

# **Implementation of the Government of the Republic of Namibia's Language Policy for Schools in Selected Primary Schools in Windhoek**

A Study Conducted by the University of Namibia

*D. Ashton, University Central Consultancy Bureau*

*T. Iijambo, Faculty of Education*

*M. Matengu, University Central Consultancy Bureau*

*E. Kalenga, University Central Consultancy Bureau*

## **Abstract**

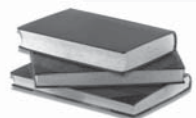
*This study investigated the implementation of Namibia's Language Policy in Grades 1-4 in selected schools in the Windhoek area. Thirty-six teachers of Grades 1-4 in nine schools were individually interviewed. Seven principals were also interviewed. Namibia's Language Policy states that English is the official language of the country and that instruction for primary learners Grades 1-3 be delivered in the mother language. The issues investigated in this study were: 1) how does this mother tongue implementation occur in a heterogeneous classroom where there are learners with a variety of mother languages and where the teacher's mother tongue may not be that of the learner? 2) What are the social dynamics in a school where the learners and the teachers are from different ethnic groups? The findings indicate that only eight of the 36 teachers had a medium of instruction in one of Namibia's native languages (six in Afrikaans, one in Khoe-Khoe and one in Oshiwambo). English supersedes mother language teaching as the default medium of instruction in many heterogeneous classrooms even though it is not a mother language. Furthermore, parents are requesting that their children be enrolled in the English medium of instruction streams as opposed to the mother language streams.*

## **1.0 Introduction and background**

Namibia is a vast country covering approximately 823,680 km. The population is relatively small, 2,030,692 as of July 2005. The majority of this population, over 60%, resides in the North. The other region with high population density is Khomas, in the center of the country, where the capital city, Windhoek, is located (Matengu, 2006).

Despite this relatively small population, Namibia has a rich diversity in languages, with 15 recognized languages. Urban areas, especially Windhoek, have a large mix of people speaking different languages, largely due to migration and urbanization. There has been little migration from the Caprivi and Kavango regions in the Northeast part of the country, whereas speakers of Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, Nama Khoe-Khoe and Damara Khoe-Khoe have moved in urban areas in large numbers. According to Mendelsohn, Jarvis, Roberts and Robertson (2002), over half the people who had moved to Windhoek in the few years prior to 2002 have been Oshiwambo speaking.

Namibia gained independence from South African rule on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March



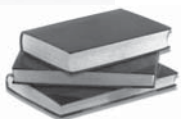
1990. Namibia was originally a German colony, but subsequent to 1915 (World War I), South Africa occupied the country and the use of Afrikaans was widely implemented for many Namibians. After independence, English was introduced as the new official language, because Afrikaans represented the symbol of apartheid and oppression therefore, the then Ministry of Education, Youth, Culture and Sport began developing the *Language Policy for Schools* in Namibia. After lengthy discussions between regions and government, the policy was issued in 1991. The development of this policy was based on the recognition that Namibia is a multilingual society in which the use of the official language would contribute to unity in diversity. The Language Policy has two main aims: to establish English as the official language and main medium of education, and at the same time to develop the native Namibian languages (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 1993: 1).

The Language Policy and additional documents (“The Language Policy for Schools 1992-1996” and “The Language Policy for Schools, Discussion Document”) indicate that the seven-year primary education cycle should enable learners to acquire reasonable competency in English and prepare them for English as the medium of instruction in later stages of schooling. At the same time, education should promote the language and cultural identity of learners whose mother language is not English. Therefore, the medium of instruction in Grades 1-3 should be the mother language or the predominant local language in order for learners to acquire the basic skills of reading, writing and concept formation, thereby creating a strong foundation for further language acquisition. During Grades 1-3, English should be taught as an additional subject. The Language Policy goes on to state that all learners must study two languages as subjects from Grade 1 onwards, one of which must be English. Grade 4 should be a transitional year in which the mother language plays a supportive role in teaching, with English as the medium of instruction. English should be the medium of instruction for all subjects in Grades 4-12, while mother languages should be taken as additional subjects. (GRN 1993, 4-5).

