

# Language-in-education policy in Zambia: The case of teaching in a regional official language at a selected mission school in Lusaka

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## Abstract

Upon gaining independence in 1964, the Zambian government embraced English as the official language for education, media, legislation, and all governmental functions. This choice followed extensive discussions on whether to adopt English or a Zambian language as the national language for classroom instruction. Despite arguments in favour of both English and Zambian languages, English ultimately prevailed. This paper delves into the language-in-education policy, with a particular focus on the 2014 Zambia education policy. The study's main objective is to investigate the impact of using Cinyanja, a regional official language, as the medium of classroom instruction for teachers and learners at a selected mission (private) school in Lusaka. Qualitative data was gathered from the school, with four teachers and twenty learners randomly selected from a population of 200 and interviewed individually. Additionally, direct observation was employed as a data collection method. The study revealed that implementing the revised 2014 education policy is challenging because the language used for teaching is considered a second language yet the teaching/learning methods and materials are designed for first language learners. This presents a hurdle for teachers and learners, who must grapple with learning both the language of instruction and the subject matter.

*Keywords:* Cinyanja, Regional Official Language, Lusaka Nyanja, Language-in-Education Policy, Zambia.

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## 1. Introduction

The role of language in human communication and education is crucial in various aspects of human activity. It is essential for every country, especially those with a diverse range of languages, to establish clear language policies that standardize the use of language in specific domains such as education and formal settings. Consequently, countries worldwide have developed language policies, particularly in the field of education. This need is even more pronounced in multilingual countries like Zambia. Therefore, upon gaining independence in 1964, Zambia, being a multilingual country, had to establish a clear language policy for education. This resulted in the selection of English as the official language for administrative purposes and classroom instruction from primary to tertiary levels. Over the years, the Ministry of Education in Zambia has formulated and revised several language-in-education policies. For example, Simwinga (2007) has observed that the Ministry of Education in Zambia has consistently formulated and revised language-in-education policies to align with the country's needs, particularly in the realm of education. Additionally, Kirkkari (2020) has linked the reviews of language in education policy to Zambia's multilingual linguistic landscape, which necessitates continuous revisions. The most recent review of the language-in-education policy took place between 2011 and 2014. This policy will be discussed later.

Zambia is home to approximately twenty-four language clusters spoken by the native population (Kashoki, 1978), in addition to minority languages including foreign languages such as Hindi, French, Swahili, and Chinese, making it a highly multilingual country. Despite this linguistic diversity, only seven Zambian languages have been designated official status for administrative purposes and as languages of instruction in schools in their respective regions where they serve as lingua franca. These languages are Bemba (spoken in the northern region, including the Copperbelt, Northern, Luapula, Muchinga provinces, and parts of the Central province), Lozi (spoken in the western region for the Western province), Nyanja (spoken in the Eastern region and Lusaka for the Eastern and Lusaka provinces), and Tonga (spoken in the Southern region for the Southern province and parts of the Central province). For the North

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Western region, Kaonde, Lunda, and Luvale were designated for the North-Western Province. Despite designating these seven regional languages as official, English, a foreign language, has remained the only official language of the nation since independence and is the only language constitutionally recognized in the 1991 Zambian Constitution.

English has been the predominant language of instruction in Zambian classrooms across all levels of education since gaining independence, despite the country's multilingual population and their proficiency in local languages. Recently, there has been a discussion about the importance of using local languages to introduce literacy to children. The argument is that children learn more effectively in their mother tongues compared to a foreign language. As a result, there is a growing consensus that children should be taught using a local or familiar language during their formative school years to facilitate a smoother academic journey. This argument is supported by the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (2013: 19).

While numerous studies have examined the role of local languages in government/public schools, there is a noticeable lack of research on their use in mission schools, which are often considered to be better managed than government schools. This is evident in the academic performance of students in mission schools, which typically exceeds that of students in government schools. This discrepancy may explain the limited scholarly interest in investigating government policies within these schools. Mission schools are often run by churches with limited or no support from the government. These schools are often known for high standards of teaching and learning and discipline among learners.

