

CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE WHEN APPLYING MOTHER TONGUE BASED MULTILINGUAL (MTB-MLE) EDUCATION STRATEGIES IN LOWER GRADES OF CHONGWE DISTRICT

Abstract

This study investigated the challenges teachers face when employing Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) strategies in Primary schools in Chongwe District. The study is informed by Ruiz's three language orientation theory which investigated language teaching and learning from the standpoint of language as a right, language as a problem and language as a resource. The study adopted a descriptive research design and used qualitative research approach through focus group discussions, classroom lesson observations and document analysis. The sample size included thirty teachers and learners of Primary school from ten schools of Chongwe District. The schools and teachers were sampled using purposive sampling and the data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that challenges that teachers face when applying MTB-MLE include inadequate materials, concepts that too unfamiliar to be interpreted into the mother tongue, time consuming and high teacher-pupil ratio. The study recommends that Curriculum Development Center should capacity build teachers to be able to design materials in Zambian languages that can be used in multilingual classrooms.

Key words: strategy, multilingualism, MTB-MLE, mother tongue, language of instruction.

1.0 Introduction

Zambia is a multilingual, multi-ethnic state whose sociolinguistic landscape has been influenced by historical factors of migration and colonialism. Regarding language of classroom instruction, the country has gone through major shift in language policy, especially during the period 1964 to 2014.

Several changes have taken place in language policy and practice in Zambia. The first one being the 1966 declaration of English as sole medium of instruction from Grade one to university level of education. The second one being the recommendations of 1977 educational reforms which, despite admitting the shortcomings of English as language of classroom instruction, still sanctioned its continued use while creating provision for the utilisation of seven Zambian official languages where necessary. Finally, the 1996 language-in-education policy which also retained the use of English as official language of classroom instruction but, in addition, proposes the employment of community languages for literacy and numeracy from Grade One to Grade Four (Masaiti, 2016). As a result of these observations, a number of innovations and proposals were brought forward which culminated into the 2013 Literacy Framework. This framework came to realisation in 2014 when it was documented and implemented from 1st January 2014 as pointed out above. However, in the implementation of this recommendation, the language in education policy still prescribed one of the seven regional languages as media of classroom instruction depending on the region. This perspective meant that many learners would still be taught in unfamiliar languages because Zambia is a multilingual nation with many ethnic communities in its different regions.

Several studies (Banda and Mwanza, 2020; Nyimbili and Mwanza, 2020; Mwanza, 2020; Mubita and Mwanza, 2020; Banda and Mwanza, 2020; Mwanza and Bwalya, 2019) have reported that in Zambia, classrooms are inherently multilingual and that the use of a regional language as stipulated in the language policy does not support or recognize the linguistic identities and capabilities of all the learners in the classroom. These studies have also reported that strictly adhering to the language policy of using only one language and exclude the rest of the languages often result into symbolic violence where some learners are excluded from learning despite being physically present in the classroom. It is in this context that Banda and Mwanza (2017) and Mashinja and Mwanza (2020) suggested that there is need for teachers to negotiate language policies in order to be inclusive in their teaching. These two studies suggest that translanguaging practices, for example, would be useful language strategies in these learning and teaching contexts. In practice, this would mean that teachers should contest and negotiate language policies in order to provide teaching and a learning situation which can be described as learner centred. Moreover, Mwanza (2012) reported that in Lusaka which is a cosmopolitan environment, teachers used other languages such as Bemba and English to teach despite the language policy prescribing standard Nyanja.

It is from this background that this study investigated the challenges teachers face when using Mother tongue based multilingual education strategies in Chongwe district which is a predominantly Soli speaking while the policy prescribes standard Nyanja to teach.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

The use of Zambian languages in the first four grades of primary schools entailed that some learners were taught in unfamiliar languages since Zambia is a multilingual nation. Chongwe rural district is one such multilingual area with multilingual learners where the official medium of instruction was Chinyanja while the dominant familiar language is Soli. This implied that teachers needed to use MTB-MLE in lower grades to enable all learners access learning. However, it is not known whether teachers in Chongwe rural district faced any challenges when they made use of MTB-MLE strategies in lower grades of primary school to enhance breakthrough to literacy. In addition, there is no known study that has investigated the challenges faced by teachers when employing MTB-MLE strategies in Chongwe district and in Zambia. It is in this regard that this study investigated the challenges that teachers faced when applying MTB-MLE strategies in their classrooms in Chongwe district.

