

The state of minority language speaking children in the global schools: A review of research findings from scholars

By Davison Makondo (Ph.D)

Abstract: *The purpose of this paper was to review literature on the situation of minority language speaking children the world over. The paper started off by looking at the theories of language and language learning in order to put the paper into context. Hence, for that reason, David Crystal's (1968) theory on child language acquisition was discussed. The Whorf- Sapir hypothesis, Vygotskian and the Piagetian theory of language development were also discussed. Later the paper looked at the global picture of how minority language speaking children are educated the world over. In the end, a survey of studies done in Zimbabwe was done. By situating the medium of instruction, policies of a number of countries in their specific historic and socio-political contexts, the discussion in this paper simply illustrated the central role that these policies have played in socio-political and economic processes. In carrying out his literature search, the researcher discovered that the language of instruction can determine who has access to the resources, power and control, and who has not. The choices made are vehicles for political subjugation of minority groups by dominant and powerful groups and the masses by the elites of their respective countries at both intra national and international levels. Based on these observations, recommendations were made.*

Keywords: *Language development; language; home Language (L1); unfamiliar/foreign language(L2); cognitive development; language development and acquisition; minority language speaking children.*

I. Introduction

Research has shown that human traffic across the globe is an unstoppable reality and a world challenge. Political instability and war have contributed a greater chunk on the causes of human migration across the globe. However, hunting for greener pastures is another major reason why people migrate. Many of these people travel with children who subsequently find themselves in a calamity of having to do school work in an unfamiliar language of instruction and learning. However, not all learners who use unfamiliar/foreign languages have migrated or displaced, studies have also shown that some children are compelled to learn in an unfamiliar language or languages because they belong to a minority ethnic group in their countries of residence where the major and dominant languages flex their muscles on the minority language speakers. In the context of this, this paper reviewed literature on the state of minority language speaking children in the schools across the globe. Recommendations were made on how the school system can include these culturally and linguistically excluded learners in order to arrest the situation. Before finding from different scholars were unpacked, the researchers started off by looking at the theories of language development and acquisition. This was meant to put this study into context.

II. Theories of language acquisition and language development

2.1 David Crystal's theory on child language acquisition

According to Crystal (1968) children learn languages in stages. In his theory, he developed five stages and pointed out that these are not clearly defined and some overlap into the other. These stages are:

Stage One:

Crystal theorised that in the first stage, children use a language for three purposes. These are:

1. To get something they want from their primary care givers or parent

2. To get someone's attention and
3. To draw attention of the care giver for something

In this way, Crystal (1968) argues that children begin to make basic statements such as "daddy car" if they want to draw the attention of their father. It is also during this stage where children begin naming things with single words and then move on to relating objects with other things, places and people, for example, "there mummy". Crystal (1968) argues that at this stage children also relate objects with events, for example, "bird gone" (Kozulin, et al, 2003). Crystal (1968) theorised that children at this early stage do not have much vocabulary, so they use intonation to ask a question. Children use words like: "there, want and all gone" to express a full sentence. This could be said that part of this stage is holophrastic.

Stage Two:

At this stage Crystal theorised that this is when children usually ask questions such as "where?" Questions come first. Their questions often begin with interrogative pronouns (what, where) followed by a noun or verb such as "where gone?" Children become concerned with naming and classifying things by frequently asking, "Was sat?" At this stage, children also begin to talk about the characteristics of things for example: big/small (Kozulin, et al, 2003). Children are taught to learn things in opposite pairs such as up/down and hot/cold.

Stage Three:

Crystal proposes that at stage three children begin to ask lots of different questions but often signalling that they are questions with intonation alone, for example: "Rhulani play in garden mummy?" This is made into a question by varying the tone of voice (Kozulin, et al, 2003). Crystal (1968) theorised that children soon begin to express more complex wants by using more grammatically correct language, for example: "I want mummy to take it work" meaning "I want mummy **to** take it **to** work". Verbs such as "listen" and "know" are also used. Children refer to events in the past and less often in the future. They usually talk about continuing action for examples: "she still in bed" and ask about the state of actions (whether something is finished or not). At this stage, the basic sentence structure has expanded such as: [subject]+[verb]+[object]+[adverb] or any other elements used. Sentences like: "Your dry hands" and "A man dig down there" begin to appear and auxiliary verbs are used in sentences such as "I am going" and phrases like "on the table" [preposition]+[article]+[noun] (Kozulin, et al, 2003).

Stage Four:

At this stage Crystal theorises that children use increasingly complex sentence structures and begin to:

- Elaborate on their explanations
- Ask for explanations using the word: "why?"
- Making a wide range of requests: "shall I do it?"

This leads to use complex sentence structures and they have flexible language tools for expressing a wide range of meanings. Probably the most remarkable development is their comprehension of language and use of abstract verbs for example "know" to express mental operations. They begin to communicate meaning indirectly by replacing imperatives such as "give me" with questions; "can I have?" As well as saying what they mean they now have pragmatic understanding and suit their utterances to context or situation (Kozulin, et al, 2003). Children also use negation (denial/contradiction) for example: "He doesn't want one!" They do not rely on intonation and signals anymore as they explain more fully. They are now able to use auxiliary verbs and may duplicate modal verbs "please, can I, may I." This could be showing that "may" is required for courtesy whilst "can" indicates being able to do something. This takes the discussion to the last stage.

Stage Five:

Crystal theorised that when children reach this stage they regularly use language to do all the things that they need it for. They have the ability to give information, ask and answer questions, request directly and indirectly, suggest, offer, state and express themselves competently. Children are now able to talk about things hypothetically and conditionally. For example, "If I were you, I would..." They are now able to explain conditions required for something to happen; "You've got to turn the tap on first in order to wash your hands"

(Kozulin, et al, 2003). As well as making general references to past and future, children now talk about particular times such as: “after tea” and “before bedtime” By this stage children are very comfortable with all questions beginning with words like: “What?” and “When?” where the subject and verb are reversed such as “what does that mean?” They have the capacity to probe issues. After looking at language development, it became critical for this paper to look at the relationship of language and thought in order to find out the challenges or opportunities minority language speaking children go through. Theories designed and developed by Whorf and Sapir, Vygotsky and that of Piaget are discussed in the next section.