### *1.1. Motivation for the study*

This study aimed to investigate the impact of the 2014 language-in-education policy at Medado Joseph Cardinal Mazombwe (MEJOCAMA for short), a Catholic school in Lusaka, Zambia. This school was chosen because it is one of the few mission schools that uses the Regional Official Language (ROL) Cinyanja as the medium of instruction for early literacy. The paper seeks to explore the challenges faced by teachers and learners in teaching and learning in Cinyanja, which Banda (1996) has described as a rural variety of Chewa spoken in the Eastern province but used for teaching and learning in Lusaka province. Mwanza (2012) agrees with Banda (1996) that the Cinyanja spoken in Lusaka province is indeed quite different from what is considered as the ROL Cinyanja used as a language of classroom instruction.

The motivation for this study was that most research on language in education policy had focused on public schools, despite some mission schools implementing the same language-in-education policies for their learners. It is important to note that whenever the acronym ROL appears, we are referring to Cinyanja as a regional official language.

### *1.2. Statement of the problem*

Several studies have been conducted on language in education policy in Zambia. Some have looked into the use of English in Zambian schools (Baker, 1983; Kashina, 1994; Ohannessian, 2017). Others have examined the status of local languages in education (Mwanakatwe, 1968; Manchishi, 2004; Simwinga, 2007), while Banda (1996) has focused on the problems associated with the implementation of mother tongue education in Zambia (cf. Simachenya and Mambwe, 2023). Additional studies on local languages used for classroom instruction have focused on factors that affect effective breakthrough to initial literacy among learners in early Grades in Zambian schools (e.g. Zimba, 2007; Matafwali, 2010; Mwambazi, 2011; Mulenga, 2012; Mwanza, 2012). Furthermore, the role of regional official languages as languages of classroom instruction was also investigated by Banda and Mwanza (2017) who argued that the use of regional official languages has impaired initial literacy development in multilingual contexts in Zambia, citing the case of Tumbuka and Nyanja in Eastern Province (see also Zimba, 2007). While factors that contribute to low literacy levels in Zambian public schools have been investigated, there is a lack of information on the role of ROLs in mission schools, despite implementing the same language in education policy as is the case in public schools. Therefore, the main question for investigation is: what is the impact of ROL on teachers and learners at a selected Catholic mission school in Lusaka? This investigation will help fill the gap regarding the benefits and challenges of ROL in a mission school with learners of diverse backgrounds in Zambia.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Language-in-education pre-independence era*

The issue of language policy in Zambia has roots in the pre-independence era. During this time, the colonial government promoted the use of local languages as the medium of instruction in the early years of a child's

education. It was common practice for schools in Northern Rhodesia to use local languages as the medium of instruction from Grade one to four. After Grade five, English would replace local languages as the medium of instruction. This approach was observed in indigenous schools not directly supervised by the missionaries as well. The missionaries prioritized local languages over English in the early grades. In response to this issue, the British Government, based on the recommendation from the Phelps-stoke Commission, selected four Zambian indigenous languages (Cibemba, Cinyanja, Citonga, and Silozi) to be used as the medium of instruction in the early years of a child's education. This emphasis on local languages marked the beginning of language-in-education policy formulation in Northern Rhodesia, now known as Zambia (Banda and Mwanza, 2017).

## *2.2. Language-in-education policy in Zambia*

After gaining independence in 1964, Zambia needed a language-in-education policy. As a result, English was chosen as the official language for instruction in schools from Grade 1 to tertiary level, while the seven local languages were to be taught as academic subjects. This decision was made to promote national unity and to address the lack of resources and qualified teachers for teaching in local languages immediately after independence. English was also seen as a language for wider communication and was associated with pride and social status, unlike the local languages.

However, the "straight-for-English" approach did not achieve the desired results, leading to subsequent reviews of the education policy. The 1977 policy recommended using local languages for early childhood literacy, the 1992 policy suggested using community language from Grade 1 to 4, and the 1996 policy statement proposed using familiar languages for initial literacy and numeracy, with English as the language of instruction for other subjects. The 1998 policy introduced the "New Breakthrough to Literacy" program, emphasizing the use of familiar languages to teach literacy in Grade 1.

