

# **The Use of SiLozi as Language of Initial Literacy Instruction in Multilingual Pre-Primary Classrooms of Zambezi Region: Challenges and Way Forward**

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## **Abstract**

The Namibia Language Policy stipulates that in the junior primary (Pre-Primary, Grades 1-3), the language of instruction is the mother tongue or the predominant local language. However, Zambezi Region of Namibia is multilingual yet SiLozi is the sole language of initial literacy based on the assumption that it is the predominant language. A number of studies argue that a monolingual language practice creates challenges for both the teacher and learners in heterogeneous classrooms. In view of the preceding, the purpose of the study was to establish the challenges the pre-primary teachers and learner were confronted with due to SiLozi as a sole language of initial literacy in selected pre-primary classrooms in a predominantly SiFwe speaking environment of Sibbinda Circuit of the Zambezi Region. The sample consisted of 6 pre-primary classrooms, 6 pre-primary teachers, 6 principals. The findings of the study bring out the numerous challenges which teachers and children face in providing/receiving instruction exclusively in SiLozi. One of the challenges includes lack of familiarity with the official medium of instruction which itself, has a number of pedagogical implications. As a way to bridge the language gap, the study recommends translanguaging as a pedagogical practice whose implementation and practice would engender multilingualism, counteract

symbolic violence and ensure epistemic access and facilitate initial literacy development. Finally, teachers require skills of resemiotisation, semiotic remediation and multilingual pedagogical practices to cope with the challenges they face in their multilingual classrooms.

**Key words:** Initial literacy, Epistemic access, Multilingualism, Translanguaging, SiLozi

## **1. Background**

Language of instruction is a fundamental component in the development of initial literacy in children in the junior primary schools in Namibia. Thus, language and education are inseparable because the use of language as a medium of instruction in the teaching/learning situation goes a long way in determining the success achieved by the learner (Fakeye, 2011). However, language of instruction (LoI), according to Musa (2012) in educational institutions in multilingual societies has always been a matter of concern. Due to multi-ethnicity and multilingual context of Namibia, language of instruction through mother tongue medium yields multiple difficulties in its implementation in the Junior Primary Phase (JPP) in Namibian schools (Koker, 2019). While the current language policy of 2003 that closely follows the language policy of 1992-1996 and beyond states that the language of instruction for initial literacy in the junior primary is mother tongue, the National Curriculum for Basic Education for 2010 in Namibia, clearly states that in multilingual schools where there are an insufficient number of learners to constitute a mother tongue medium class, the medium of learning for those learners will be the predominant local language (Ministry of Education, 2010). Therefore, the language policy for Namibia does not ensure children in Namibia receive instruction in their mother tongue, but the language of the majority speakers in the

community is the one which is taught (Koker 2019, Iitula 2016, Ipinge, 2013, Harris, 2011).

Premised on the assumption that SiLozi was the predominant local language in the multilingual Zambezi education region, SiLozi was accorded the status of national language and is the sole sanctioned language of instruction for initial literacy in the region (Kavhura, 2018; Kangumu, 2008). Thus, SiLozi was deemed appropriate language through which children should be instructed for initial literacy due to multilingualism in that region. Therefore, an exclusive language of instruction for initial literacy is the medium through which the junior primary phase are instructed in multilingual schools in Namibia. Benson & Kosonen (2013) argue that an exclusive language of instruction in multilingual societies is a primary cause of creating division, inequalities, and inequities because many children and teachers are forced to learn or teach through the language they are not familiar with. Banda & Mwanza (2017) and Bwalya (2019) also argue that the exclusive use of a language unfamiliar to learners as medium of instruction creates challenges for both the teacher and learners alike in heterogeneous classrooms and disables epistemic access.

Kavhura (2018) explains that in schools nowadays students are taught in languages they neither speak nor understand. Therefore, this accounts for the shaky foundation, especially in initial literacy learning of learners in the Junior Primary Phase (JPP). This argument creates an underlying notion that providing and receiving instruction through SiLozi medium of instruction in the pre-primary classroom is characterized by challenges. Therefore, knowledge of the challenges that teachers and learners face in the pre-primary classroom was particularly needed in order to identify possible intervention strategies to ensure epistemic access and facilitate development of requisite initial literacy to improve

literacy levels in schools. Thus, in order to implement an effective curriculum in the pre-primary, challenges should be identified and solved because they do not only impact learners' achievements and teachers' work in the teaching/learning process but affect the goal of Basic Education which is "to empower learners for the development of Namibia for the future as a knowledge-based society" (MoE, 2010: 7). Therefore, this paper sets to establish challenges experienced by teachers and learners in providing and receiving instruction through SiLozi language of instruction for initial literacy in selected pre-primary classrooms of Sibbinda circuit of Zambezi education region in Namibia.