2.2 The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

Many theories were put forward to explain language, learning and cognition in relation to the developing child. Whorf and Sapir (1956) cited in Manis (1971) hypothesized that language and thought are related. This theory further asserts that thoughts and behaviour are (or at least partially influenced) by language. Whorf (1956) argues that language largely determines the way in which humans perceive and think about the world in which they live. For him, language serves as more than a passive “interpreter” or “translator” of mental life; instead, it provides an all pervasive framework that actively contributes to our thoughts and perceptions (Manis, 1971). Thus, Whorf’s theory is often known as the linguistic-relativism (Orwell, 1984).

Both Sapir and Whorf agree that it is culture that determines the way people categorize their thoughts about the world, and their experiences in it. Their proposition has sparked a lot of debate and controversy for more than fifty years (Manis, 1971). This stimulated a lot of research in this area to this day. However, no matter what, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf are credited with developing the most relevant explanation outlining the relationship between thought and language; the Sapir- Whorf hypothesis. The hypothesis consists of two parts; linguistic relativist and the linguistic determinism. The linguistic relativists assume that culture is shaped by language. According to Terwilliger, (2000), linguistic determinism on the other hand, is a process by which “the functions of one’s mind are determined by the nature of the language which one speaks. In short, this means that language influences thought. However, Whorf left this theory broad. He did not explain the extent to which language influences thought (Ellis & Beattie, 1986). Although the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis has its own inadequacies in explaining the relationship of language and thought, other scholars seem to agree with them to an extent. Such scholars include Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky 1896-1934.

2.3 Piaget and language

As discussed above it seems many psychologists agree in principle that language and thought are somehow related. Piaget (1967) is one such theorist who seems to agree with Whorf and Sapir. He theorized that language and thought are related and they develop together. However, in his later studies, he slightly departed from his earlier assertion and pointed out that language is not enough to explain thought, because the structures that characterize thought, have their roots in action (Behr, Erlwanger, & Nichols 1980). Piaget (1939) strongly believed that the child’s egocentric speech is closely related to a child’s thinking but later; he then felt that thought precedes language. In this case, Piaget, (1952) theorized that the child, early in life engages in egocentric speech where he/she talks to himself and makes no attempt to communicate with others. This is done in a child’s home language hence the argument that the home language is critical in learning. Piaget accepts that egocentric speech transforms itself to socialized speech between 3 to 7 years of age where the child communicates to influence the listener to adopt a course of action (Behr et al 1980). Crystal also agrees with this assertion (Kozulin, et al, 2003). However, Piaget says that egocentric speech gradually disappears as the child grows older.

2.4 The Socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky

Lev Vygotsky is one scholar who wrote extensively on the relationship of language and thought. In his argument, he theorised that language and thought are somehow related. On that note he agrees with Whorf and Sapir when he theorized that language and thought are related and they develop together. But, Vygotsky (1896-1934) unlike Whorf and Sapir saw a powerful interplay between the mind and language (Miller, 2000). He proposed that speech and thought at first are independent of each other and he argued that babbling and other such sounds are speech without thought. He called these utterances automatic reflexes. For example, a child cries when uncomfortable. On this note, he differs with Chomsky who argues that humans are born with the capacity to speak a language. This means that they are prewired to speak a language and it can be concluded that the LAD is closely linked to one’s mind. However, Vygotsky theorized that at age 2 onwards, language and

thought fuse or fuse and function together. He argued that from this age, children learn that objects have names and thus, they use words and symbols (Miller, 2000). Thus, for Vygotsky, after two years, the development of language influences the development of cognition. According to him, if one has not learnt to talk; then one hasn't learnt to think either (Gibson, 1980). The implication of this assumption is that, if we have not a word, or words for a concept, then, we can't think about that concept. Thus, Vygotsky (1969) views vocabulary deficiency in a certain language, especially where it is used as a medium of instruction, as an impediment to classroom performance. Such is the situation of minority language speaking children across the globe.

Vygotsky (1969) cited in Dyanda and McLane (2000), theorized that at age three, speech between people splits into communicative speech (sometimes called "egocentric speech" or speech for oneself) which is audible speech for oneself. According to him, private speech takes place in the child's mother tongue (L1) and it increases when children meet a difficult task to learn. Vygotsky (1939) unlike Piaget, points out that private speech does not disappear, but it becomes inner speech and it becomes a critical tool in influencing thought.

According to Vygotsky (1964), language is a semiotic system that acts as a "psychological tool" in transforming natural impulses into higher mental processes. In this case, Vygotsky tried to create a theory that allowed for the interplay between two "lines of development". These are the "natural lines" that emerges from within and the "social historical line" that influences the child from outside (Vygotsky, 1931). Vygotsky called various psychological tools that people use to aid their thinking and behaviour 'signs' and he argued that human thinking cannot be understood without examining the 'signs' the cultures provide (Crain, 2005). For him, speech is the most important sign system because it enables us to reflect on the past and plan for the future. Vygotsky argued that language, especially the mother tongue, is essential to cognition because it helps us to think about the world and it also gives us the means to reflect on and regulate our own thinking by use of inner or private speech. Such is the situation facing minority language speaking children across the world.

Thus, according to Vygotsky, the mother tongue is very important to a growing child. Vygotsky maintains that speech facilitates the child's own individual thinking. He argued that by the age of 3 or 4 years, children begin to carry out the kinds of dialogues they had had with others with themselves alone. At first, they do it aloud and later, at the age of 6 or 7 years children tend to carry out such dialogues more inwardly and silently (Crain, 2005). Thus, for Vygotsky, private or inner speech facilitates thinking. What comes out as vocalized material is a product of refined inner speeches that are taking place inside a person before final utterances are made. On the basis of all this, Vygotsky's theory formed the basis of my study. Having discussed Vygotsky's theory, it becomes imperative to look at bilingualism; its definition, strengths, shortcomings and its applicability in an African context.