The meaning of the mother language is crucial when learning one’s culture. According to the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report (Tsoupaloko, 2003), culture is the basis for one’s identity and dignity; it helps to understand where we are coming from, what kind of values we present, and who we are. The only tool one uses to learn culture from childhood is the mother language. In addition to the 15 recognized languages there are another 9 languages or major dialects used in Namibia. English is learned as the second language for most of the Namibian people (Mendelsohn, Jarvis, Roberts & Roberts, 2002). This has set a challenge for society, and most particularly for schools, to use English as a medium of instruction and, at the same time, maintain and develop the native languages. Also, the pedagogical view supports mother language teaching during the early years of schooling; it is ideal that learners study in their mother languages in order to acquire the basic skills in reading, writing and concept formulation (GRN 1993, 3). For example, children’s expressive and receptive language abilities must be at a certain level before the child is capable of reading. Only then it is possible for them to express themselves and understand and interpret what others are saying (Landsberg, 2005).

## **2.0 Purpose of the Study**

The Namibian Language Policy adopted by the then Ministry of Education, Youth,



Culture and Sport in 1991, states that all primary school learners in Grades 1-3 be taught in their mother languages. The Millennium Development Goals ensure that universal primary education be achieved. This investigation examined the impact of attempting to teach primary learners in the 15 mother languages when not all schools, classrooms and teaching staff are conversant in the same language.

This investigation addresses the following questions:

- How does this Language Policy impact not only the education of the learners, but also the social dynamics within the school, particularly if the mother language of the teachers is not that of the learners,
- What are the social dynamics in a school when the staff and learners do not all have the same mother language,
- Where does the actual practice intersect with the policy and
- How realistic is the policy in terms of implementation?

The operating assumption is that in rural areas it is easier and more effective to comply with such a Language Policy, but in Windhoek, when a classroom is heterogeneous and contains children from various cultural and language groups, how are the teachers actually implementing the policy?

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This investigation was designed to accommodate a qualitative interview case study format. The investigators chose three main areas of Windhoek in which to conduct interviews: Katutura, Khomasdal and Windhoek Central. There are 66 schools with lower primary education in Windhoek, and parents and guardians usually enroll their children in a school within their area or just nearby, so children are able to walk to and from school. This is especially true in Katutura because most residents do not have sufficient discretionary income to pay for transport to and from school. Katutura is the lowest socio-economic area in Windhoek whereas Khomasdal is a fairly middle socio-economic neighborhood. The Windhoek Central schools are a bit scattered from each other and most children from affluent backgrounds would attend schools in these areas since transport is generally not a problem.

#### **3.2 Sampling Procedure**

The nature of the investigation required a representative sample. The investigators decided to include three schools from each area: Katutura, Khomasdal and Windhoek Central. Thus, a total of nine schools were sampled. This allowed schools in the townships and urban part of the city to be included, therefore making the sample relatively representative. This number (three schools per area) was based simply on the time available on the part of the investigators. The investigators identified the nine schools based on their prior knowledge of schools with heterogeneous populations. Therefore the sample was purposive.

It was necessary to have four teachers and the principal from each school available for interview. The investigators determined that it was imperative to have one teacher from each grade (Grade 1 through to Grade 4). The interview was a structured questionnaire and was conducted face-to-face. The principal made the final decision about which teacher from which grade would be interviewed. The interviews were conducted privately in the staff room or the teacher's classroom.



### **3.3 Data Collection**

Each individual interview took approximately 30 minutes. The interview began with a brief introduction by the investigators about the nature and purpose of the investigation. All the Katutura schools willingly participated in the investigation, whereas all the Windhoek Central schools which were selected declined to participate, and the investigators had to select others from the list of schools which were initially identified. In Khomasdal, one of the initially chosen schools declined participation in the investigation.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Given that this was a qualitative case study, the investigators debriefed and discussed findings after interviews were conducted at each school. Afterward, one of the investigators compiled the raw data for general review. Subsequent to the data analysis, follow-up phone calls were made to each school for clarification about the total number of teachers in Grades 1-4 and the language streams offered by the schools.