3.0 Objectives of the Study

Arising from the problem stated above, the study sought to investigate the following objective:

- (i) To identify the challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of MTB-MLE strategies in lower grades of Primary school of Chongwe rural District.

Research Question

- (i) What challenges do teachers face when applying MTB-MLE strategies in lower grades in Chongwe District?

4.0 Theoretical Framework

The study was informed by the three language orientation theory by Ruiz (1984) which operated as a basis for language in education policy and practice in multilingual contexts. Ruiz investigated language teaching and learning from the standpoint of language as a right, language as a problem and language as a resource. Ruiz contends that regarding the orientation “language as a problem,”

English is considered as the language of importance, and monolingualism is regarded as the norm. When educational policies are shaped with this orientation, the objective is to eliminate multilingualism. From this standpoint, minoritized languages are deemed as threats to a unified national identity, and the inability to speak English is viewed as the cause of disabilities and social problems (Hult & Hornberger, 2016).

Regarding the “language as a resource” orientation, bilingualism is understood as an important element of a diverse society and considered as giving personal and societal benefits (Ruiz, 1984). This orientation falls within a neoliberal setting by alluding that in a diverse society, being bilingual can render people more competitive in a worldwide marketplace. This theory

Language as a resource posits that monolingual discourses founded on the dominant language are regarded suitable for instruction with the reasoning of inclusivity while multilingualism is perceived as a problem. Yet when diversity is perceived as a resource, heteroglossic discourse can be employed to help learners acquire basic reading skills and acquire knowledge (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Therefore, how language is deciphered impacts on how it is utilised. The 2013 Literacy supported the use of a familiar language as medium of instruction from grade one to four. In Chongwe District, Chinyanja was chosen as the language of instruction over Soli the indigenous language of the area due to its dominance. In this case, Chinyanja was deemed as suitable for use as the medium of instruction in the lower primary grades.

Under Ruiz’s (1984) third orientation of “language as a right,” orientation, the argument is that, speaking and maintaining one’s language (or languages) is a human right attached to one’s personal autonomies. That is to say, when language is professed as a fair, lawful prerogative, it is perceived as an influential arbitrator to having access to very important domains of society such as the labour force and health care (Hult & Hornberger, 2016).

Methods and Materials

The study adopted the descriptive research design under qualitative research approach (Milingo, 1999; Milingo, 2004; Milingo, Changwe and Hara-Zulu, 2021). McCombes (2022) submits that descriptive research aims to precisely and systematically describe a population, situation or phenomenon. The population for the study were all schools, learners and teachers in Chongwe Rural District. The sample for the study consisted of ten schools from which 3 teachers were

sampled per school giving a total of 30 teachers. The study employed purposive sampling technique to select the ten schools and the three teachers per school. The study made use of three data collection instruments namely, Focus Group Discussion guide, Classroom lesson Observation checklist and Documents. Since the study is purely qualitative, the data were analysed using thematic analysis. Permission to undertake research was sought from the university and clearance was obtained from University of Zambia Ethics Committee. Participants were assured that the information was purely for academic purposes and that the information would be confidential and that they would withdraw from participating in the research at any time if they so wished.

6.0 Data Presentation

The findings of the study show that the challenges faced by teachers when applying MTB-MLE strategies in their classrooms were as follows.