In 2011, the Ministry of Education promoted and emphasized the use of local languages for initial literacy through the Primary Reading Programme (PRP). The 2013 Education policy further emphasized the use of local languages for early childhood literacy from Grade 1 to 4 in all primary schools in Zambia, and this policy has been in effect since 2014.

The policy on education recognises the use of familiar Zambian languages as the official languages of instruction in the Pre-Schools and early Grades (Grades 1-4). All the teaching and learning in all the learning areas at the Lower Primary level will be in familiar Zambian Languages. English will be offered as a subject, beginning at Grade 2. [...] In Zambia, the seven (7) zone languages; Cinyanja, Chitonga, Icibemba, Kikaonde, Lunda, Luvale and Silozi as well as the widely used community languages in specific school catchment areas will be used for this purpose [...]. English will still remain as the official medium of instruction beginning at Grade 5 up to tertiary education (The Zambia Education Curriculum Framework 2013, 19).

The 2014 language-in-education policy encourages the use of local languages for classroom instruction. However, the use of English as medium of instruction from Grade 5 until tertiary level still gives English supremacy over local languages which are only taught as subjects from Grade 5.

## *2.3. Studies on local language education policy in Zambia*

Many studies have been conducted on language in education policy in Zambia with a view to establishing the most effective language of initial literacy for learners (Tambulukani and Bus, 2012; Mwansa, 2017; Chibesakunda and Mulenga, 2019). Another study by Banda and Mwanza (2017) discussed translanguaging in multilingual classrooms and argued that the use of regional official languages have impaired initial literacy development in multilingual contexts in Zambia. They recommended that in a multilingual environment like Zambia, teaching would be better done through the use of multiple languages which should also include the hybrid forms. They argue that this approach would encourage pupils' involvement resulting in a learner-driven and centered approach. Similar arguments are advanced by Mubanga (2012) who investigated the use of Cinyanja in a Soli-dominated community of Chongwe district and revealed that it was difficult for learners to develop literacy skill mediated by Nyanja a regional official language of Lusaka province because their home language was not Nyanja.

Another study by Chishiba and Manchishi (2016) reviewed different language policies and language documents which have been introduced in the education system from 1924 to 2014. The observation is that due to the challenges faced by learners to break through to literacy, the Zambian Government has reverted to the pre-colonial and colonial

era education system where local languages were used as media of instruction in all subjects during early childhood schooling. Therefore, the 2014 local language policy is supported by empirical evidence that learners in the lower Grades learn better in a mother tongue. This is supported by Kafata (2016) who investigated the impact of teaching in a local language on pupils and teachers in selected schools in Kitwe district of the Copperbelt Province in Zambia. The findings revealed that the use of a local language as a medium of instruction from Grade 1-4 in Kitwe was beneficial to most pupils because they were able to grasp concepts faster. Thus, their class participation improved greatly. However, this was not the case for learners who came from other provinces.

In reflecting on the 2014 language policy, Banda and Mwanza (2020) wanted to establish the preparedness of the Ministry of Education in implementing the 2014 regional official language policy. It was established that the problem was not just the lack of consultation with the critical stakeholders but also that enforcing regional official languages as media of instruction from Grades 1-4 reflected the colonial mentality to stratify English and regional official languages to the detriment of the unofficial languages. Therefore, Banda and Mwanza (2017) recommended a blended approach to teaching and learning called translanguaging, which refers to the purposeful pedagogical alternative of language in spoken, written, receptive and productive modes to overcome challenges associated with former approaches (see also Hornberger and Link, 2012:262). In this approach, teaching can be done in standard Nyanja /English, Bemba, Tonga, etc., while learners would be free to also respond in different language varieties.