## **2. Aim of the Study**

The aim of the study was to establish the challenges experienced by teachers and learners in providing and receiving instruction through SiLozi as sole language of instruction and their implication on initial literacy development in selected pre-primary classrooms of Sibbinda circuit in Zambezi education region.

## **3. Review of Literature and Conceptual Framework**

Koker (2019), established that junior primary teachers experienced various challenges when teaching through Afrikaans medium of instruction. The study indicated that pupils were not familiar with the language of instruction as a result, teachers employed translation mechanisms to easy learning but also was problematic since some teachers lacked vocabulary to translate from English to Afrikaans as most materials were written in English. Teachers were also faced with lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials for Afrikaans medium of instruction and lack of qualification and training to teach Afrikaans.

Similarly, Ankonga (2018) found that some teachers believed that teaching exclusively in the sanctioned medium of instruction

(Oshindonga) was quite a challenging task because some of them lacked vocabulary, at the same time there were limited teaching resources mainly for mother tongue instruction and teachers had to create their own materials. Moreover, some teachers were trained in English, thus they were not familiar with the language of instruction and therefore, they had to translate from English to Oshindonga. The study further discovered that pupils too had difficulties speaking and understanding the language of instruction; therefore, the teacher had to translanguague to facilitate teaching and learning. It is clear that exclusive monolingual language instruction is problematic to both the learners and teachers in heterogeneous classrooms where most of the learners were not familiar with the language of instruction

Carl & Negumbo ( 2017) and Negumbo (2016) found that inappropriately qualified and unqualified teachers were deployed to teach Social Studies. Thus, teachers were not appointed based on appropriate training and qualification. Further, Carl & Negumbo ( 2017) established that pupils were not familiar with the language of instruction. This implies that teachers will face challenges in handling the subject because they lacked methodology. Jotia & Matlale (2011) in Botswana, found that teachers who did not undergo formal training in the subject area were not familiar with any special teaching and learning strategies to teach the subject. The teachers mentioned that they taught the subject because it was the only option subject available to teach. This provides evidence that training and qualification was never considered a crucial factor that would provide teachers with adequate subject knowledge in order to handle the subject. Although the studies focus on Social Studies in the senior primary, the question arise as to whether this could be the case in the pre-primary where a “predominant local language” is used. Nevertheless, the crucial question is what impact does lack of training and qualification in

the language of instruction might have on pupils' initial literacy development in the pre-primary? The other question is: if teachers are selected based on the only available options, would this not be a pedagogical barrier and affect initial literacy development. Moreover, if teachers use common knowledge to teach, would then not be necessary for pupils to use common/familiar language to access the language of instruction in multilingual classrooms where the medium of instruction is not familiar to all?

Lipinge (2018) found that due to the exclusivity of English language instruction being promoted by the Namibian language policy, learners in Northern Namibia experienced writing difficulties. The study established that learners were not familiar with the language of instruction which affected their learning. However, while teachers were aware of those challenges, they rejected the use of mother tongue (Oshiwambo) citing that it compromised the effective mastery of English and it was against policy. This state of affairs seem to suggest that the language policy prohibits the use of alternative pedagogical strategies such as translanguaging in which pupils' linguistic repertoires are considered as resources for meaning making. The concern thus arises as to what is the purpose of learning through mother tongue when it becomes inappropriate to help learners make meaning when the medium of instruction is not familiar to them. How do pupils develop vocabulary if they are prohibited learning from known to unknown. In short, will this not affect literacy development, particularly in the pre-primary.

While the language policy mandates that for pedagogical reasons, it is ideal for learners to study through their Mother Tongue (MT), particularly in the early years of schooling when basic skills of reading, writing and concept formation are acquired. Mwindi and Van der Walt (2015:14) found that pupils were unable to access knowledge in the home/community language,

they were unable to process the information in the language of instruction. This state of affairs was challenging for both the teachers and learners, pupils in this case would not be able to develop the required initial literacy due to lack of familiarity with the language of instruction. Harris (2011) asserts that one of the factors contributing to low literacy levels in Namibian schools is that pupils are instructed in the language of instruction that is unfamiliar to them. Namupala (2013) and Iyambo (2011) confirmed that high low literacy levels were as a result of lack of familiarity with the language of teaching and learning. It is evident from the reviewed studies that the exclusivity of the language of instruction being promoted by the Namibian language policy may need to be revisited if effective literacy development is to be attained in the junior primary phase. Moreover, it is clear that lack of familiarity with the language of instruction could be one of the key factors hindering epistemic access and requisite initial literacy development in Namibian schools. In support of this view, Banda and Mwanza (2017) and Mkandawire (2017) asserts that unfamiliar language of instruction in the classroom affects pupils initial literacy development because the language barrier makes it difficult for learners to express themselves to produce the required literacy in the target language.