III. Empirical Studies on the effect of a foreign/unfamiliar language as a medium of instruction

As said before, the purpose of this paper is to discuss literature on some of the work done by some previous researchers on the topic in question. Some theories on language development were discussed in section two (2) and thus, this section did not discuss them but it only concentrated on the studies done by various researchers on selected parts of the world. In doing so, the researcher started off by looking at the education of minority groups in the United States of America, then Vietnam, Ghana, Tanzania, Botswana, South Africa and then lastly, Zimbabwe; which is the country of interest in this paper. Thus, this kind of approach was necessary because it gave the researcher the opportunity to explore global overview on the state of minority children and their endeavour to access fair education in an enabling language environment. In reviewing the related literature, the researcher started off by briefly highlighting Vygotsky's theory which is the theory that informs this paper. Thereafter, a world overview was given.

3.1 The relationship of language and thought

Issues on the relationship of language and thought and the origin of language have attracted considerable attention to a number of scholars. Accordingly, it has been a subject of debate for a long time and still, it is an on-going debate. Many theorists and scholars have given different explanations as to the relationship of language and thought and also on the origin of language. This shall also devote some space on highlighting and discussing some of these views as discussed by various scholars and theorists. Among them are; Noam Chomsky, Whorf and Sapir, Jean Piaget, David Crystal and Lev Vygotsky. This attempt was meant to put this study into context. In doing so, the discussion started off by discussing the views of Noam Chomsky (1968) who argues that all human beings are born with an inherent ability to speak a language.

3.2 Mother tongue and cognitive development

Vygotsky (1969) cited in Gibson (1980) argues that if one has not learnt to talk, he/she has not learnt to think either. This suggests that cognition and the development of language are intertwined. Thus, according to Vygotsky, language, especially the mother tongue, is very important in cognitive development (Duminy, 1975; Hawes, 1979; Bamgbose, 1991; Awoniyi, 1982; Owu-Ewie, 2006; Cummins 2000 & Adler, 2001). He argues that mother tongue is the language through which children, in early life, learn to organise and relate to their environments. Vygotsky (1969) views language, particularly the mother tongue, as a complex semiotic system that acts as a “psychological tool” in transforming natural impulses into higher mental processes. According to him, language is essential to cognition because it helps us to think about the world around us and to communicate with others (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007). Vygotsky (1969) goes on to argue that children use the mother tongue to produce, test and refine thoughts about their environment. Hence, from his point of view, language is related to cognitive development, especially when he further argues that people use language to reflect and regulate their own thinking. Vygotsky cited in Kruger and Adams (1998), theorised that it is inner thinking which guides thinking and action. This inner thinking is usually in one’s mother tongue. A study carried out by Davey and Davey cited in Kruger and Adams (1998), confirms Vygotsky’s (1969) view that language and cognition are related. The duo argues that cognition and language are interdependent. On the basis of this therefore, this paper reviewed literature on the state of minority language speaking children in schools across the globe.

3.3 The relationship between the child and his /her culture

Vygotsky’s theory denies the strict separation of an individual from his/her social environment. Vygotsky (1978) cited in Dyanda (2000), believes that culture defines the parameters in which a child grows up. According to him, cognitive development and language are embedded in people’s culture and therefore, the discussion of any child development should be examined within that context. On the basis of his argument, this paper sought to review literature on the state of minority language speaking children in schools across the globe.

3.4 The foreign language and classroom performance

A study carried out by United Nations Children’s Educational Fund (1999) of African countries which use a foreign language as a medium of instruction, showed that school can be an alien and daunting place for millions of young children who begin class work in a language different from their own. The study observed that compelling children to adopt a foreign language as a language of school would mean that children must give up an entire universe of meaning for an unfamiliar one. According to this study, children may come to believe that the language they have known from birth is inferior from the language of school (United Nations International Children’s Emergence Fund 1999). Thus, this author assumes that if children feel that way, then it means that they are likely going to develop a low self-esteem and a negative self-regard. Consequently, this paper sought to review literature on the state of minority language speaking children in schools across the globe. The study by United Nations International Children’s Emergence Fund; was a general survey on the situation of primary school education of many African countries as compared to this study, which focuses on the state of minority language speaking children across the globe.

3.5 Minority language speaking and poverty in Vietnam

Apart from the studies carried out in the USA, another study was carried out in Vietnam to examine the human rights situations of its numerous minority groups. The study was carried out by a UN Independent Expert on minority issues. In her study, McDougall (2010), observed that in Vietnam, most ethnic minority groups remain the poorest of Vietnam’s poor. She made this observation after a ten-day mission to that country to examine the human rights situation of Vietnam’s numerous minority groups. McDougall (2010) observed that persistent problems remain for many of those belonging to Vietnam’s minority groups, despite a period of economic growth, progress towards the UN Millennium Development Goals and positive results in poverty alleviation and economic development in general. McDougall (2010), highlighted the importance of education for the poor communities and the key role of education in closing the poverty gap experienced by many minority communities in Vietnam. She argued that access to quality and appropriate education is a gateway to development and poverty eradication for minorities, and it is equally essential for the preservation and promotion of minority cultures, languages and identities. Thus, among many issues to be addressed by the authorities, the UN expert singled out bilingual education as an area of “high priority.

McDougall (2010) observed that in Vietnam there are 54 recognized distinct ethnic groups with unique religious, linguistic and cultural characteristics and identities. Despite significant progress in the provision of education infrastructure, she noted that minorities are achieving poor results relative to students who speak major languages and she proposed that much needs to be done to address this fact. In her survey, McDougall (2010) observed that minorities lack adequate opportunities to be taught in their own languages from the earliest years of education and struggle with being taught only in the major Vietnamese language.

In her study, McDougall (2010) proposed that bilingual education will help minority children to make better early progress and provides a strong and culturally appropriate foundation for their future schooling. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UHRC) expert said this after highlighting a pilot project for bilingual education implemented by the Ministry of Education and Training and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), which has demonstrated positive results for minority students. In her survey the Independent Expert visited Hanoi and travelled to regions of significant minority populations, including the provinces of Dien Bien in the Northern Highlands, Tra Vinh in the Mekong Delta region and Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces in the Central Highlands. The purpose of her study was to find out how education is linked to economic empowerment.

