in second language. Administrators should follow the allocation of periods according to what has been suggested in the curriculum framework of (MoE, 2013) to enable teachers teach Bemba effectively and cover the syllabus with a peace of mind.

5.3 Language Barriers

Language barrier was one of the factors affecting poor performance among Grade Nine and Twelve learners in the sampled provinces. Some Zambian languages teachers are not fluent enough to deliver the lesson in Bemba. The revelation that some teachers teach Bemba in English while others use most of the English words when teaching Bemba is contrary to the social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) which says that the one helping learners to know something should be someone who knows more or is better than them such as an older peer, adult or teacher. Teachers are role models who are expected to avoid code-switching when teaching Zambian languages.

The study also reveals that the Bemba spoken in the sampled provinces was different from the standard Bemba found in textbooks because it was a mixture of other languages which are predominantly spoken in such areas. Mwanza (2012) observes that while the standard forms of the seven regional languages in Zambia exist in written form and spoken only in selected parts of the country, other areas especially urban spaces speak ‘town dialects’ of the language which is characterized with borrowing and translanguaging as the common language practice. Thus, the standard varieties as prescribed in textbooks are not the only used forms of Zambian languages (Mwanza, 2016:40). Adegbiya (1994:104) observes that under the circumstances, where no efforts are made to use indigenous languages in education till the end of primary education, teachers and learners may tend to naturally develop negative attitude towards indigenous languages and cultures. The above scenario affected learners’ performance in Bemba as it is hard to develop interest in the subject at secondary school level.

Language barrier was one of the reasons some pupils failed to translate a passage from English to Bemba. Pupils’ translated the passage with a mixture of English words and some words which were from other dialects as presented in the results. Due to language barriers, teachers and pupils found teaching and learning of Bemba difficult because they did not speak fluently.

5.4 Lack of Motivation

Zambian languages teachers feel unappreciated. They are not motivated in terms of incentives such as promotions and attending workshops. The study reveals that teachers trained in English language had higher chances of being promoted as Heads of Languages Department unlike those trained in Zambian languages with no combination of English. Mutono (2010) cites factors affecting teacher motivation in secondary schools which include; low salaries, lack of accommodation, lack of promotion opportunities and lack of teaching and learning materials as some of the causes of low motivation among teachers. There is need for language teachers to continue growing professionally and that includes teachers of Zambian languages. ECZ (2015:30) advocates that, ‘Head teachers should encourage all language teachers to attend Languages Teachers’ Association of Zambia (LATAZ) meetings in order to share experiences and learn from each other.’ The above trend should be upheld by all Head teachers in secondary schools.

5.5 Lack of Trained and Experienced Teachers of Bemba

The study establishes that most teachers were qualified to teach junior classes and not senior grades as they were still diploma holders in Zambian languages. This shows that senior classes are still being handled by unqualified teachers with diplomas. According to the standards set by the Ministry of Education, degree holders are the ones that are supposed to teach senior classes. The guidelines of who should teach a particular grade have been outlined in MoE (1996:10) stating that Diploma-level teachers should teach Grades 8 and 9 and should be trained in the Teachers’ Colleges while Graduate teachers should handle Grades 10-12 and should be trained at universities.

What is obtaining on the ground is contrary to what is stated in ‘Educating our Future’ as most teachers of Bemba handling senior classes still have diplomas in Zambian languages and this makes them not to qualify to handle senior classes. Zambian languages should be treated with the same dignity and esteem as English language because they are both languages. McCarty (2003) argues that the only strategy for teaching languages is through teacher training. He continues to say, being a fluent speaker does not automatically make one a skilled teacher because a first language teacher is often unaware of the difficulties of learning a language. Training is, therefore, important to qualify teachers to teach at every level, that is, primary, junior secondary as well as senior secondary. There is need to recognise that professional teachers must be well educated, especially in the subject matter or content they teach, and that their career-long professional education experiences must continue to be grounded in the centrality of that content (Shulman, 2000:xiii). Brown et al, (1994) state that no matter how kind, amiable and well-meaning a teacher may be, he or she cannot possibly succeed unless he/she has a thorough knowledge of the subject matter he/she is teaching and a good general knowledge. This shows that an effective teacher is one who has undergone training.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, the researcher concludes that potholes exist in the teaching and learning of Zambian languages in secondary schools. The most critical source of potholes is negative attitude from administrators, teachers, pupils as well as parent. Secondary schools have inadequate teaching and learning materials in Zambian languages. The third

pothole is limited time allocation to Bemba language which makes teachers fail to cover the syllabus. The other pothole is language barrier which results into code-switching during teaching of Zambian languages. The paper also outlines that lack of motivation to teachers teaching Bemba is another serious pothole. It is further envisaged that lack of qualified and experienced teachers to teach senior classes is yet another pothole in the teaching of Zambian languages. All these potholes have contributed to the poor performance among Grade Nine and Twelve learners in Bemba in secondary schools. It is, therefore, expedient that the concerned stakeholders should strive to mend the identified potholes and provide lasting solutions to the challenges of teaching local languages.