Relevant and adequate teaching and learning materials are necessary for effective teaching and learning and literacy development (Chileshe et al, 2018). There is evidence that teaching materials is one of the challenges affecting effective instruction in the mother tongue in Namibian schools. According to Totemeyer (2010), the lack of reading and teaching materials in African languages is a major problem faced by teachers and learners in Namibian schools. Siyave (2017) did a study to investigate the teaching of reading in Rukwangali in grade 3, in Namibian classrooms. The study found that lack of reading books written

in the language of instruction (Rukwangali) and large classrooms constrained the teachers from teaching in a more learner-centred way. Kandumbu (2005) discovered a lack of teaching and learning materials as one of the challenges affecting effective teaching and learning in the primary schools in Namibia. Further, Banda, Mostert, & Wikan (2012) found that some teachers felt that the materials in the mother tongue were not sufficiently developed for teaching literacy skills. It was discovered that materials were very limited and were mainly in English. Several learning materials were displayed on the walls but all these materials had to be made or bought from the teachers own pocket. Lack of teaching materials in the mother tongue has a negative impact on medium of instruction teaching and literacy development.

Due to challenges of lack of familiarity with the language of instruction, studies such as those by Iiping (2018), Denuga (2015), Shifidi (2014), Shilamba (2012) argued that translanguaging was an alternative bi-multilingual language practice to enhance comprehension and epistemic access. The studies established that translanguaging was prevalent in Namibian classrooms, particularly in heterogeneous classrooms where the language of instruction was unfamiliar to learners. In particular, Denuga, James, & Michael (2017), found that translanguaging was prevalent in the Zambezi education region and also argued for translanguaging as the necessary pedagogic practice for teachers and learners to achieve teaching and learning goals in lessons involving students who lacked familiarity in the language of instruction. Further, Simasiku (2016b), contended that due to the Zambezi region context, where English was a second language or a third language after Silozi and other Zambezi region language varieties, translanguaging was critical for pedagogical reasons especially among learners who were not familiar with English language of instruction. Simasiku (2014: ii) further argued that



“Language classrooms should become learning environments where learners actively participate and grasp the knowledge that they are taught in a language they are comfortable with”

Simasiku (2016a), Simasiku, Kasanda, & Smit (2015a) reported that English Second Language teachers were of the view that the exclusive use of English as medium of instruction in the English Second Language classrooms, impacted negatively on the year-end results. Thus, the studies argued that the continuous exclusive use of English as language of instruction in Namibian schools would continue restraining both teachers and learners in providing and receiving quality teaching and learning. In Simasiku, Kasanda, & Smit (2015b, 2015c) teachers perceived translanguaging as enhancing academic achievement because it fulfilled the linguistic and conceptual gaps, aided multiple communication purposes and enhanced teaching and learning of English as a second language. Thus, familiar language helped learners to attach meaning to the newly acquired language vocabulary. The studies asserted that translanguaging was an additional resource that sped collaboration between learners and teachers in language classrooms and should be treated as such by both teachers and educational policy makers. The argument here is that the use of familiar language in classrooms with unfamiliar medium instruction enhances teaching and learning of the target language.

Naha, Nkengbeza & Liswaniso (2018) in their study on the effects that translanguaging on teaching and learning in the senior primary in Zambezi region, established that translanguaging had positive effects on language (English) of teaching and learning. It helped learners to understand difficult aspects of the lesson taught and therefore were able to follow the instructions given. When the teacher explained what was said in the familiar language, it helped learners to participate especially those had learning

difficulties with the language of instruction. It also helped them to express themselves when they did not know how to say certain things in English. Furthermore, translanguaging helped teachers manage their classrooms. This means that translanguaging was an effective pedagogic strategy to ensure epistemic access in the classrooms where the medium of instruction was unfamiliar to learners.