5.1 Time Consuming

A number of teachers indicated that applying MTB-MLE strategies in the classroom was time consuming. Teachers spent a lot of time attending to learners who were not familiar with LOI. Beginning from preparation stage, teachers took many hours consulting fellow teachers on how to translate certain concepts from LOI to L1 of learners. When using fellow learners to help those not familiar with LOI, teachers had to prepare those learners first before the lesson and spent a lot of time to do that. In some cases, teachers could not find someone to help them translate certain concepts among fellow teachers and had to consult people from the community, where they had to cover long distances. Where teachers could not find someone to help them, they ended up deferring or skipping some lessons or topics.

Teacher from school D said:

I think time also is a challenge because as you are trying to help, time is running out. Because they say literacy is one hour, so you can go beyond one hour.

Teacher from school E recounted:

Yes, challenges are there, the way I would explain it, kaili by translating you are wasting that time, we have limited time; here we only have two hours per grade. So, in one hour

you teach then if you need to help this learner, sometimes we remain to help the learners under the tree after class.

From school C, a teacher said:

Teachers spend a lot of time looking for someone to help with translation of the content. Sometimes it is difficult to find someone to help and so teachers end up skipping the lessons until one to guide is found.

5.2 Language used too unfamiliar to be interpreted

Teachers expressed themselves that the variety of Nyanja used in text books is too unfamiliar for learners and even to some teachers to comprehend. The variety of Nyanga used in textbooks is the standard Chewa instead of elementary one that can easily be interpreted and understood by learners and teachers. Teachers find it difficult to interpret these deep Nyanja words such as *mpira* ‘ball’ for *bola* and *Kukunenepa* ‘thin’ instead of *kuina*. A teacher from School D explained:

*The other challenge is that also some words are written in typical Chewa, so they need to be a little bit translated in a language they know, for example the *mpira* as the ball; instead of *mpira*, it should just be *bola* because *bola* they know it mu Chinyanja to say this is *bola*.*

From school J teachers said:

The language used in text books is deep, its Chewa but there are times you need to lighten it. Yeah, some words they know. Sometimes you need to lighten it into the language they are familiar with. It is difficult especially for teachers whose first languages are different from the LOI. Sometimes you find that there is a ka child who has come from the village, you find that you are belt out as that ka child will be able to give you the meaning.

This perspective was due to the language policy which stressed the use of the standard variety of the seven official Zambian languages for education purposes.

At school B one teacher said:

Text books are too detailed, deep language is used. Sometimes words are changed from English to Nyanja and so it is difficult for teacher to teach expressions from English to Nyanja. For example, Thursday to Thezide...

From school I teachers said:

Here in Chongwe, learners speak Soli at home. So, using Nyanja in the classroom does not help the learners. It is better to use Soli which learners speak at home.

5.3 High Teacher Pupil Ratio

The data also indicate that the high teacher-pupil ratio makes it difficult to implement MTB-MLE strategies in the classroom. Strategies like Think-pair-share can only be monitored easily when the size of a class is normal. This problem is compounded by late enrollments where learners are enrolled later during the term. The teacher may be forced to reteach some lessons or keep changing the already established groups to take care of the new comers.

At school H teachers said:

Teacher-pupil ratio should be controlled. Classes are overcrowded due to shortage of teachers and inadequate infrastructure in schools. It is difficult to teach overcrowded classes effectively. For instance, where a teacher has to use fellow learners to explain in the L1 of the learner not conversant with the LOI, it is difficult for the teacher to monitor these groups or pairs in overcrowded classes.

5.4 Inadequate Materials

Teachers expressed themselves that further challenge they faced is inadequate teaching and learning materials to enhance the use of MTB-MLE strategies in their classrooms. For instance, real objects are very expensive, say, traffic lights which are situated very far from the schools of Chongwe. The nearest traffic lights are about 30 kilometers from most schools in Chongwe. Where there are no real objects, learners end up confusing the learning of the concept and learning the language.

A Teacher from school I said:

The real objects such as pictures and real objects are difficult to find and expensive. Where do I buy? How do I get it? You find that some lessons that explain it may be that cannot be drawn like let's say traffic lights, it is difficult to teach traffic lights here... it is difficult for the learners to get the concept. Learners end up confusing learning the language and the concept...