References

- Adegbija, E. (1994). *Language attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa. A Sociolinguistic Overview*. Bristol: Longdunn Press.
- Bamgbose, A. (2000). *Language and exclusion: The consequences of language policies in Africa*: Hamburg, London: LIT VERLAG Münster
- Bamgbose, A. (1991). *Language and the nation. The language question in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Banda, D., Mostert, L., & Wikan, G. (2012). *The language of education policy implementation, practice and learning outcomes in Zambia, Namibia and Norway*. Forfatterne/Høgskolen i Hedmark.
- Banda, F. (1996). In search of the lost tongue: Prospect for mother tongue education in Zambia. In: *Language Culture and Curriculum*. Vol. 9:2, 109-119.
- Benson, C. (2005). The importance of mother-tongue based schooling for educational quality. Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005. *The Quality Imperative*. UNESCO.
- Brown et al. (1994). *Curriculum and instruction. An introduction to methods of teaching*. Accra: Macmillan Education ltd.
- Burns, N. & Grove, S. K. (1997). *Qualitative approach*. New York: (Publisher Unknown).
- Cummins, J. (1976). The influence of bilingualism on cognitive growth: A synthesis of research findings and explanatory hypotheses'. *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, 9, 1-43
- Cummins, J. (1979). Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of Educational Research*, 49, 222-251.
- ECZ (2015). *Examination performance review report*. Lusaka: Examination Council of Zambia
- Guthrie, M. (1948). *The classification of the Bantu languages: International African Institute*. London: Oxford University.
- Kathleen, H., Berhanu, B., & Gebre, Y. (2006). *Study on the medium of instruction in the primary schools of Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia.
- Kombo, D. K. & Tromp, D. L. A. (2006). *Proposal and thesis writing: An introduction*. Nairobi: Pauline Publication Africa.
- Marten, L. and Kula, N. C. (2014). *One Zambia, one nation, many languages*. It is available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264824740>.
- McCarty, T. (2003). Revitalizing indigenous languages in homogenizing times. *Comparative Education*, 39(2), 147-163.
- MoE (1996). *Educating our future*. Lusaka: Zambia Education Publishing House (ZEPH).
- MoE (2013). *National literacy framework (CDC)*. Lusaka: Zambia Education Publishing House (ZEPH).
- Mugenda, O. and Mugenda, A. (1999). *Research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approach*. Nairobi: ACTS.

- Mutch, C. (2005). *Doing education research: A practitioners' guide to getting started*. Wellington: NCZER.
- Mutono, V. (2010). *Factors affecting teacher motivation in Zambia: The case of selected high schools of Lusaka Province* (Unpublished Dissertation). Lusaka: University of Zambia
- Mwanza, D.S. (2016). *A critical reflection on eclecticism in the teaching of English grammar at selected Zambian secondary schools* (PhD Thesis). Cape Town: University of the Western Cape.
- Mwanza, D.S. (2012). *The language of initial literacy in a Cosmopolitan environment: A case of Cinyanja in Lusaka District* (Masters Dissertation). Lusaka: University of Zambia.
- Nkolola, W. M. (2013). A critical analysis of Zambia's language in education policy: Challenges and lessons learned. In: H. McIlwraith (Ed.). *Multilingual Education in Africa: Lessons from the Juba Language-in- Education Conference*. London: 10 Spring Garden.
- Nkolola, M.M. (2010). The discourse of “call boys” and minibus conductors in Zambia: A hybrid sociolect of identity. In: *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 5(2), 131-156
- Nuttal, C. (1982). *Reading: Testing and assessments techniques*. Second Edition. Kent: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Patten, A. (2001). 'Political theory and language policy.' *Political Theory*. 29:691-715.
- Porter, R. P. (1990). *Forked tongue. The politics of bilingual education*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rossell, C. H., & Baker, K. (1996). The educational effectiveness of bilingual education. *Research in the teaching of English*, 30(1), 7-74.
- Schulman, L. S. (2000). Teacher development: Roles of domain expertise and pedagogical knowledge. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 21, 129-135.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. & Toukomaa, P. (1976). 'Teaching migrant children's mother tongue and learning the language of the host country in the context of the socio-cultural situation of the migrant family'. Department of Sociology and Social Psychology. University of Tampere. *Research reports* No. 19.
- Stern, H. H. (1992). *Issues and options in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge: Harvard University.
- White, C. J. (2005). *Research: A practical guide*. Pretoria: Ithuthuko Investment.