Translanguaging is “the purposeful pedagogical alternation of languages in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes” (Hornberger and Link 2012: 262). Thus, in a classroom it may involve “students listening to information in one language and explaining the gist of it orally in another or reading a text in one language and talk about it in another” (Hassan & Ahmed, 2015). In that regard, Jones and Lewis (2014: 141) define translanguaging as “a process of establishing meaning, shaping experiences, understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages”. Banda (2019) and Bwalya (2019) notes that it is a dynamic process in multilingual language users mediate complex social and cognitive activities through strategic employment of multiple semiotic resources to act, to know and to be. Thus, translanguaging is multimodal as Banda (2019) and Mwanza (2016) argued that it transcends verbal and written language modalities to other mediated and mediatized modes and related literacies learners bring to the classroom. As a pedagogical practice, it engenders multilingualism and multimodal literacies, counteract symbolic violence and ensure epistemic access in heterogeneous classrooms. Thus, translanguaging pedagogy can minimize the challenges and complexity of language education in multilingual societies.

#### **4. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

The study was qualitative in nature as “data collection method

involved subjective assessment of behaviour, attitudes and social interaction” (Mkandawire, 2019: 145). Face to face interviews with 6 pre-primary teachers and 6 school principals drawn from six schools in Sibbinda Circuit of the Zambezi education region were conducted. The interviews were used to collect rich and detailed data pertaining to the challenges faced by teachers and learners with SiLozi as sole language of instruction in the pre-primary. Purposive sampling was employed to sample six teachers and six school principals. The study area was Sibbinda Circuit in an area where SiFwe was the predominant familiar language. This was chosen based on the language policy relative to its sociolinguistic context. The pre-primary classrooms were purposefully selected because this was the first class that experiences the switch of the home/familiar language (SiFwe in this case) as they step into the use of SiLozi as medium of instruction. Data was analysed thematically. The collected interview data was grouped into themes that emerged from the data. The categorised data, was analysed and discussed qualitatively.

## **5. Findings**

### **5.1. Challenges teachers face with SiLozi sole Language of Instruction**

The study sought to establish the challenges which teachers and learners faced in teaching and learning in pre-primary classrooms using SiLozi and their implication on initial literacy development. Data was obtained through face to face interviews with teachers and principals.

#### *5.1.1. Lack of familiarity with SiLozi by learners*

All six teachers and principals interviewed stated that it was difficult to communicate with the learners due to lack of familiarity

with SiLozi. Both teachers and principals explained that learners lacked background in SiLozi because they came from homes with languages different from SiLozi. Below are some of the teachers and principals responses:

*TA: ...they are not familiar with SiLozi because they don't speak that language in their homes. So it is difficult to teach using SiLozi only, so you have to explain in their mother tongue for them to understand.*

*TB: It is difficult for these children to understand SiLozi because at home they are using SiFwe as their mother tongue...they are not familiar with SiLozi. They always have difficulties to follow the lesson if I use SiLozi only, so I also use the local language they are familiar with to explain to them.*

*TC: Learners are not familiar with SiLozi since they are meeting this language only in class during lessons, but we translate for them to understand.*

*TE: These learners are not fluent in SiLozi since they don't use it at home... SiLozi is a new language to them... they speak different languages like SiFwe, Mbukushu and others here so I have to translate in their mother tongue.*

*PA: ... for the pre-primary learners, SiLozi is difficult to catch up because it's a new language to them. They come from homes with different languages and SiFwe is the most spoken language here. Children are not familiar with SiLozi as medium of instruction.*

*PC: Learners are not familiar with SiLozi, it is not their first language, they are more familiar with SiFwe because it is their mother tongue here, so it is challenging for teachers*

*to use SiLozi because they will not understand unless she interprets in the mother tongue.*

*PD: These learners don't have SiLozi background ... they are coming from homes with their own languages so it is better to interpret in the vernacular language when teaching because they are more familiar with the language.*

### 5.1.2. Lack of teaching and learning materials

Teachers and principals expressed shortage of teaching and learning materials as another challenge encountered in the pre-primary classrooms. They explained that all materials including the syllabus, schemes of work, teachers' manual, learners' books and most of the teaching materials were all written in English. So it was up to the teacher to translate information to SiLozi which was also regarded as a challenge for some teachers. Below are the responses:

**TA:** *The syllabus for pre-primary, especially this new curriculum is in English, even though they insist that we should teach them in SiLozi. So we always have to translate to SiLozi because we must teach in SiLozi as the recommended language yet we have the materials written in English.*