Another study by Simwinda (2014) examined major factors that informed the formulation and implementation of language in education policy in Zambia from 1964-2014 (cf. Chishiba and Manchishi, 2016; Kafata, 2016). As regards the 2014 language in education policy for initial literacy, the study noted that though English has remained the only national official language over the years, the use of local languages for classroom instruction has increasingly gained recognition in Zambia. To further consolidate the gains achieved over the years regarding the use of language of classroom instruction as guided by the principle of languages in complementation as opposed to competition, the study recommended that a comprehensive language development plan should support teachers to determine the language to use as language of classroom instruction at national and community level.

From the studies reviewed, it is clear that the argument on the use of regional official languages for initial literacy from Grade 1-4 has been received with ambivalence. Some scholars have argued for the use of regional official languages for initial literacy (cf. Simwinda, 2014, Chishiba and Manchishi, 2016; Kafata, 2016) while others have recommended a blended approach called translanguaging (cf. Banda and Mwanza, 2017).

### **3. Research Method**

The study involved one selected mission school in Lusaka district and 24 respondents participated. These included four (4) teachers and twenty (20) pupils. Purposive sampling was used to identify the respondents within these levels of study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), purposive sampling is used when the researcher identifies informants with certain qualities to participate in a study. The Catholic mission school was deliberately chosen, firstly, because it is a mission school accommodating pupils from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Secondly, because the medium of instruction from Grades 1-4 was Cinyanja, a Regional Official Language of Lusaka and Eastern provinces. Thirdly, pupils from this school also sat for Cinyanja examination in grade 7. Further, only pupils at lower grades and teachers teaching at these grades were relevant for the study.

The study used primary data collected from the respondents at the Catholic Primary School in Lusaka. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interview guides. This was used to allow for new and follow-up questions and answers during the interview. The secondary data obtained from pupils' and teachers' books also supplemented the primary data. Data were analyzed qualitatively. The qualitative analysis involved identifying specific instances of teachers' and learners' views on the impact of the ROL Cinyanja, categorizing them according to the type of question as they relate to the themes.

### **4. Results and Discussions**

#### *4.1. Impact of learning in Cinyanja (ROL)*

##### *4.1.1. Learners' home and language of play*

Regarding the language used by learners at home from Grade 1-4, different language varieties were identified. In grade 1, 50% of the learners spoke Cinyanja, 30% spoke Bemba while 20 % of the learners spoke Tonga at home. In

grade two, 60% of the learners spoke Cinyanja, 40% spoke Bemba and 10% spoke Lozi. At grade three, 40 % spoke Cinyanja, 30% spoke Bemba, and 20% spoke Tonga and 10% spoke Kaonde. At grade 4, 50% of the respondents spoke Cinyanja, 30 % spoke Bemba, 20% spoke Tonga and 10% spoke Kaonde as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Percentages of languages used by learners at home

GRADE LEVEL	% of ROL LANGAUGES SPOKEN PER GRADE						
	Bemba	Kaonde	Cinyanja	Lozi	Tonga	Lunda	Luvale
1	30	0	50	0	20	0	0
2	40	0	60	10	0	0	0
3	30	10	40	0	20	0	0
4	30	10	50	0	20	0	0

In Grades 1, 2, and 3, all students indicated that they used Cinyanja as their language of play. However, in Grade 4, 70% of the students reported using Cinyanja as their language of play, while 30% stated that they used a combination of Cinyanja and English for play.

#### 4.1.2. The local language used for classroom instruction

When asked about the language of instruction used for learning in class, all students from Grades 1-4 indicated that it was ‘Cinyanja of the book’, which refers to Cinyanja, the Regional Official Language (ROL). When asked if the ROL had helped them improve their literacy skills, 50% of grade 1 students stated that learning in Cinyanja had helped develop their reading skills, while 40% said that learning in Cinyanja was not very helpful because it was so different and deep compared to the Cinyanja they use at home and when playing. Here's what one of the students had to say:

The Cinyanja we use in class has difficult words and it is different from what we use at home. For example, words like **khasu** ‘hoe’, **komeki**, ‘cup’, and **nsabwe** ‘lice’ are new words to us. At home we use **kambwili** to mean ‘hoe’, **kapu**, for ‘cup’, and **inda** to mean ‘lice’. The differences in words [vocabulary] makes reading and speaking hard for us.