After reviewing literature in the Americas and Asia, the researcher was compelled to look at the situation in Africa South of the Sahara. Ghana became the researcher's country of interest since the researcher observed it has a lot in common with his country under study.

3.6 The education language policy in Ghana

3.6.1 The English-Only Language Policy of Education

After carrying out a study in Ghana, Owu-Ewie (2006) concluded that the language of education in multilingual societies has always been a matter of concern to educators and educational planners. Ouadraogo (2000: 89) has pointed out:

“Education and language issues are very complex in Africa because of the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual situation”.

Owu-Ewie (2006) observed that the situation is even more severe when the official language of the nation is different from any of the indigenous languages. Owu-Ewie (2006) points out that there is always controversy over which language to use in school especially at the lower primary level in multilingual societies. He observed that forty-eight years after independence, Ghana is still grappling with which language to use as the medium of instruction in the lower primary school (primary one to three/Grade one to three). Owu-ewie (2006) observed that the language policy of education in Ghana has had a checkered history since the colonial era. According to Owu-Ewie (2006), in May 2002, Ghana promulgated a law, which mandates the use of English language (hereafter L2) as the medium of instruction from primary one (Grade one) to replace the use of a Ghanaian language as the medium of instruction for the first three years of schooling, and English as the medium of instruction from primary four (Grade four). According to him, this new policy has attracted a lot of criticism from a section of academics, politicians, educators, traditional rulers, and the general populace. In his study, Owu-Ewie (2006), looked briefly at the historical development of educational language policy in Ghana, examined what necessitated the change in policy, and responded to issues raised. In his paper he then argues for the reversal of the new policy and proposes the implementation of a late-exit transitional bilingual education model.

3.6.2 The historical overview of the language policy of education in Ghana

According to Owu-Ewie (2006), the controversy about the language to use as the medium of instruction in Ghanaian schools, especially at the lower basic level dates back to the castle schools and missionary era. Before formal education was introduced into Ghana (Spring, 1998), traditional education was conducted in the indigenous languages. With the inception of formal education and the subsequent use of English as the medium of instruction, the indigenous languages were seen as “inadequate” as teaching media (Bamgbose, 2000). Bilingual education in Ghana commenced with the inception of formal education in Ghana which began with the castle schools and was later continued by the Christian missionaries. This period is the pre-colonial period (1529-1925). The languages used were those of the home country (the metropolitan languages). Portuguese, Dutch, Danish and English were used as media of instruction wherever and whenever the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes and the English respectively were in power. The situation, however, changed with the arrival of the

missionaries, who resorted to the development of the local languages in both their educational and proselytizing efforts (Owu-Ewie, 2006).

Owu-Ewie (2006), observes that during this period, a systematic pattern began to emerge with regard to both education and language use. The first legislation on the use of a Ghanaian language in education was promulgated during this period (MacWilliam, 1969; Graham, 1971; & Gbedemah, 1975). Ghanaian language was to be used as the medium of instruction only at the lower primary level, with English used thereafter. The policy was reversed and became unstable when the administration of the country came under the jurisdiction of indigenous Ghanaians in 1957. Since then, the use of a Ghanaian language as the medium of instruction at the lower primary level has had an unstable history; for a example from 1925 to 1951, a Ghanaian language was used as medium of instruction for the first three years. Between 1951 and 1956, it was used only for the first year. From 1957 to 1966 a Ghanaian language was not used at all, from 1967 to 1969 it was used only for the first year, and between 1970 and 1974 a Ghanaian language was used for the first three years and where possible beyond (to the sixth year). From 1974 to 2002 a Ghanaian language was used for the first three years. This largely depended on the interest of the existing government. There was no standing policy on the medium of instruction in Ghana at that time. A Ghanaian language in this case, is the language of the locality which includes one of the following: Akan (Fante and Twi), Nzema, Ga, Ga-Adangbe, Ewe, Gonja, Kasem, Dagbani, and Dagaare (Owu-Ewie 2006).

According to Owu-Ewie (2006), at present, the education language policy in Ghana states that English should be used as the medium of instruction from primary one, with a Ghanaian language studied as a compulsory subject to the Senior Secondary School (High School) (Ameyaw-Akumfi, 2002). Since the announcement of the change of policy, the debate over the language of education has picked up momentum from academics, politicians, educators, educational planners, traditional rulers, and the general populace (Owu-Ewie 2006).

Owu-Ewie (2006) sees the use of the child's primary language in education, at least in the early stages as having been theoretically and empirically confirmed to be beneficial. He argues that there is a plethora of evidence for the use of L1 in education but Ghana for a number of reasons has decided to espouse an English only language policy in its education. The reasons given include the following (The Statesman, Thursday July 16, 2002):

1. The previous policy of using a Ghanaian language as medium of instruction in the lower primary level was abused, especially in rural schools. Teachers never spoke English in class even in primary six.
2. Students are unable to speak and write 'good' English sentences even by the time they complete the Senior Secondary School (High School).
3. The multilingual situation in the country especially in urban schools has made instruction in a Ghanaian language very difficult. The source added that a study conducted by the Ministry of Education showed that 50 to 60 percent of children in each class in the urban area speak a different language. "It is therefore problematic if we insist that all the children be instructed in Ga, Twi, or Dagbani depending on whether it is Accra, Kumasi or Tamale".
4. There is a lack of materials in the Ghanaian languages to be used in teaching. The minister of Education declared that "Only five, out of the languages that are spoken by our major ethnic groups, have material developed on them. Certainly, we cannot impose these five languages on the entire nation and people of other ethnic origins".
5. There is a lack of Ghanaian language teachers specifically trained to teach content subjects in the Ghanaian language. The minister added "merely being able to speak a Ghanaian language does not mean one can teach in it".
6. There is no standard written form of the Ghanaian languages. He says "For nearly all the languages that we have, there is hardly any standard written form".
7. The minister, in order to support the claim for the use of English as the medium of instruction from primary one cited an experiment by Rockwell (1989) and indicated that children transfer from L2 to L1 better.
8. The minister pointed out that English is the lingua franca of the state and that all effort must be put in to ensure that children acquire the right level of competence in both the spoken and written forms of the language (Owu-Ewie 2006).