**TB:** *You will find that the syllabus is in English, scheme of work, teacher's manual, everything is English. Also the learners' story books are in English so you need to explain in SiLozi and SiFwe. So it is really a challenge because most of the teaching materials and pictures on the walls as you can see are written in English.*

**TE:** *We don't have necessary materials and facilities to use. There are no materials written in SiLozi, the current*

*syllabus is written in English...It is too difficult, you have to translate from English to SiLozi and their mother tongue. So, sometimes I fail to find the right words to use in SiLozi. So, I also plan in English and teach in SiLozi and SiFwe because it becomes easy for me...and use other alternatives like sign language to communicate to my children.*

**TF:** *It is quite surprising that the policy recommends the use of SiLozi in the pre-primary yet we are not provided with materials in that language. We do not have materials written in SiLozi, the teacher's manual is English and so is the syllabus. So without materials it is difficult to help my learners understand, so I spend time drawing and creating teaching materials so that even the following year I will use them, but this needs time.*

Three principals concurred with teachers that most materials were in English and teachers needed to translate to SiLozi. The following were their responses:

**PA:** *We don't have resources written in SiLozi but the teacher must create some teaching and learning aids. Everything, even the syllabi is written in English.*

**PF:** *Some materials are written in SiLozi but most of them are written in English whereas the teacher needs to translate from English to SiLozi, otherwise materials are available but in English.*

**PD:** *All materials are written in English, it is up to the teacher to translate and interpret in SiLozi. The Syllabi, the schemes of work, all resources are written in English...*

While teachers and three principals claimed that resources were inadequate in SiLozi, other two school principals expressed that materials were readily available in SiLozi even though they were insufficient. They had this to say:

***PE:** Much of the resources and or teaching and learning materials are in SiLozi... Yes we have materials but not in sufficient quantities.*

***PB:** ...all materials are written in SiLozi and they are available...*

### *5.1.3. Lack of vocabulary by teachers to translate teaching materials written in English*

Some teachers expressed that translation of materials from English to SiLozi was a challenge. Two teachers stated that at times it was difficult to find corresponding words in SiLozi. In that regard, one of the teachers suggested the provision of dictionaries. Below are the response:

***TC:** ...even though I get help from other teachers, translation is just difficult because what you have in English you don't have in SiLozi and vice-versa, so it becomes difficult. I think we need dictionaries when it comes to translation, even though I don't know if we have dictionaries but those will help much.*

***TE:** Sometimes I fail to find the right words to use in SiLozi, so I often use them as they are in English and they make sense to my learners.*

### *5.1.4. Inconsistent language policy from Pre-school to Primary school*

It was noted by one school principal and one teacher that the

language policy from pre-schools to formal elementary schools was inconsistent. Consider the responses bellow:

**PD:** *At the kindergarten, most of these children are taught in English and when they join the formal education here they are taught in SiLozi, this is a challenge for them...I was suggesting that maybe there should be two sections; one in English and the others in SiLozi or we maintain one language as medium of instruction in both kindergarten and formal school for these young ones to avoid these discrepancies.*

**TE:** *One of the challenges is the kindergarten, because children don't understand SiLozi, teachers use SiFwe at that kindergarten most of the time. It is hard to find them teaching in SiLozi or English. That is a big challenge we always get when they reach the pre-primary where they are expected to learn through SiLozi which they because they can't speak. They get confused, so we start teaching them to speak the SiLozi language first that when we can focus on the basic literacy they need to know, and it takes time for them to adjust to the language.*

#### 5.1.5. *Lack of infrastructure and overcrowding*

Teachers and principals mentioned the challenges of inadequate infrastructure which also lead to overcrowding of learners in classrooms. Consider the following responses from two teachers and one principal respectively:

**TD:** *The other challenge is overcrowding, I have 46 learners in my class and so I cannot attend to all of them in a day...*

**TE:** *Overcrowding of learners is another challenge, I have thirty three (33) learners in steady of 25, so helping these children is difficult. The policy recommends twenty five (25), but in our case we cannot base on policy because other*



*children will not be admitted... Sometimes this is because we find ourselves not having enough learners with the required age level, so to meet the enrolment criteria, management allow to take those turning five years of age that year which becomes a huge challenge because every parent would want their children enrolled.*

**PF:** *Another challenge is the issue of the numbers of enrollment because the policy requires that we admit twenty five (25) learners per class but we end up admitting above thirty (30) and forty (40) since this is a community school. So this leads to the challenge of infrastructure, we don't have infrastructure to separate these learners as per required numbers by the policy. So if they are forty (40) they will be taught in one class and by one teacher as such.*

The findings revealed that teachers and learners were faced with numerous challenges. These include; lack of familiarity with SiLozi by learners, lack of teaching and learning materials ,inadequate vocabulary by teachers to translate materials written in English, Inconsistent language policy from Pre-school to Primary school and lack of infrastructure which also lead to overcrowding in the classrooms. Findings from documents review also revealed that all materials were written in English.