Besides, Chongwe being a rural area, some learners may not be exposed to certain real objects which seem obvious.

At school C teachers observed:

Some learners in rural areas are not exposed to simple real objects such as stove, fridge and television set, therefore have no knowledge of these and so we find it difficult to use these as teaching or learning aids.

Teaching using real objects is one of the effective methods to apply MTB-MLE strategies and to enhance understanding of the lessons. Therefore, teachers should strive to use them whenever possible.

5.5 Mother Tongue Interference

The data from the study revealed that learners find problems when transitioning from Nyanja to English and end up writing English in Zambian Languages. Since learners are used to the local language from Grade 1 to 4, they end up confusing concepts of English and ZL when they transition to English in Grade five.

Teacher at school B said:

You find that since the sounds are different in some languages, learners experience spelling problems when the learners are from different language backgrounds. For example, in Tonga, the sound /b/ is pronounced as voiceless /β/ and there is a double /bb/ to sound the voiced /b/. So, learners get confused when it comes to spellings...

At school F one teacher said:

Because learners are exposed to local languages in lower grades and those not familiar with LOI are helped using other local languages, when they transition to English, they end up confusing English with the local language and write some words of English in Zambian languages. So, using mother tongue should be a temporal measure...

At school H teachers observed:

When using English, for example, in Grade 4, it is difficult to spell words in English. Learners find it difficult to spell words in English correctly, e.g. cook /kuku/, can /keni/.

5.6 Slow Learners affect the Pace

The data from the study revealed that one of the challenges affecting the application of MTB-MLE in the classroom is that learners are very slow. Teachers need to exercise a lot of patience to ensure that every learner is brought on board. Teachers from school J indicated that:

We are talking of these learners who learn slowly, so learning slowly is one of the challenges, you find that no wonder we group them so we can have this group at this pace and this group is at this pace. You will not be able to see the fruits as early as you want, you need to have patience. You need to run with them, you can run with them the whole term, they are just slowly improving, slowly improving because they are already slow. And some of them it's totally a new language...

5.7 Parents not Supportive

The results from the study further indicated that parents whose children are not familiar with LOI do not support the efforts by teachers to help their children with learning. Parents are urged to help their children at home with homework and to complement teaching using LOI. However, parents have not been very supportive of this initiative as they think that teaching is the work for teachers and not parents.

A teacher from school B explained:

Parents do not feel the need of helping their learners, they feel it is the teachers that should teach, especially if their language is different from the language of instruction. Sometimes, those parents who try to help their children at home do not use the LOI, they continue with their first language and this delays the progress of learners.

6.0 Data Analysis

The study revealed that one of the challenges faced by teachers when applying MTB-MLE strategies is inadequate materials. For instance, real objects are very expensive while others such as traffic lights are situated very far from the schools of Chongwe District. As a result, teachers find it difficult to teach certain concepts without referring to real objects. Teaching without real objects is a challenge especially with learners who are not familiar with LOI. In such a scenario, learning just remains abstract in the mind of the learner and learners may end up confusing the language and the concept. These findings are supported by Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021) that the challenges faced by teachers when implementing translanguaging, one of the MTB-MLE strategies, included the mismatch between the language of instruction and dominant learners' familiar languages, rigidity of the language policy, strict monolingual based assessment which only tested skills in the regional language and inadequate teaching and learning materials. Hunahunan (2019) adds that challenges confronting the programme implementers of the MTB-MLE strategies include the inadequate representation of the cultural heritage of the children in their first language, insufficient and inadequate instructional materials and equipment, and the lack of teachers training for appropriate MTB-MLE teaching techniques and learning styles. The lack of representation of cultural heritage is crucial, for instance, when learners are taught in a language that they are not familiar with, they will not get the meaning of what they are being taught as culture and language are inseparable. The teachers therefore should endeavour to be familiar with the languages and culture that learners speak or languages spoken in the area for them to teach learners meaningfully.