## **4.0 Findings**

### **4.1 Medium of Instruction**

In all of the schools sampled, there are language streams wherein the parents have a choice of the medium of instruction with another language as a subject, prior to Grade 4. In all the schools sampled, English has been implemented as the medium of instruction for Grades 4 and above, with the exception of one class at one school which continues the Khoe-Khoe stream. As indicated in Table One, the most frequently used mother language as the medium of instruction is Afrikaans. Furthermore, as of Grade 4, where English is the required medium of instruction, Afrikaans is taught as the default subject in all schools except one, regardless of whether or not the learner's mother language is Afrikaans.

Although teaching in the mother language is the government policy for Grades 1, 2 and 3, only seven teachers from a sample of 36 are teaching in one of the national languages and have the same mother language as the language in which they teach. The majorities, five of these seven, has Afrikaans as a mother language and teach in Afrikaans. The only other mother languages taught were Khoe-Khoe (Damara>Nama) and Oshiwambo. Thus, children whose mother language may be one of the other national languages appear to be taught in English. Furthermore, all the teachers who are teaching in English are not native speakers, nor is English the mother language of the children whom they are teaching. Nevertheless, parents are opting to have their children taught in English, despite the national Language Policy. Table 2, shows the teachers' mother language and the language they use for teaching. It is sorted by grade taught and area in Windhoek.

As indicated in the Table 2, English is the dominant language as a medium of instruction.

Teachers were asked how they deliver instruction when there are children in their class who have a variety of mother languages. They were asked if they mix or use more than one language when teaching. Those who responded in the affirmative (55%) said that they would mix languages or use another language when it was clear that the children did not understand, when explaining new concepts or details, when trying to get the children's attention, when the teacher did not know

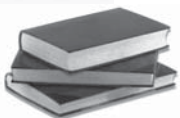


TABLE 1

	Central Windhoek	Khomasdal	Katutura
<b>School</b>	<b>Eros</b>	<b>Gmeiner</b>	<b>Augheikhas</b>
Medium of Instruction Grades 1-3	Afrikaans, English as a subject	Afrikaans, English as a subject	Khoe-Khoe, English as a subject
	English, Afrikaans as a subject	English, Afrikaans as a subject	Oshiwambo, English as a subject
Grade 4	English, Afrikaans as a subject	English, Afrikaans as a subject	English, Afrikaans as a subject
<b>School</b>	<b>Pioneerspark</b>	<b>M.H. Greef</b>	<b>Namutoni</b>
Medium of Instruction Grades 1-3	Afrikaans, English as a subject	Afrikaans, English as a subject	English, Oshiwambo as a subject
	English only	English, Afrikaans as a subject	English, Afrikaans as a subject
Grade 4	English, Afrikaans as a subject	English, Afrikaans as a subject	English, Oshiwambo as a subject
			English, Afrikaans as a subject
<b>School</b>	<b>R.H. Van Ryn</b>	<b>Khomasdal</b>	<b>Van der Byl</b>
Medium of Instruction Grades 1-3	Afrikaans, English as a subject	Afrikaans, English as a subject	English, Khoekhoe as a subject
			Khoe-Khoe, English as a subject
	English, Afrikaans as a subject	English, Afrikaans as a subject	English, Afrikaans as a subject
Grade 4	English, Afrikaans as a subject	English, Afrikaans as a subject	English, Afrikaans as a subject
			Khoe-Khoe, English as a subject

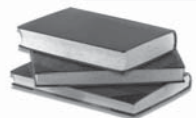
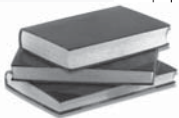