## **6. Discussion**

The study was set to establish the challenges experienced by teachers and learners in providing and receiving instruction through SiLozi as sole language of instruction and their implication on initial literacy development. The study established that the pre-primary teachers and learners of Sibbinda Circuit were faced with numerous challenges while teaching and learning in SiLozi.

The findings in this study showed that teachers had difficulties communicating with learners when they used SiLozi exclusively as many of them were not familiar. Thus learners' lack of familiarity with SiLozi made it difficult for teachers and learners to provide and receive instruction solely in SiLozi. In other words the exclusive use of SiLozi as language of instruction for initial literacy made it difficult to provide effective teaching and learning in the pre-primary classrooms. Schroeder (2004) in Chinyama (2016) states that where the languages are not native to pupils, many of them fail to speak or fully understand them. This implies that when the language of instruction is not native to the pupils, it become difficult for them to understand the learning content which in turn negatively affect the development of initial literacy. Harris (2011), on the educational challenges in Namibia found that a high proportion of learners were unable to understand their subjects well enough due to language problems. Also, Likando and Wolhuter (2013: 161), discussing the "formidable challenges" that face the Namibian education system, mention "the problem of the language of learning and teaching not being the same as the first language of the teachers and learners alike." This means that learning in an unfamiliar language disables, rather than enabling epistemic access. It also hinders effective initial literacy development, target language (SiLozi) development and awareness is also deterred which results into poor grounding in the medium of instruction and overlaps to further grade levels.

In short, education in an unknown language disables just about every area of development, particularly epistemic access, initial literacy development, language development and the quality of life in general (Mkandawire and Tambulukani, 2017). This implies that to lay a solid foundation of initial literacy in the multilingual pre-primary classrooms, translanguaging is the most suitable pedagogical language approach since it enables the

use of multiple languages to help learners make meaning of their learning.

It was noted and suggested in the study by both teachers and school principals that translanguaging was the alternative pedagogical language practice in the pre-primary classrooms to ensure epistemic access and develop initial literacy and SiLozi language. Riegelhaupt (2000) states that the teacher creates a scaffold by using both languages alternately to convey increasingly specific and complex information, while connecting the new information to the information already presented. This implies that translanguaging enables pupils to learner from known to unknown language when their linguistic repertoires are used as resources to access learning in the target language. The findings indicated that the language preferences by both the teachers and principals was the use of other local familiar languages in support of SiLozi (multiple languages). The findings are consistent with Mkandawire (2017) and Koker (2019) who postulated that instruction in multilingual junior primary classrooms was effective with the use of multiple languages. It is noted from the findings that lack of familiarity in the language of instruction disables epistemic access and makes learning very challenging and retrogressive.

Learners' lack of familiarity with SiLozi could also be as a result of inconsistent language policy from pre-school to formal elementary primary school which also is a challenge in the pre-primary classrooms where SiLozi was the medium of instruction. The study found that while the policy in formal elementary school mandated that children received instruction in the mother tongue (SiLozi), it was not the case with pre-schools as they used different languages of instruction depending on the location of the preschools. Those in urban areas used English while the rural ones used local familiar language (SiFwe for instance). This

language situation becomes problematic for pupils when they are instructed in monolingual SiLozi which they were not exposed to in the nursery schools. This means that the SiLozi language of instruction becomes strange to the pupils. Therefore, due to lack of vocabulary and familiarity with SiLozi teachers and learners experience difficulties to teach and learn effectively. According to Ankonga (2018), teachers might struggle with the correct vocabulary and this leads learners into confusion if the teachers do not know what to say. Thus, teachers need to be well prepared to avoid this kind of confusion and make effective teaching possible.