Furthermore, teachers need to be innovative and creative to design suitable materials in the first language of the learners because it is only when teaching is done taking into account the cultural context that learners can be useful members of society. To this end, the Ministry of Education through Curriculum Development Centre should come up with deliberate programmes aimed at

equipping teachers with skills to design and implement local materials to teach using MTB-MLE strategies in schools.

Besides, other challenges cited by teachers include mother tongue interference and that some concepts used in the mother tongues are too unfamiliar to be interpreted. Deep Chewa words such as *mpira* instead of *bola* 'ball' are used which are too deep to be comprehended by learners in elementary Nyanja. In this way both learners and teachers are confronted with the problem trying to understand the words in order to comprehend the content. This view is supported by CDA theory in that it studies discourse and its functions in society and how especially, forms of inequality are expressed, represented, legitimated, or reproduced in text and talk (Van Dijk, 2006). In this case, the concepts from Chewa are used in the classroom due to the fact that it is a dominant language associated with power over other varieties of Nyanja and minority languages such as Soli.

Given this scenario, there is need for policy makers to be flexible to allow teachers use minority languages such as Soli in Chongwe District, to explain some concepts during classroom interaction with learners. Besides, teachers should be liberal to give explanations in other minority languages spoken in the area and make use of the MTB-MLE strategies that promote minority languages. Teachers should learn and teach in the minority languages spoken in the area where the school is situated. This is important because it helps to preserve the cultural heritage of a people as culture is expressed through language. In addition, the usefulness of a given language in terms of tradition which includes knowledge of medicines contained in plants and other existing things in a given language should be preserved for the benefit of society. In line with this perspective, Leketi (2015) posits that expanding cultural identity of the speakers and the students through classroom interactions is important as it enables them realise that their cultures are similar with those of other languages. In addition, this view is supported by the CDA theory showing how social relations, identity, knowledge and power are constructed through written and spoken texts in communities, schools and classrooms (van Dijk, 2006).

The findings are further supported by Dequiña and Oliva (2022) who cited difficulty understanding of terminology, language use confusion, as well as translation challenges as affecting teachers' application of MTB-MLE strategies in the classroom. Dequiña and Oliva (2022) further contend that teachers had problems with translation, the use of additional instructional materials, the use of technology, and consultation with other teachers. The teachers should be encouraged to equip

themselves with skills of translation, and be able to design materials in the mother tongue in order to come round this challenge. As Leonardi (2011) avows, translation is a cognitive process which teachers need to employ from time to time in a multilingual classroom to help learners when faced with foreign words and expressions. Furthermore, these findings concur with those of Lartec et. al (2014) who cited problems encountered by the teachers in implementing mother tongue-based instruction which include absence of books written in mother tongue, lack of vocabulary, and lack of teacher-training. The difficulty of understanding terminology, language use confusion and translation challenges is considered a problem according to Ruiz's (1984) orientation of language as a problem. In Chongwe District, the LOI was Nyanja for lower grades, and therefore the translation of concepts was done in the standard variety which is Chewa and which was sometimes difficult to be comprehended by learners in Chongwe District who spoke elementary Nyanja not as deep as Chewa. Therefore, insisting on translating concepts into Chewa ends up to be seen as a problem as learners have problems comprehending such unfamiliar terms during lessons. To this end, teachers need to be liberal in the classroom and help learners understand lessons by following Ruiz's orientation of language as a right by explaining concepts in a language that is familiar to learners. This motivates learners as they exercise their personal autonomy through using the language they are familiar with.

Yet another challenge cited by teachers in the application of MTB-MLE is that it was time consuming. Teachers spent a lot of time trying to translate concepts from the target language to the local language or from the LOI to the L1 of learners. Where teachers had to use other learners to help explain the concepts to learners not familiar with LOI, they spent a lot of time preparing those learners to be able to explain to the friends correctly. In addition, the teachers had to monitor those learners in class while they were teaching and while the learners were doing peer interpretation. Where teachers were not familiar with the L1 of the learners, they spent a lot of time consulting fellow teachers and members of the community to help them with the explanation of certain concepts before going into class to teach. In some cases, teachers had to invite members of the community to class to explain concepts better in the mother tongue or LOI. At times the teachers could not manage to find people to help them with translation and ended up deferring some lessons or skipping them altogether. These findings are supported by Dequña and Oliva (2022) who submit that teachers have problems with translation, the use of additional instructional materials, the use of technology, and consultation with other teachers and therefore teacher readiness to teach