TABLE 2

	Central Windhoek	Khomasdal	Katutura	Lang. for Teaching	Mother Tongue	Lang. for Teaching	Mother Tongue	Lang. for Teaching	Mother Tongue
	Central Windhoek	Khomasdal	Katutura						
	<i>Mother Tongue</i>	<i>Mother Tongue</i>	<i>Mother Tongue</i>						<i>Lang. for Teaching</i>
Grade 1	Otjherero (2) Afrikaans	Afrikaans (2)	Oshiwambo (2) Oshiwambo Afrikaans	English (2) Afrikaans		English (2)	Oshiwambo (2) Oshiwambo English		English (2) Oshiwambo English
Grade 2	Afrikaans Afrikaans	Afrikaans	Khoe-Khoe Otjherero (2)	English Afrikaans		English	Khoe-Khoe Otjherero (2)		Khoe-Khoe English (2)
Grade 3	Afrikaans Afrikaans (2)	Otjherero (2)	Khoe-Khoe Afrikaans	English Afrikaans (2)		English (2)	Khoe-Khoe Afrikaans		English English
Grade 4	Otjherero Afrikaans	Afrikaans Otjherero	Silozi Setswana Oshiwambo	English Afrikaans & English		English English	Silozi Setswana Oshiwambo		English English English
Principal	Afrikaans (2)	Afrikaans (2) Otjherero	Oshiwambo Otjherero				Oshiwambo Otjherero		
Most comfort	Afrikaans (7) English (5)	Afrikaans (3) English (6)	Afrikaans (3) English (7) Oshiwambo Silozi						Afrikaans (3) English (7) Oshiwambo Silozi



a word in English, or when the teacher was speaking privately to a learner.

They cited the following instructional strategies, but all teachers stated that these strategies were less than optimal: Use pictures and gestures, body language; peer teaching/translating; other teaching aids; explain in Afrikaans if children don't understand English concepts and other teacher to translate.

It is noteworthy that all teachers cited peer teaching as an instructional strategy. While peer teaching and cooperative learning are time-tested positive instructional techniques, there is peril in using peers to translate language, particularly when concept comprehension and formation is at stake.

#### **4.2 Teacher preference**

Teachers generally indicated a preference for teaching in the mother language. The advantages cited included: better understanding of concepts; better expressive language; learning is easier and faster; children will know how to speak their mother language; fosters community and parental involvement; leads to improved reading and writing; children are more relaxed and confident in class, more participation; expands knowledge of indigenous culture and child will be bilingual.

However, there were an equal number of disadvantages cited to teaching Grade 1, 2, 3 in a mother language, including: causes segregation and is discriminatory; switch to English in Grade 4 is difficult and destructive; Namibia is multi-cultural and there must be a common language; Namibia is one country with one official language; limits the child's understanding of variety of cultures in an urban setting; limits children's socialization and peer communication; parents generally prefer that their children be taught in English since it is the official language; practically speaking, there are insufficient teachers for all mother tongues; books and teaching materials are not available in most mother languages (exceptions are Afrikaans, Oshiwambo) and family movement from one geographic area to another may be restricted if child is taught in an ethnic language.

When Grade 1-3 teachers were asked in what language they would choose to teach if they had the authority to teach in any language, the majority responded English. It is noteworthy, however, that the majority of teachers whose mother language is Afrikaans would choose to teach in Afrikaans, while the majority of teachers whose mother language is one of the other ethnic African languages would choose to teach in English, as indicated in Table 3.

#### **4.3 Implementation of Grade 4 English**

Grade 4 teachers were asked how they implement the transition from the mother language to English, what challenges they face in this transition, and what solutions they have found to be successful. They were also asked if they agreed with the philosophical basis that teaching through mother language in the early grades helps children learn the basic concepts and language structures in their own language, thereby facilitating the transfer of these concepts and structures to English.