However, 10% of the pupils were uncertain whether learning in the local language had helped them. Among grade 2 learners, 70% reported that learning in the local language had improved their reading skills, attributing this improvement to the correlation between phonic sounds and spelling. The remaining 30% stated that their reading skills had not improved because Cinyanja was not their native language and felt alien to them. At the grade 3 level, 80% responded positively, while 20% found Cinyanja difficult to comprehend and preferred learning in English, the language they frequently used. For grade 4 students, 90% claimed that learning in Cinyanja had improved their reading skills, while 10% found the vocabulary too challenging, especially as they had recently moved from other provinces.

Additionally, when asked which language they were fluent in, 70% of the pupils cited Lusaka Nyanja (the urban form of Nyanja), while 20% indicated Bemba. The remaining 10% cited Tonga, Lozi, or Kaonde.

#### 4.1.3. Challenges of ROL as a medium of classroom instruction

In a study about learning challenges in Cinyanja, it was found that 100% of students in Grades 1 and 2 had difficulties understanding when the teacher used the regional official language (ROL) because it differed from Lusaka Nyanja in vocabulary and spelling. In Grades 3 and 4, 60% of students mentioned that the significant vocabulary and spelling differences between ROL Cinyanja and Lusaka Nyanja affected their reading comprehension, particularly in science-related subjects. Forty percent (40%) of students attributed their poor reading comprehension to linguistic variations, among other factors. When asked if they were native speakers of ROL, 80% of the students stated that they were native speakers of Lusaka Nyanja, while 20% spoke other linguistic varieties.

#### 4.1.4. How learners cope with strict ROL policy

The next question related to how the learners coped with the strict policy of learning all subjects only in ROL. The learners revealed that most teachers tended to translate unfamiliar concepts into ‘Lusaka Nyanja’, a language they are familiar with. The learners also indicated that they asked the teachers to explain difficult concepts which they cannot comprehend either in English or ‘Lusaka Nyanja’. The question on whether it was good for them to strictly learn in Cinyanja, 30% of the pupils indicated that they would prefer learning in Cinyanja in all the subjects while 70% said they would appreciate if both English and Lusaka Nyanja were used side by side by the teachers.

#### 4.2. Impact of teaching in ROL

In order to investigate the impact of teaching in Cinyanja, a regional official language in a multilingual context of Lusaka, different questions were asked to Grade 1-4 teachers. The questions have been presented according to different themes.

##### 4.2.1. Teachers’ native language

The first question teachers responded to relates to their native language. All four teachers of Grades 1-4 indicated that they were native speakers of ‘Lusaka Nyanja’ not the regional official language Cinyanja used in books for classroom instruction. One of the teachers had to state the following:

I was born and bred in Lusaka. The only local language I know is ‘Lusaka Nyanja’.  
Another teacher also indicated that even her primary school teachers used Lusaka Nyanja.

##### 4.2.2. A local language used for classroom instruction and benefits

The lower primary school grade teachers stated that they use Cinyanja for classroom instruction. The Grade 1 teacher confirmed that teaching in Cinyanja had helped improve the literacy levels of learners in Grade 1, with most pupils showing improved reading skills. This improvement was attributed to the similarities in the pronunciation of the phonic symbols between the town Nyanja and the ROL Cinyanja used for classroom instruction. Grade 2 and 3 teachers noted undeniable improvements in reading comprehension for most pupils.

When asked about the best language for classroom instruction at the mission school, the teachers suggested a bilingual approach, using Cinyanja and English side by side. They also mentioned that most learners use English due to exposure to technology, and if Cinyanja became incomprehensible, they could switch to English.