3.6.3 Home language and classroom performance in Ghana

According to Owu-Ewie (2006) from the Ghanaian minister's point of view, the main reason for the change of policy is that students are performing abysmally in English and in other subject areas because of the use of Ghanaian language as the medium of instruction. However, Owu-Ewie (2006), observed that since 1987 there

have been educational reviews and interventions like the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) and the 2002 Presidential Education Committee, and none has identified the use of a Ghanaian language as a medium of instruction as the source of poor performance in schools, especially at the Basic level. Rather, the reports of such reviews call for the strengthening of the use of the native languages in schools (Ministry of Education, 1996 & 2003).

Terminating the policy of using a Ghanaian language as the medium of instruction is seen as an unscientific way of ameliorating the problems of the old policy (Owu-Ewie, 2006). The reason given by the minister that there is a lack of textbooks and other materials in the Ghanaian language to facilitate teaching and learning is not peculiar to the Ghanaian language. Most Schools in Ghana are functioning without textbooks and other teaching and learning materials. Sometimes a class of fifty learners has only two English textbooks (Owu-Ewie, 2006). How do our kids learn to read and improve their English proficiency when there are no textbooks? The same situation is experienced by such countries as Zimbabwe. Therefore, according to Owu-Ewie (2006) to say teachers should not teach minority languages because there are no text books, is as good as saying educators should not teach any subject which does not have text books. Instead, Owu-Ewie (2006) proposed that the government must provide funds for the corpus development of Ghanaian languages to incorporate technical and scientific terms into the various Ghanaian languages and also develop the written forms of the less developed ones.

Owu-Ewie (2006) further sees the claim by the minister that children can transfer from the second language to the home language as very intriguing. He saw it as impossible for children to transfer from a second language to a home language when they have not mastered the home language effectively and do not have competent teachers in the second language to teach them to transfer. He argued that transferring from home language to second language is theoretically and empirically more probable. Owu-Ewie (2006) and Saville-Troike, (1988) see the home language as background knowledge, pre-existing knowledge upon which inferences and predictions can be made to facilitate transfer. Krashen (1996), for example, notes that when schools provide children with quality education in their primary language, they give them knowledge and literacy, and the knowledge they have gained in home language helps them make the English they hear and read more comprehensible. In his opinion, it is easier and more cost effective to invest more in the home language of learners to promote transfer to the second language than it is to do the opposite. Also, Hakuta (1990) points out, that home language proficiency is a strong indicator of second language development. Owu-Ewie (2006) also saw the claim that the multilingual nature of the nation, especially in urban centres, which made the old policy non-implementable as a sign of short sightedness. He argued that the linguistic diversity of the urban classrooms in Ghana should not be seen as a threat to home tongue instruction and unity in the classroom but as something that supports and strengthens the goals of educators. Educators should therefore affirm, accept and respond to the importance of children's home languages as media of instruction. It must be noted that home language education is a right as well as a need for every child (Pattanayak, 1986). He points out that we cannot deny our learners language rights and claim to give them fundamental rights and he sees rights without language rights are vacuous. Thus, he came up with the following mathematical logical proposition; Language Rights + Human rights = Linguistic human rights. For Owu-Ewie (2006), denying the Ghanaian child the use of his/her home language in education is unfair to the children and for Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), it is committing crime which he called "linguistic genocide" in education. There should be a starting point for a search for the best choice among alternatives. Using English is definitely not the best alternative.

3.6.4 The effects of the use of a foreign language in Ghanaian schools

The use of the child's home language in education has shown that it enhances the academic, linguistic, and cognitive achievement of learners (Baker, 2001). Owu-Ewie (2006), proposed that the issue of underachievement/low academic performance, especially in English language in Ghanaian schools despite the use of the child's home language at the lower primary level, needs to be investigated. He argues that merely using the child's home language in education does not guarantee any of the benefits mentioned above. According to him, this will depend on an effective and well planned programme in which proficiency in the home language is developed and attained. On the same note, Lewelling (1991) sees the level of home language proficiency as having a direct influence on second language development and cognitive academic growth.

6.6.5 The early-exit transitional model and academic underachievement in Ghana

Owu-Ewie (2006) attributed the students' underachievement, despite starting their education in their home languages to the type of bilingual education model practiced in Ghana. The type of bilingual education that was

practiced in Ghana before the change of policy was the early-exit transition model. To restate the policy, a Ghanaian language was used as the medium of instruction at the lower primary level (P1-3, equivalent to Grade 1-3 in Zimbabwe), and English as the medium of instruction from class four (Grade 4). At the lower primary level, English was taught as a subject (Owu-Ewie, 2006). In Owu-Ewie's (2006) opinion, besides the teacher factor, lack of materials, lack of supervision, and lack of exposure to the target language, are some of the factors which worked against the model, and this may explain why the Ghanaian child is performing abysmally in English language in particular, and in the academic subjects in general. He observed that in the first place, learners were prematurely transitioned into the use of English as medium of instruction, and second, the transitional process was abrupt. Owu-Ewie (2006) and Lewelling (1991) further pointed out that second language acquisition research has shown that the level of proficiency in the home language has a direct influence on the development of proficiency in the second language and that a disruption in home language development has been found, in some cases, to inhibit second language proficiency and cognitive growth. Saville-Troike (1984) also, made similar observations when he asserts that in almost all cases, a student's relative competence in the native language coincides with the student's relative achievement in English (L2).

From his studies in Ghana, Owu-Ewie, (2006) views the use of a Ghanaian language as the medium of instruction in the early-exit transitional model as too short-term for children to understand the complex workings of their home language for them to transfer it effectively and efficiently to the second language. He argues that at this stage, they have not crossed the threshold where competence in the home language carries over to the second language (Owu-Ewie, 2006). The thresholds theory indicates that "when there is a low level of competence in both languages, there may be negative or detrimental cognitive effects" (Baker, 2001:167).