These teachers all indicated that children from streams where English is not the medium of instruction have difficulties, and in particular those children whose mother language is Khoe-Khoe (presumably because the language structures

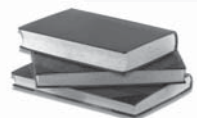


TABLE 3

Language choice	Teacher's mother tongue	Reasons	Total
English	Oshiwambo	Most commonly used, key to everything	4
	Otjiherero	Most commonly used	5
	Khoe-Khoe	Inclusive and used by all	1
	Afrikaans	Used to it, most commonly used	2
Khoe-Khoe	Khoe-Khoe	Easier for teacher and for learners	1
Otjiherero	Otjiherero	Teacher's mother tongue	2
Rukwangali	Rukwangali	Teacher's mother tongue	1
Afrikaans	Afrikaans	Teacher's mother tongue	10

are so different). Remedial assistance is offered in some schools, but the teachers just continue to emphasize English. They stated that children have difficulty reading and writing in English, and worry that their instructions are not clearly understood, which may be a function of the teacher's expressive language skills as well as the learner's receptive language skills. Solutions and strategies included listing words for the children to write on the blackboard, using other languages to explain concepts, consulting with principal and other teachers, and use of English phonics.

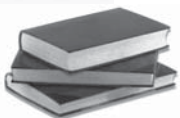
While every Grade 4 teacher expressed agreement with the philosophical basis of the Language Policy, at the same time they all indicated that many learners have not mastered concepts in the mother language, have difficulties, and cannot read fluently, if at all. Learners who had been in the English stream in Grades 1-3 have the easiest transition to Grade 4.

Finally, the Grade 4 teachers were asked, "If you had the authority to teach in any language as a Grade 4 teacher, what language would you choose, and why?" Nine (9) teachers responded, and seven (7) said they would choose English because it is the official language, good for communication anywhere in the world, and it addresses multicultural dynamics. One teacher chose Afrikaans because it is her mother language and another chose Otjiherero because "it is a proud language."

#### 4.4 Teacher Training and Promotion Opportunities

It appears that the teachers interviewed were neither prepared nor trained to teach in one of the national languages, unless their training was in Afrikaans prior to independence (1990), in which case they were taught to teach in Afrikaans. Teachers who received their training in Namibia subsequent to 1990 were taught in English, and depending upon the college or university which they attended, the mother language teaching policy may or may not have been addressed as part of their curriculum.

The investigators asked about the impact of the Language Policy on teacher's job flexibility, opportunities to teach throughout the country, and opportunities for





promotion. Responses fell into two categories:

1. The policy is limiting because one can only teach in areas where one speaks the mother language. This can be a barrier to promotion opportunities.
2. The policy is not a problem because one needs to be bilingual and English provides an advantage. English is necessary for promotion and one can teach anywhere in English.

#### **4.4 Assistance and Advice for Teachers**

There appears to be a wide variety of support for teachers when they notice that a learner is not making progress. In addition to offering afternoon remedial classes and consulting books and workshop training materials, they indicated that they seek advice from: the principal; head of department or grade; subject head; parents; colleagues; occupational therapist; psychologist; Ministry of Education; teacher resource centre and neighboring cluster schools.

Although from this case study it cannot be determined whether these resources are helpful, it clearly seems that teachers know where and how to obtain assistance.

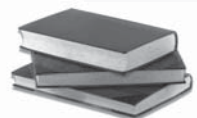
#### **4.5 Principal's Opinions on the Language Policy**

The principals from seven (7) of the nine (9) schools were individually interviewed about their opinions regarding the purpose of the national Language Policy and its' advantages and disadvantages. Six (6) of these seven (7) interviewed did not indicate that the purpose of the national Language Policy is to teach mother language in the early grades for the purpose of language development and concept formation. Rather, they stated that the purpose of the Language Policy is simply to promote the use of indigenous languages and to make the community aware that English is the official language of Namibia as well as a medium of international communication.

Principals stated that implementation of the Language Policy for teaching in mother language is very difficult in urban areas due to the heterogeneity of the population. In rural areas, where the population is more mono-lingual and homogeneous, it is easier to teach in the primary mother language. Both teachers and children are disadvantaged in urban areas if one ethnic language is identified as the primary mother language for a school. In general, principals cited many more disadvantages than advantages to the Language Policy.