##### 4.2.3. Challenges of ROL as a medium of classroom instruction

On the challenges of teaching in Cinyanja, all lower primary school teachers mentioned the differences in vocabulary between the ROL and the Lusaka Nyanja as a major issue. In most cases, the teachers would have limited vocabulary or understanding of words in ROL whose equivalents in Lusaka Nyanja are easily accessed by both teachers and learners. Here are a few examples they provided:

- |    |    |                  |        |               |
|----|----|------------------|--------|---------------|
| 1. | a. | <i>khasu</i>     | ‘hoe’  | ROL Cinyanja  |
|    | b. | <i>kambwili</i>  | ‘hoe’  | Lusaka Nyanja |
| 2. | a. | <i>komeki</i>    | ‘cup’  | ROL Cinyanja. |
|    | b. | <i>kapu</i>      | ‘cup’  | Lusaka Nyanja |
| 3. | a. | <i>nsabwe</i>    | ‘lice’ | ROL Cinyanja  |
|    | b. | <i>inda</i>      | ‘lice’ | Lusaka Nyanja |
| 4. | a. | <i>nkhwangwa</i> | ‘axe’  | ROL Cinyanja  |
|    | b. | <i>katemo</i>    | ‘axe’  | Lusaka Nyanja |

The main issue highlighted by teachers was the challenge of having students who spoke different languages in the same class. They expressed concerns that students who spoke other languages were unable to fully participate in classroom activities due to language barriers. The Grade 4 teacher also mentioned that using only the Regional Official Language (ROL) in a multilingual classroom put non-Cinyanja speakers at a disadvantage, as they had to learn two languages simultaneously: Lusaka Nyanja for general communication and the ROL for classroom instruction (cf. Simachenya and Mambwe, 2023).

All teachers of lower grade levels have confirmed that students who are not Nyanja speakers struggle with reading and writing in the ROL (Reading and Oral Language). When it comes to the strict ROL policy, teachers have indicated that they do not strictly adhere to it. They often switch between ROL, Lusaka Nyanja, and English. Regarding whether the ROL policy is beneficial for early childhood literacy in a mission school, the general view among the lower-grade teachers interviewed is that it is not entirely beneficial due to the multilingual nature of the school and the vocabulary differences between ROL Cinyanja and Lusaka Nyanja.

#### 4.3. The impact of learning in the ROL

After gathering feedback from the students, it was clear that they came from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This means that the learning environment at the Catholic school is multilingual and multi-ethnic. Consequently, using the ROL as the medium of instruction may not be beneficial for most students. Although there are more students who speak Cinyanja across all grade levels, the findings indicate that using Cinyanja as the medium of instruction in class is unfamiliar to most students, including those who are considered Cinyanja speakers in Lusaka (cf. Banda, 1996). This is evident from the way most students consistently refer to the language they speak as 'Lusaka Nyanja'. This distinction suggests that the two language variations are 'asymmetrically intelligible' because the urban variety, Lusaka Nyanja, can be easily understood by speakers of the ROL Cinyanja, but not the other way around.

The findings also indicate that the vocabulary of Cinyanja used in the classroom is significantly different from the Cinyanja that students use at home and during play. This is supported by differences in vocabulary, such as *nkhwangwa* 'axe' being called *katemo* and *nsabwe* 'lice' being called *inda* by Lusaka Nyanja speakers.

The disparity in vocabulary between the ROL Cinyanja and Lusaka Nyanja creates challenges for effective learning and communication for students. This is because issues related to phonology, spelling, and vocabulary are crucial in reading and writing. The differences in the spelling system between the ROL Cinyanja and 'Lusaka Nyanja' clearly confirm the reading challenges that lead to ineffective communication by the students. This is evident in the way students pronounce the words, as exemplified below:

5.	a.	[ <i>phazi</i> ]	'foot'	ROL Cinyanja
	b.	[ <i>pazi</i> ]	'foot'	Lusaka Nyanja
6.	a.	[ <i>mphunzitsi</i> ]	'teacher'	ROL Cinyanja
	b.	[ <i>mpunzisi</i> ]	'teacher'	Lusaka Cinyanja
7.	a.	[ <i>mphika</i> ]	'pot'	ROL Cinyanja
	b.	[ <i>mpika</i> ]	'pot'	Lusaka Nyanja
8.	a.	[ <i>tsistsi</i> ]	'hair'	ROL Nyanja
	b.	[ <i>sisi</i> ]	'hair'	Lusaka Nyanja