The findings of this study were similarly to that of Chibesakunda & Mulenga (2019), Sampa (2019), Zulu, (2019) in Zambia who postulated that, there was usually a discrepancy between the language used as medium of teaching and the language spoken by teachers and learners hence it hindered the learners' active participation in class. Inconsistencies in the deployment and training of teachers were also observed by Chinyama (2016), Banda, Mostert, & Wikan (2012) and Mwanza (2012) who found that teachers were sometimes deployed in regions that used different Zambian language for literacy which was different to the familiar language of the teacher. The finding therefore, provide evidence that translanguaging would be the most appropriate language teaching and learning approach because teachers and learners would use all the available linguistics tools and knowledge to develop initial literacy in the target medium of instruction.

The findings in this study further indicated that some teachers believe that teaching exclusively in SiLozi was a quite challenging task because some of them lacked vocabulary to translate teaching materials which were written in English since there were limited teaching resources mainly for mother tongue

instruction (SiLozi). Thus, teachers had difficulty in translating certain words into mother tongue of each child because some do not exist (O’Sullivan, 1993). Therefore, through translanguaging it is advisable to adopt and adapt some terminologies not available in either language since translanguaging is multimodal as Banda (2019) and Mwanza (2016) argued and it is an acceptable practice of language development. These findings are similar to Mwanza (2012) who also found that Primary school teachers in Zambia lacked familiarity with Cinyanja which was the official medium of instruction.

Lack of teaching and learning materials was one of the main challenges that teachers and learners were faced with in SiLozi. This problem is recurrent and not receiving special attention as was also reported by Töttemeyer, (2010) and Kirchner, Alexander, & Totemeyer (2014). The findings were also consistent with Koker (2019), Ankonga (2018) who mentioned that lack of materials hindered effective teaching as it took time for teachers to translate the materials from English to mother tongue as medium of instruction. Translating some texts for instructional purposes from English to a local language might poses a challenge due to cultural variations even when such a text may facilitate learning (Mumba and Mkandawire, 2019). It was an extra workload for the teachers to translate teaching and learning materials. It was found in this study that teachers had challenges to teach SiLozi to learners who were not familiar with it without necessary materials written in SiLozi. In fact, a study by the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (1996) established that materials were not systematically adapted to gradually build the child’s literacy skills. Insufficient and inappropriate materials in SiLozi pushes pre-primary teachers to embrace materials whose content, activities, language and culture appropriateness are inappropriate for learner progress. This mean that inadequate and inappropriate

teaching and learning materials can be detrimental to effective curriculum implementation which in turn affect epistemic access and initial literacy levels. The problem of lack of teaching materials seems to be wide-spread in Africa. For example, Kombe and Mwanza (2019), Mwanza (2012), Mkandawire & Tambulukani (2017), and Banda, Mostert, & Wikan (2012) found that Primary schools in Zambia also lacked teaching materials and that affected the teaching of literacy in the country.

The dilemma of teaching materials in schools in Namibia is a nationwide cry and challenge (Lumbu, 2013) and this problem may eventually fail to address teachers and learners' needs to deliver and ensure inclusive and equitable quality and relevant education, which creates lower possibilities of maximizing learners' full potential in SiLozi. Provision of appropriate and adequate teaching and learning materials is crucial for ensuring epistemic access and initial literacy development.

Moreover, teachers were challenged with big class sizes which was as a result of lack of infrastructure. It was found in this study that the teacher- learner ration was uneven to the disadvantage of some teachers as the numbers of learners were reported higher than the recommended one by policy. As established by the study, it was quite challenging for one teacher to give individual attention to a total of 46 pre-primary scholars in order to provide the necessary guidance in areas of need during the teaching and learning process. Thus, the teachers did not have time to interact with the children to assist them gain adequate knowledge for literacy development in the target language SiLozi. As mentioned earlier, lack of infrastructure contributed to big classroom size. It was also found that there was a shortage of classrooms, human resource (teachers) and teaching materials to split learners as per policy guidelines, hence, 46 learners were taught in one class by one teacher. Thus, infrastructure hinders effective classroom

instruction and hence poor literacy development.

Furthermore, the study found that the majority (five) of the teachers did not have the minimum diploma qualification required for a teacher to teach in Namibian schools. However, teachers were in their final year of studies enrolled in the In-Service Teacher Education Diploma in Junior Primary Education, initiated by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and UNAM, specifically tailored to the needs of unqualified and under qualified serving teachers to obtain the necessary qualifications, skills and knowledge to teach SiLozi in the junior primary phase.