The advantages are: easier home-school communication; learner-centered approach; learners understand and participate more readily; encourages bilingualism and promotes expressive language development, self-confidence and socialization.

The disadvantages are: requires smaller classes and many teaching aids; most schools do not offer the child's specific mother language, and therefore this limits parental choice; more difficult transition to English in comparison to those who have been taught in an English stream from Grade 1; heterogeneous nature (multi-lingual/multi-cultural) of classes inhibits possibility for teaching in all mother languages; urban population is multi-lingual and therefore it is not possible to choose only one ethnic language, therefore, it is preferable to teach in English; there are limited textbooks and teacher training in mother languages (with the exception of Afrikaans) and teaching in the mother language is reminiscent of the separation engendered by apartheid.



The challenges which principals face in the implementation of the Language Policy of course vary from school to school. They generally concur that the Language Policy is most easy to implement in rural areas, where there are very few multi-cultural and multi-lingual pressures. One principal stated that the policy is not implemented in his school due to the difficulties in doing so in a very multi-cultural setting. A main challenge appears to come from parents who want to enroll their children in an English stream even though the Language Policy specifies the mother language. It is easier to accede to the parents' wishes in the more heterogeneous schools where the mother language may not be offered. Another challenge is the lack of qualified teachers for specific mother languages as well as lack of resources (textbooks).

#### 4.6 Teacher-Teacher Communication

##### 4.7.1 *Ethnic composition*

The teaching staff of all the schools sampled is ethnically diverse, but not to the same extent in all schools. Teachers reported that the ethnic composition of the teaching staff is representative of the population of learners, although not proportional; the learners may be more diverse. The only exception is in the Katutura neighborhood, where there are children from Angola whose mother language is Portuguese, which is not one of the national languages of Namibia. In such cases, a translator may need to be hired to assist the child in school.

##### 4.7.2 *Formal and informal communication*

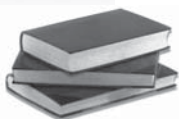
In the most ethnically diverse schools, teachers reported that school business is conducted in English. In the less diverse schools (in terms of teaching staff and learners), school business is conducted in English and Afrikaans. When teachers are speaking informally among themselves, English, Afrikaans, or other national languages are spoken.

#### 4.7 Learner-Learner Dynamics and Communication

Teachers from all the schools indicated that children are encouraged to use English when speaking to each other. The exception is the children in Afrikaans medium of instruction streams. When children are conversing among themselves during non-structured times, the languages used varied. As indicated in Table 4, children in Central Windhoek and Khomasdal tend to use Afrikaans or a mixture of English and Afrikaans for informal conversation, and it was perceived by one teacher that children are reluctant to speak in their mother language if it is not Afrikaans. Children in Katutura tend to use more English, perhaps due to the more heterogeneous nature of the schools.

TABLE 4

Central Windhoek	Khomasdal	Katutura
English & Afrikaans	English & Afrikaans	English
Afrikaans	Afrikaans	English & mother tongue
Other mother tongue	Other mother tongue	Other mother tongue
	English	



#### **4.8 School social dynamics**

As indicated in section 4.7.1, the ethnic composition of teaching staff is generally representative, but not proportional to, the ethnic composition of the learners. While all schools acknowledged that there may be children whose mother language could not be taught (due to lack of staff), there did not appear to be a great concern about non-implementation of the Language Policy. In the Khomasdal and Windhoek Central schools, the default language was Afrikaans, while in Katutura, the default language was English.

The social dynamics among teaching staffs appeared to center upon the use or non-use of Afrikaans for school business. In some schools, English is used exclusively, while in others English is used but always translated into Afrikaans for teachers who are more comfortable. Conversations with parents are generally held in Afrikaans because many parents are not fluent in English. Teachers converse among themselves in Afrikaans or may segregate themselves according to their mother language. The principal of one school noted that teachers are now trying to use English because there is an American teacher, but it is not easy.