3.6.6 The late-exit transitional model and academic achievement in Ghana

Owu-Ewie (2006), argues that the old language policy in Ghana produced children in this category, which may help to explain the low academic performance among learners. There is therefore, he argued, the need to embark on a late-exit transitional model, which will make learners 'balanced bilinguals'; competent in both the Ghanaian language and English. The work of Cummins and Mulcahy (1978) also agree with this view and it contends that the child's advancement towards balanced bilingualism has a probable cognitive advantage. Owu-Ewie (2006) argues that prolonging the use of home language in school will enhance the learning of the second language; hence use of a home language has an added advantage in education.

After making these observations, Owu-Ewie (2006) proposed that Ghana needs to fashion a language policy model that will nurture the learners well into an advanced grade where they would have matured in age and in the home language. Similarly Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978), concur with Owu-Ewie's observations when they assert that the older the age of the learner, the better they learn the second language because they have achieved a high level of cognitive maturity in the home language. The two scholars added that cognitive maturity, knowledge, and experience in the home language transfers to the second language.

Similarly Hovens (2002) in a study of experimental bilingual programmes in Guinea-Bissau and Niger found that students in the bilingual programmes had better school results especially in language subjects. They found out that this is true when the second language (French) is not introduced too abruptly or too early. Again there are strong arguments for the introduction of the late-exit model of transitional bilingual education. The old policy, which terminated the use of the home language at year three and resurrected the use of English in the fourth year, was very abrupt for Ghanaian learners (Owu-Ewie, 2006). Where is the bridge for the cross over? Metaphorically, it is like jumping over a trench when you have little or nothing at all to execute the task. Thus, Owu-Ewie (2006) sees it as where the disaster begins and he suggests that the transitioning process must be gradual. Krashen (1999) views, the "gradual exit" model as a way of organising a bilingual programme that ensures effective cognitive and academic achievement, and proficiency in the second language. It makes instruction in the second language at later stages more comprehensible to learners. As a result, as Thomas and Collier (1997, 2000 & 2002) found, students in a late-exit (gradual exit) transitional bilingual program perform well ahead (in English achievement) of their early-exit counterparts.

The findings by Owu-Ewie, (2006) confirm Cummins (1976); Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977) threshold theory which states that the student's level of home language competence has implications for the child. The theory holds that there is a level of home language proficiency that a child needs to attain to avoid the negative consequences of using two languages. This suggests that if the child is prematurely transitioned into the second language, detrimental consequences may be experienced. The implications of the threshold theory and

the studies indicated above in Owu-Ewie's (2006) view are that a late exit-transitional bilingual education model should be adopted in Ghana in order to improve academic performance in Ghanaian primary schools.

IV. Use of a foreign language and classroom performance

The UNESCO Committee of 1953 states that the best medium of instruction for teaching a child is the mother tongue through which children understand better and express themselves freely. The basic position of the 1953 report, which shows that children learn quicker through their first language than an unfamiliar linguistic medium, is supported by research evidence from many scholars in Africa and globally (Mwamwenda, 1996). Out of the many research studies carried out in Africa, Bangbose (1991) cites the Six Year Primary Project started in 1970 in Nigeria to establish the effectiveness of the home language as compared to a (foreign language) English L2. The results of his experiment clearly showed that the home languages facilitated more meaningful learning than English. In another research, Cleghorn (1992) also carried out comparative studies on the effectiveness of the home language over English L2 in several schools in Kenya and it was also found out that important ideas were more easily conveyed when teachers did not stick to the requirements of the English-only language of instruction. Those who learn in their home language (L1) were at an advantage. Other researchers also observed that learners who learn through a second language are disadvantaged (Wallwork, 1985; Ngara, 1982; Macnamara, 1973; & Miti 1995). After reviewing literature from the USA, Asia, Ghana and some sections in West Africa, the researcher felt it compelling to look at literature in some selected parts of Southern Africa. Botswana became the first country of interest.

4.1 Educational Hurdles faced by minority language speaking children in Botswana

A study which unveiled what the researcher saw as an unbearable situation for minority language speaking children in Botswana was done by Nyati-Ramahobo in 1996. In her study, Nyati-Ramahobo (1996) looked at minority language use and early educational hurdles for minority language speaking children in Botswana. The results of the study showed that in an almost monolingual country such as Botswana, it is easy for people to take minority language users for granted. Their linguistic problems, especially in education, can become easily overlooked (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1996). Although Setswana is the national language and although some 90% of the population speaks Setswana, either as a first or second language, 10% of the people do not speak Setswana at home. As such, they have to learn Setswana at school and use it as a medium of instruction for the first four years before switching to English, a third language (Nyati-Ramahobo 1996). The study showed that English and Setswana determine the educational achievement of minority language users for the rest of their lives. The situation of minority language speaking children in Botswana is similar to those of Zimbabwe. In her study, Nyati-Ramahobo (1996), systematically evaluated the educational performance of children who speak languages other than Setswana at home and compared their performance with that of children who speak Setswana at home. This was meant to indicate disparities, if any, in the acquisition of literacy skills by minority language users (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1996).

In her study, eighteen primary schools distributed throughout the country were selected. Nine schools were selected from villages which are predominantly Setswana speaking. These schools were classified as category A. The other nine schools were selected from villages representing nine minority languages in Botswana. These schools were classified as category B. In all of the eighteen schools, Nyati-Ramahobo, distributed questionnaires to teachers of standards five, six and seven classes. The questionnaire solicited information such as teacher rating of students' English proficiency, availability of teaching materials in their schools and whether they felt that children who come to school with little or no-competence in Setswana have any special problems. Individual teachers and students were also interviewed. They were asked about the language they spoke, read, wrote and comprehended better, and which language they preferred as a medium of instruction (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1996). They were also asked how they felt about the language of instruction. Responses from each interviewee were written down (in short form) on an interview form.

Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) results from 1980 - 1985 were examined to see if there is a pattern in performance between minority language users and Setswana speaking students. Special attention was given to their English and Setswana results. The data were analysed in two ways: A) the teachers' responses on both the questionnaire and the interview were scrutinized to see how each category rated their children. B) the data were then analysed according to standards in each category, to see how children in the same standard but in different categories perform as seen by their teachers (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1996).

4.2 Results from Students in Setswana Speaking Villages

The results of her study showed that at Standard five students' ability in comprehension, speaking, reading and writing in Setswana is satisfactory. When they get to Standard six, reading and writing in English begins to improve. They begin to write as good compositions in English as they do in Setswana (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1996).

4.3 Results from students from minority language speaking villages

In minority speaking language villages; Nyati-Ramahobo (1996), observed that the receptive language, (comprehending when the teacher spoke) in Setswana as well as writing skills in Setswana were comparatively low at Standard Five. At Standard Six, she observed that their (receptive language) comprehension and writing ability got better. The (expressive language), reading and speaking, however, remained a problem. At Standard Seven, performance in English begins to improve in the first three skills (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1996). At Standard Five, ability in English was much lower than it was in Setswana. This situation continued to Standard Six but at Standard Seven, more students were able to do better in the first three skills in English and they begin to write as good compositions in English as they did in Setswana (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1996). However, the most striking observation Nyati-Ramahobo (1996) made was that speaking ability in English remained low for both categories throughout their primary school lives. Nyati-Ramahobo (1996), observed that the motivation to learn English for both groups was however very high. Both categories saw English as a very important subject for getting jobs and speaking to foreigners. Other important subjects are mathematics and science. In her study, she also observed both groups preferred to use English as a medium of instruction for the same reason as above. Students from minority language villages preferred to use their home language as a medium of instruction in the classroom (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1996).

The results of Nyati-Ramahobo's (1996) study showed that comprehension and speaking ability that the Setswana speakers bring to the classroom from home serve as an advantage for them and the lack of these two skills by the other speakers serve as a disadvantage for them throughout their primary school lives. Nyati-Ramahobo (1996), observed that while other speakers are still working on acquiring comprehension and speaking in Setswana, Setswana speakers are already working on reading and writing in Setswana.

When other speakers are working on reading and writing in Setswana, Setswana speakers are already working on reading and writing in English. Nyati-Ramahobo (1996) saw this as the central problem in her study. Other speakers are a step behind the skill acquisition process. The ability to write in both languages (the grey area) for Setswana speakers comes at Standard Six and at Standard Seven for other speakers. This clearly indicates the disadvantage the other speakers face with the use of a foreign language for learning purposes. The results clearly indicated that minority language speaking students have problems in Setswana. Nyati-Ramahobo (1996), observed that the problem of lack of comprehension at lower standards as described above is a contributory factor to lower performance by minority language speaking children.

It was also observed in her study that the attitude toward Setswana is not very positive for minority language speakers. First of all Setswana is competing with English which is seen as a language of the elite, prestige and power. Secondly, Setswana is not a language for upward mobility and, therefore, there is no motivation among the minority groups to learn it (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1996). The best they want to do is acquiring it and use it as a national language, outside the classroom. Teachers disclosed that they use Setswana in the classroom most of the time because of their students' lack of comprehension in English. This implies that minority language speaking children might not understand both languages in certain instances, thereby impeding performance (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1996).

V. Minority language speaking and Educational hurdles in Botswana and Tanzanian schools

A similar and later study done by the Edge Hill College, of the United Kingdom (UK), examined the relationship between educational language policy and classroom practice in two post-colonial African societies; the Republics of Botswana and Tanzania. The results showed that in both societies, English is one of the official languages of instruction but is being challenged by languages which are used far more widely (Arthur, 2006). The researchers found out that Setswana is the first language of approximately 70 per cent of the population in Botswana and some 28 further languages are spoken natively by the remaining 30 per cent. Setswana is established as the medium of the first four years of primary schooling although a new policy proposing Setswana for the initial year of primary school followed by English from year two is yet to be fully implemented (Taylor & Francis, 2001) and (Arthur, 2006).

According to Arthur (2006), in Tanzania, Kiswahili is a second language for the overwhelming majority of the population, learned after or alongside one of over 120 ethnic community languages. It has been the sole medium of primary education since 1967. However, secondary schooling still takes place in English. In his study Arthur (2006) assessed the impact of teaching through the medium of a second language. The study reviewed research on practices in English-medium classrooms at both primary and secondary level in Botswana and at secondary level in Tanzania.

From his studies, Arthur (2006) found out that:

- The majority of teachers in Botswana favour English as the sole medium of instruction throughout primary school but those who speak a minority language other than Setswana or teach speakers of a minority language are less in favour.
- There is extensive use of bilingual "code switching", where the official language of instruction is used alongside other languages known to teachers and learners.
- The patterning of bilingual discourse in classrooms in the two different sociolinguistic settings appears to vary: in Botswana, code switching from English to Setswana has been observed to be the prerogative of teachers while Tanzanian secondary school pupils switch from English into Kiswahili quite freely.
- Classrooms are dominated by teachers lecturing or asking questions, possibly because whole-class routines are less demanding of teachers' English. According to Arthur, (2006) English language is considered to carry the most prestige and there has been recent growth in English-medium private education. However the need and opportunity to use English in employment appears to be extremely limited. The study suggested that policy-makers need to be careful not to mistake popular demand for education in English for practical or communicative necessity.

Because of the observations he made in his study, Arthur (2006), recommended that policy makers should:

- base educational language policy on sound understandings of children's language development and how children can be best assisted to learn through language.
- train teachers in the methodology for teaching of and through second languages and enhance their understanding of how children become competent in a second language.
- legitimise the use of code switching during English lessons to enable English to be comprehended by all learners.

Other related studies on languages of instruction showed that home language instruction is more important than second language instruction for ultimate literacy and academic achievement in the second language, and learners should be provided with a strong basis in the home language (Ndamba 2008; Adler 2001; Peresuh & Thondlana, 2002; Cummins, 1988). Thus, three researchers concluded that home language maintenance needs to be taken more seriously as a way of developing the cognitive academic language proficiency of learners. According to them, the aim of all education should be to foster bi- and multi-lingualism at all levels of language usage (Morrow et al, 2005).