Unqualified and underqualified teachers are ineffective to handle initial literacy in the early phase of education. The main challenge of these teachers was that they may tend to ignore, skip and leave out those topics they consider and find problematic to handle. This is synonymous to what Silavwe et al (2019) called functional illiteracy. If teachers decide to skip topics, then, pupils are inadequately prepared. The quality of teacher professional training determines the quality and effectiveness of education. Therefore, poor quality teachers bears poor quality education. The conclusion of this, is that the quality of pre-primary teachers will determine the effectiveness of SiLozi curriculum implementation and pupils' initial literacy development. The pre-primary lacks well trained and motivated teaching staff in order to effectively succeed in the development of basic literacy. According to Mwanza (2017), teachers do not only need adequate training but good attitude towards the curriculum in order for them to implement the curriculum correctly and appropriately. He adds that teachers' attitudes partly explains the success or future of education policies.

Nevertheless, poor, or lack, of teacher qualifications can constrain effective teaching as both content, methodology and approach may be either absent or level inappropriate. Both

Cullingford (2005) and Nakabugo et al (2008) argue that effective teaching can be constrained by a lack of content knowledge. An inadequately qualified teacher can thus not be expected to teach effectively despite adequate familiarity with the language of instruction. This means that familiarity with SiLozi language of instruction is not an indicator of one being adequately qualified to teach SiLozi in the pre-primary classroom. Therefore, effective delivery require not only knowledge of the language of instruction but also adequate understanding of applicable methods, techniques, approaches and styles which promote active participation in the process of learning and facilitates pupils understanding of the subject matter. This means that an adequate qualification with familiarity with the language of instruction enables teachers to use a participatory and learner centred kind of teaching methods and lack of it forces them to employ a traditional and teacher-centred teaching approaches. Therefore, lack of qualification by teachers contributed to some of the major challenges they faced. These findings about poor teacher competence and lack of familiarity to the medium of instruction have implication on teacher training. Manchishi and Mwanza (2018) advices teacher training institutions to tailor their teacher preparation to the needs of the schools where they will teach upon graduation. This is because as Kombe and Mwanza (2019) put it, teacher preparedness is key to the success of a teacher. However, effective teacher preparation should start within college/university through effective peer teaching Manchinshi and Mwanza (2016) and later during teaching practice Manchinshi and Mwanza (2013) before they are deployed they are deployed. Teachers need to possess adequate content, methods and the right attitude (Mwanza, 2016) because lack of thorough and adequate understanding leads to misapplication or mis-implementation the curriculum (Mwanza, 2017).



## **7. Way forward**

Therefore, there is a need to move away from SiLozi monoglossic discourse practices to the multilingual discourse practices in which both teachers and learners in the junior primary in the Zambezi education region are allowed to use their linguistic repertoires, through translanguaging in their classroom practices to ensure epistemic access, facilitate SiLozi language learning and production and development of requisite initial literacy. The study recommends translanguaging as a pedagogical practice whose implementation and practice would pedagogically democratize the classrooms, engender multilingualism, counteract symbolic violence and ensure epistemic access and facilitate effective initial literacy development. Since translanguaging is the classroom language practice on the ground in the pre-primary, it should be legitimized so that teachers would be free to use it. Finally, teachers require skills of resemiotisation, semiotic remediation and multilingual pedagogical practices to cope with the challenges they face in their multilingual classrooms.

## **8. Conclusion**

The study established that teachers and learners were faced numerous challenges when learning through a monolingual language of literacy teaching and learning which also had educational implications on epistemic access and initial literacy development. It was clear that lack of familiarity with SiLozi language of instruction by learners was one of the challenges faced in the pre-primary in terms of ensuring epistemic access and initial literacy development. In this regard the exclusivity of SiLozi as medium of instruction left learners with poor grounding in the language of instruction. Another factor affecting initial literacy development was inconsistent language policy from pre-

school to formal elementary school, in the sense that the language of instruction contradicted what pupils came with from the nursery schools and this confounded their learning. Lack of teaching and learning materials also largely affected initial literacy development in the pre-primary, this put an extra workload on the teachers translating the materials written in English which sometimes teachers also lacked vocabulary to interpret the English words. Further, lack of materials forced teachers to use inappropriate teaching and learning materials. It was also evident that lack of infrastructure which also led to overcrowding of the classrooms affected initial literacy development, in that pupils did not receive required individual attention in their areas of need. It was therefore, suggested and concluded that translanguaging should be embraced as an alternative pedagogical practice that may enable epistemic access and ensure initial literacy development. Finally, the study recommends refresher courses to equip teachers with skills of resemiotisation, semiotic remediation and multilingual pedagogical practices and eclecticism to acquaint them with how the SiLozi language pedagogy can be recontextualised in the multilingual classrooms.

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