is stressed. To this end, teachers should learn the L1 of learners in the area and MOE through Curriculum Development Centre should help capacity build teachers by providing training in translation and instructional material development. These views are also in line with those of Maulad and Magbata (2022) who pointed out that the diversity of the linguistic backgrounds of the learners posed a problem during the implementation of MTB-MLE programme. Even though teachers have knowledge and receive training on MTB-MLE, such knowledge and training may have no practical relevance to their day-to-day classroom instruction and therefore spend a lot of time seeking for help from others. In addition, this view is in line with that of Yuvayapan (2019), who revealed that despite their favourable sentiments on MTB-MLE in some specific circumstances, teachers did not frequently use this strategy due to the demands of their institutions, which include over enrolment and other duties. These demands of the institution leave teachers with very little time for them to implement MTB-MLE activities such as consulting fellow teachers and community members, preparing learners for peer interpretation and designing other MTB-MLE materials.

The results are also supported by Ezayra (2017), as she posits that the problems faced by teachers when employing MTB-MLE in the classroom are lack of materials written in mother tongue, lack of vocabulary, and influence of social media over the students.

The other challenge that affected the application of MTB-MLE strategies is the high teacher-pupil ratio whereby teachers were handling large classes. Applying MTB-MLE strategies such as using peer interpretation to explain some concepts, using groups, picture stories and real objects are very difficult to employ with large classes. This problem was compounded by late enrolments and absenteeism by learners. From classroom observation, the results of the study revealed that the use of methods such as group work, pair work, discussion and read aloud to help learners whose L1 was different from LOI in the classroom by teachers were not effectively done. This is due to high teacher-pupil ratio and high enrolments which makes it difficult for the teacher to apply these methods to large classes. These views concur with what Dagelea, Peralta & Abocejo (2022) postulated, that MBT-MLE activity is difficult to implement as it required additional funds concerning the address of the inadequacy on instructional and developmental resources to cope with large classes or over enrollments. Furthermore, Narvacan (2023) reports that learner-centered instruction faced challenges such as learners exhibiting unruly behaviour during activities;

secondly, teachers found it difficult to use the mother tongue; and thirdly, there was lack of cooperation among learners. Unruly behaviour and lack of cooperation among learners is only possible with large classes which poses problems with class control. In Chongwe district, many schools have high enrolment contributing to challenges in implementing MTB-MLE strategies.

Furthermore, data from document analysis revealed that some teachers could not formulate learning outcomes correctly in their lesson plans covering the affective, cognitive and psychomotor domains. Some covered only two domains, others only one. The three domains complement the application of the MTB-MLE strategies in the classroom. When teachers do not formulate the learning outcomes correctly, they end up not applying MTB-MLE strategies appropriately in class. The data further showed that in some cases, teachers formulated the learning outcomes correctly covering the three domains but did not apply them in their actual teaching. The planning did not much with the actual delivery thereby affecting the quality of education negatively. These findings are supported by Dequiña and Oliva (2022) who cited the lack of instructional materials development, and teacher readiness to teach as challenges faced by teachers when applying MTB-MLE strategies.

In addition, the analysis of teachers' lesson plans and schemes of work revealed that majority of the teachers have problems with sourcing teaching and learning materials especially real objects. Even pictures are a challenge for them to secure. As a result, many of them just resorted to using flash cards, songs and read aloud without aligning them to MTB-MLE principles. The implication of this is that some teachers taught learners without paying particular attention to those not familiar with the LOI due to inadequate teaching and learning materials. These findings concur with what Hunahunan (2019) found out, that challenges teachers face when applying MTB-MLE strategies in the classroom include insufficient and inadequate instructional materials and equipment, and the lack of teachers training for appropriate MTB-MLE teaching techniques and learning styles. The findings are also supported by Haukås (2015) who submits that teachers did not fully understand and utilize multilingual pedagogies in the classroom.