The examples (5-8) suggest that the learners may be having challenges spelling some words. It is evident, therefore, that using the ROL to teach learners at the mission school is not helpful to all learners. As a result, it is a barrier to learners' breakthrough to initial literacy (cf. Matafwali, 2010; Mwanza, 2012). Therefore, we can conclude that the 2014 language in education policy, which favors the use of ROLs in schools, is not entirely beneficial to all lower grade learners in Lusaka. This is perhaps the reason why Simachenya and Mambwe (2023) argue for the flexibility of a language policy in education in Zambia, which allows for translanguaging as a privileged pedagogic resource in multilingual education contexts.

Furthermore, from the findings, it is clear that the learners were taught by non-native speakers of the ROL. As a result, it was not easy for learners to cope with learning in a ROL, as their teachers were equally finding it difficult to understand some words in the ROL Cinyanja. It was further revealed that in order to cope with the prevailing situation, the teachers would use Lusaka Nyanja or English to explain unfamiliar concepts to the learners, which in essence defeats the rigid provisions of the policy. This situation is evident that it is impractical for the learners to learn the ROL without diluting the content of the lessons. Therefore, in order to resolve this problem, teachers should be trained to specifically teach the lower primary level. Furthermore, for a multilingual-multi-ethnic environment like Lusaka, materials in the familiar 'Lusaka Nyanja' language should be produced, particularly for grade ones to prepare them to read and write effectively. This would help them appreciate the language as they transition to a ROL because they would be learning from the known to the unknown. In doing so, the Primary School Teacher Education Course Programme stipulated in the 2013 Zambia Education Reform Curriculum Framework, to train teachers, will be actualized (see Zambia Education Curriculum Framework, 2013:48).

Despite the challenges highlighted above, the learners appreciated learning in the ROL because it helped boost their confidence as they were free to express themselves in a local language. Furthermore, the use of the regional official language helped them expand the vocabulary of Lusaka Nyanja, thereby laying the basic pronunciation skills for more complicated words as the learners transition to English. The use of the ROL Cinyanja would also help the learners to appreciate the rich morphology and phonology of the ROL Cinyanja and probably other Bantu languages as they interact in different situations and at different levels.

#### 4.4. Impact of teaching in ROL (Cinyanja) in a mission school in Lusaka

The research findings indicate that using the regional official language (ROL) was beneficial to teachers, particularly non-native speakers, as it helped them expand their vocabulary in the language of instruction when encountering new words. Additionally, using the ROL to teach the learners led to improvements in their reading and writing skills. However, it was also discovered that using the ROL had negative effects on the teachers. One challenge noted was their insufficient vocabulary due to not being native speakers of the ROL, which led them to explain unfamiliar concepts in Lusaka Nyanja and English, thereby diluting the content of the language of instruction. Furthermore, the lack of a clear policy supporting the teaching of multilingual classrooms in Zambia, where only seven out of approximately 24 language clusters have been designated official status, was identified as an issue. This forces learners who speak minority languages to first learn a familiar language, Lusaka Nyanja, to communicate with their community, before tackling the complex vocabulary and phonology of the regional official language for pedagogical purposes. This presents a significant barrier to achieving initial literacy.

## 5. Conclusion

The study has shown that there are inconsistencies in the current language policy in education regarding the language used in a specific region compared to actual language practices (see Mandyata et al, 2023; Jimaima, Banda, Mambwe & Simungala, 2019). While teaching in a local language has helped some learners become literate, the policy disadvantages other learners. A policy meant to address challenges faced by some groups must be as inclusive and practical as possible. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the policy is flexible to allow for the use of different forms of familiar languages in different communities. In other words, the policy should consider the benefits of using multiple languages as a teaching resource. Additionally, the policy could be revised to include multilingual teaching and training for teachers to effectively use the diverse linguistic resources available to learners.

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