#### **4.9 Exams**

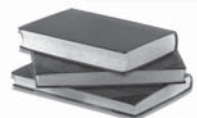
Given that English is generally the medium of instruction except in a few Afrikaans streams, one Oshiwambo stream and one Khoe-Khoe stream, the investigators asked whether exams are ever translated for learners, and if so, under what circumstances. It appears that this varies from school to school and that there is not a formal policy, but rather at the discretion of the teacher. However, teachers in the majority of schools reported that exams are not translated. The circumstances under which exams would be translated include: according to the composition of the class, when the teacher believes that the child does not understand, for the transition from grade 3 to 4, in one school grade 4 exams can be in both English and Afrikaans. It was also found that teachers informally would clarify exam instructions for the learners in other languages

#### **5.0 Discussion**

It appears that there are very few opportunities for learners to be taught in their mother languages if the mother language is not Afrikaans. There was only one school in this sample that implemented the mother language as the medium of instruction. At that school, there is one Khoe-Khoe and one Oshiwambo stream. It was also reported that there is a lack of willingness by parents to have their children taught in their mother language; parents prefer to have their children in an English stream, even though English is not spoken at home. The exception to a preference for English as the medium of instruction for Grades 1-3 is when the mother language is Afrikaans; parents enroll their children in Afrikaans streams as medium of instruction, with English as a subject.

In the Katutura schools sampled, there are no medium of instruction in Afrikaans streams; Afrikaans is only taught as a subject. The dominant ethnic groupings in Katutura are Owambo, Damara, Herero, and they are clustered by location ethnically. Nevertheless, Afrikaans is spoken as the common language when people do not know each other's mother language when different ethnic groups are communicating.

Regardless of ethnic background, all children will have concepts in Afrikaans because their parents were educated in Afrikaans only and it is widely spoken in



Windhoek. However, it is the supposition of the investigators that if this study were conducted in the north, where Afrikaans is not widely spoken, children would be speaking in English.

The Language Policy embodies the twin goals of establishing English as the official medium of education and promoting the equal development of the main Namibian languages. The stated purpose of the Language Policy is to acquire competence in English, to promote the language and cultural identity of learners through the use of home-language medium Grades 1-3, and the teaching of home language throughout formal education provided necessary resources are available. The policy also states that the medium of instruction should be English beyond the primary grades. It is clear that instructional materials need to be developed in mother languages. The pedagogical foundation for the Language Policy is to facilitate concept formation, but this is not happening in practice due to the lack of teacher training and materials, although the political policy may be to maintain the native languages. Therefore, the investigators wonder if the Language Policy is the best way of maintaining and supporting the mother languages.

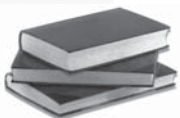
## 6.0 Conclusion

International research literature suggests that learners acquire basic skills, concept formation and general understanding better when they study in their native languages. Different countries have made strides to implement the best possible contextual education systems that are commensurate with the needs of the local people. However, implementation of such systems does not occur without challenges. Brock-Utne quoted in Iijambo (2001:179) succinctly argues that "there is hardly another socio cultural topic you can discuss with Africans that leads to such heated debates and stirs up so many emotions as the language of instruction in African schools."

This study has elaborated how Namibia abolished the former segregating education system to establish the current system which requires learners to be taught in the mother language from Grades 1 through 3. Nevertheless, the findings of this investigation indicate that there are enormous dilemmas that need to be addressed if the Language Policy is to operate in the interest of the inhabitants of Namibia. While the Language Policy design is sound, practical implementation of this policy remains retrogressive due to a conglomerate of factors, such as immobility of language teachers from region to region, lack of trained sufficiently language teachers in multi-lingual urban areas, limited availability of teaching materials in all native languages except Afrikaans, lack of motivation by the teachers, parents desire and indeed insistence, on the English stream, perceptions of de facto perpetuation of apartheid in multi-cultural settings.