Therefore, MOE through CDC should come up with programmes aimed at capacity building teachers to be able to use MTB-MLE strategies appropriately. At the same time, teachers themselves should be encouraged to be creative, innovative and liberal enough to come up with teaching materials using local materials and methods in line with MTB-MLE strategies. Besides,

Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021) support these findings since they posit that challenges faced with teachers when implementing MTB-MLE strategies include the focus on skills in the regional language and inadequate teaching and learning materials. The focus on the regional language is in line with CDA, that when considering the relationship between power and discourse, usually the dominant language is adopted and the less dominant is suppressed (Van Dijk, 2006). In Chongwe, Nyanja has been adopted as medium of instruction in lower primary schools because it is a dominant language enjoying more power than Soli, the indigenous language of Chongwe or even other varieties of Nyanja. Nyanja is also one of the seven official Zambian languages and therefore when translating materials from English usually Chewa is used as opposed to other varieties of Nyanja such as Tumbuka and Chikunda.

The data further revealed that when implementing MTB-MLE, teachers face the challenge of mother tongue interference with the learners. Since sounds are different in different languages, learners experience spelling problems. For instance, a child whose first language is Tonga may find problems in spelling words like *bola* in Nyanja since in Tonga the voiced bilabial plosive /b/ is spelled with double *b* /bb/ while a single /b/ is voiceless bilabial fricative /β/. Also, the voiced glottal fricative /ɦ/ and voiceless glottal fricative /h/ in Tonga are spelled differently. Therefore, when a learner is transitioning from Tonga to Nyanga, they can have problems with spelling. The same was the case when learners were transitioning from local language to English in Grade Five, some of them ended up pronouncing and spelling words wrongly as a result of mother tongue interference. This gave teachers challenges on how to handle these learners in the classroom. These views are supported by Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021) that the challenges that teachers face when implementing MTB-MLE activities included the mismatch between the language of instruction and dominant learners' familiar languages, rigidity of the language policy and inadequate teaching and learning materials. This perspective is in line with CDA theory bringing out how social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, produced and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts (van Dijk, 2006).

On the other hand, some learners were very slow which gave teachers challenges of progressing in their lessons. This problem was compounded by transfers of learners from other schools especially those from other regions where a different LOI was used. In such circumstances, teachers were forced to reteach lessons to take care of the learners who were enrolled late and

those who came on transfer from other schools. Therefore, employing MTB-MLE strategies with such learners was a challenge.

A further challenge teachers faced when applying MTB-MLE strategies was that some parents were not supportive. Where a learner's L1 is different from the LOI, it is helpful that parents help the learner at home with lessons and homework. However, some parents felt that teachers were the ones who were supposed to teach learners and shunned that task. This was especially common where the LOI was different from the parents' L1. Where parents decided to help the learner, they used their L1 and not the LOI, which posed a challenge on the part of the teachers. This perspective is supported by Hunahunan (2019) who identified issues when implementing MTB-MLE including the inadequate representation of the cultural heritage of the children in their first language, insufficient and inadequate instructional materials and equipment, and the lack of teachers training for appropriate MTB-MLE teaching techniques and learning styles. When teachers lack appropriate MTB-MLE teaching techniques and learning styles, they will not be able to help the learners in the classroom let alone parents at home.

8.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that challenges that teachers face when applying MTB-MLE include inadequate materials, concepts that too unfamiliar to be interpreted into the mother tongue, time consuming and high teacher-pupil ratio. The implication of this therefore is that the Ministry of Education through Curriculum Development Center should capacity build teachers to be able to design materials in Zambian languages that can be used in multilingual classrooms. The teachers should be liberal enough to use strategies to help learners who may not be familiar with LOI. The language policy should also take into consideration the use of minority languages such as Soli as languages of instruction in the classroom to take the needs of all learners.

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