VI. Studies in Zimbabwe

6.1 The effects of a foreign language on children's performance

Early study, studies in Zimbabwe concentrated on the three major languages, English, Shona and Ndebele. Until recently very little was done on minority languages. A study by Makondo (2012) showed that many former minority language speaking children in Zimbabwe could read English or Shona words but they did not know the meanings of some of the words which they read. For example, children could read the word "exotic" but they did not know its meaning. At the same time, the Tsonga (Shangani) children who participated in his study could read many Shona words, for example "muhacha", but they did not know the meaning of the word either. Thus, researchers argue that because many children are not taught in their home languages, they become incompetent in their home language and also in the language of school.

Similarly, Miti (1995:) lamented on the Zambian situation, where English is introduced and taught side by side with the home language at the beginning of Grade one:

"... we have produced thousands upon thousands of children who are unable to read either L1 or L2".

In his study, Miti (1995) observed that introducing an extra language without having developed the home language fully would simply produce learners who are not good in both languages. This works against

Cummins' principles of the additive approach. The child is introduced to yet another language before mastering the grammar of his home language (Miti, 1995).

6.2 Use of a foreign language and classroom participation

Chaudron (1988), asserts that in a learning situation where only the second language (L2) is used as a medium of instruction, learners face problems because their task is threefold. The first is that the learner has to make sense of the instructional tasks which are presented in a foreign language and secondly, the learner has to grapple with attaining linguistic competence which is required for effective learning to take place. Thus, learners should have good receptive and expressive language competencies in order to understand instructions and to express themselves accordingly and meaningfully. Finally the last challenge is that the learner is faced with the problem of mastering the content itself. In his study, Makondo (2012), observed that the situation in the Chiredzi district of Zimbabwe where Tsonga (Shangani) language speaking Grade Seven learners are compelled to learn in two unfamiliar/foreign languages (English and Shona) was responsible for the feeling of incompetence and loss of confidence among the learners as a result of a poor or hardly any grasp of English and or Shona. Some learners stayed dumb during the lessons for fear of embarrassing themselves in languages they were not even sure they understood.

Makondo (2012) noted that the Tsonga (Shangani) grade seven learners who are taught in two unfamiliar languages (English and Shona) used inappropriate terms in the taught concepts and hence this compromised the quality of their work since most of the terms they used in answering questions and describing environmental phenomena were a direct translation from their home language (Tsonga/Shangani). From these observations, the researcher concluded that learners in Chiredzi district under perform at Grade Seven level because of the language challenges they are subjected to. The researcher thus, observes that use of an unfamiliar/foreign language for instructional purposes implies, in a way, excluding the Tsonga (Shangani) learners in the school system. The researcher observed that Tsonga (Shangani) learners struggle to master and understand two unfamiliar/foreign languages before they could begin the actual learning process.

Thus, because research has shown that the mother tongue is crucial in the initial phase of the child's school life, Zimbabwe has found it necessary to implement an education language policy which recognizes the child's home language in Grades one to three. It was hoped that this language policy for the early grades would reflect some of the expectations and assumptions of bilingualism that learners understand concepts better in their home languages; skills would transfer from the home language (L1) to the second language (L2); all instruction in second language (L2) should be delayed until initial literacy in the home language (L1), and that some oral fluency in the second language (L2) is achieved (Ndamba, 2008). However, Roller (1988) established that Zimbabwean pupils at Grade 5 level had achieved superficial levels of proficiency in English and found very little or no evidence of transfer of skills between home language and second language (L2).

VII. Conclusion

By situating the medium of instruction policies of a number of countries in their specific historic and socio-political contexts, the discussion in this paper simply illustrated the central role that these language policies have in socio-political and economic processes. This paper also showed that the choices made in the medium of instruction, are not purely about educational efficacy but also about social, political and economic participation, social equality and human rights. They determine who has access to resources, power and control and who does not have. As shown in this paper such policies are vehicles for political subjugation of minority groups by dominant and powerful groups and the masses by the elites both at intra national and international levels. Minority language speaking children of Botswana, Vietnam and Zimbabwe are good examples of the subjugated groups in their countries of nationality. In countries where resources are scarce, the rate of illiteracy is high, and basic education is available only to a small group of the population, investment in the area of a foreign language as a medium of instruction is ethically untenable.

VIII. Recommendations

In the light of the above conclusions drawn from the observations made, the following recommendations are made:

8.1 Provision of a new non-discriminatory language policy

The existing global language policies should be revised to accommodate all the languages spoken in respective countries. The researcher observed, in his study that use of a foreign language to teach primary school learners is a barrier to learning.

8.2 The all inclusive language policies should be put in place

The all inclusive language policies should be put in place to boost the esteem of most minority language speakers to confidently respond to classroom needs in the languages which they are both familiar and comfortable with. According to Sachs (1995:59), the right to non-discrimination is the most powerful principle to have emerged in relation to the protection of minorities.

8.3 The introduction of bilingual programmes in primary schools

This paper revealed that three years of home language use is incontrovertibly not sufficient for learning at primary school level. Thus, the researcher recommends that education planners in most multilingual states should introduce bilingual programmes at primary school level. This recommendation is made in view of the fact that the paper established that use of a foreign/unfamiliar language as a medium of instruction affects classroom performance at primary school level.

8.4 Provision of an all-inclusive enabling legislation

To realise the above recommendations, the researcher recommends that an all-inclusive and enabling legislation should be put in place in the global communities where minority language speakers exist. This shall go a long way towards helping all the learners in their respective countries to receive quality and appropriate education in the languages which they best understand.

8.5 Training and support for teachers

If a bilingual or multilingual programme is to be achieved in the global schools, a new strategy to train and support teachers should be adopted. In-service and pre-service teachers' training programmes should be introduced to take care of the bilingual programmes. This should initially target those teachers who teach in minority language speaking areas. Later, it should cascade to include all primary school teachers. This also implies that a new curriculum, which significantly departs from the current monolingual programme, should be put in place to cater for all the learners.

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