The Namibian situation is particularly skewed. All former colonized countries in Africa resorted to their colonizers language for official use and language of instruction in schools. English, the chosen language for Namibia, has proven to be problematic since it was not the language of the colonizers.

German was the first colonial language, and after 1915, the use of Afrikaans was most widely implemented. As indicated in section 4.4 of the findings, most contemporary teachers were taught in Afrikaans. Materials to teach other ethnic languages are inadequate. The country literally still functions in Afrikaans as the *lingua franca*, despite the official status of English.



The dilemma in Namibia is of well intended educational policies versus the practical realities of implementing such policies. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that education policy making needs to be defined and understood very broadly. It is the opinion of the investigators that education in general and the Language Policy in particular, is not confined to the formal relationships and processes of government, nor only to schools and teachers, nor to legislation affecting them. The conclusive, broad definition requires an understanding in broader perspectives; that is, in its political, social, and economic contexts. Those contexts also require study because of the ways in which they shape education policies. If they are excluded, a comprehensive picture is not provided.

Thus, the question must be critically asked, "whose language and indeed whose education for all is being advocated?" The findings showed that there remain persistent language inequalities regarding the perceived value of one language over another, the lack of opportunities to be taught in one's mother language, and the limited, if any, instructional materials in all native languages except Afrikaans. A contradictory Language Policy is a problem that contributes to unequal educational opportunity, causes confusion, and exacerbates language and ethnic divisions. Comprehensive and well thought out research is necessary if Namibia is to develop an all inclusive and acceptable Language Policy.

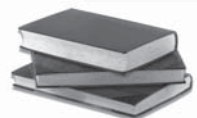
## **7.0 Recommendations**

Although the sample size of this study was quite small, nevertheless it appears that there are two cross-cutting urgent needs in order to more fully implement the Language Policy:

if the policy is truly to be implemented in urban multi-cultural areas, materials must be developed for language teaching and teacher training must include pedagogy about teaching in the mother language.

The following recommendations and questions for further study are offered by the investigators:

1. Expand this investigation to include more schools in Khomas, other heterogeneous urban areas in Namibia, and homogeneous rural areas in order to determine the national status.
2. Include parents in the interview sample, particularly those who have requested the English stream rather than mother language stream.
3. Interview learners in Grades 1-3 are using their mother language, interview learners in grade 4 using both English and the mother language, regarding their experiences and the psycho-social implications of the implementation or non-implementation of the Language Policy.
4. Interview learners in Grades 10-12 retrospectively regarding their experiences and how they learned English as well as their mother languages.
5. Are resources and implementation unequal based on socio-economic status of neighborhood, village or town?
6. In an urban area that is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, does it make more sense to support the mother language development in other ways and to



have English as medium of instruction due to challenges faced in order to teach in the mother language?

7. As of Grade 4, what is the relationship of learner progress to the language spoken at home?

## **8.0 References**

Government, (1993). The Language Policy for Schools. 1992-1996 and Beyond. Ministry of Education and Culture. Windhoek.

Government, (2003). The Language Policy for Schools in Namibia. Discussion Document. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture. Windhoek.

Iijambo, TCK. (2001). State, Region, Ethnicity and Educational Inequalities in Post-Colonial Namibia. Doctoral Dissertation. Michigan State University

Landsberg, E. (ed.) (2005). Addressing Barriers to Learning, A South African Perspective, Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Matengu, K. (2006). Adoption of ICT at Schools in Core and Periphery Settings of Namibia. Exploring Innovation Technology Policy and Development Issues. Unpublished dissertation. Joensuu: Shaker Verlag.

Mendelsohn, J., Jarvis, A., Roberts, C. and Robertson, T. (2002). Atlas of Namibia. A Portrait of The Land and Its People. Ministry of Environment and Tourism. David Philip.

Tsoupaloko, F. (2003). A Case Study: The Importance of Language in Preserving Cultural Identity, commissioned by UNESCO.

