

Research Article

Theory and Practice: The Case of the Mother Tongue, SiSwati Language in Education Policy

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Abstract

The competition between colonial and indigenous languages is always a threat towards the implementation of language in education policies. The study investigates implementation of the language in education policy which postulates that siSwati shall be used as the medium of instruction from the 1st four grades. The objectives were to determine the language of instruction used to teach pupils in the 1st four grades and to ascertain the factors that determine the language of instruction used to teach pupils in the first four grades. The assumptions raised are modelled by the bilingualism model which pronounces teachers' use of medium of instruction in bilingual contexts as either additive or subtractive. It used qualitative research approach, case study design and a semi-structured interview guide with twelve (12) items designed by the researchers. The population for the study was teachers of the 1st four grades in the Hhohho region. Purposive sampling was used to select two (2) schools, and four (4) teachers as participants. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse data. The findings revealed that teachers offered instruction in English or both languages, while siSwati was used during siSwati lessons and to clarify most challenging concepts during the use of English as a medium. The factors that determine the use of siSwati were the language of instruction used in prescribed texts, the syllabus and the pupils' language background. It was concluded that teachers did not adhere to the policy. There is need to revise the language of textbooks and to capacitate teachers on the psychological benefits of offering instruction in the mother tongue.

Keywords

Medium of Instruction, Bilingualism, Language Policy

1. Introduction

A mother tongue is a person's native language, one that is spoken and acquired in the home environment and transferred from one generation to the next [9, 22]. The pedagogical definition of the mother tongue given by [22] is that it is an official standardised language variety used as a school language, the medium for teaching and learning in educational contexts (p. 2).

A medium of instruction of instruction is the language that is used to deliver instruction in both formal and informal educational settings [30]. The authors of this paper simply regard it as the language used by the teacher to teach learners at school.

Bilingualism is proficiency in two different languages; the ability to read, write, speak and listen them either at profi-

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ciency level or varying degrees [2]. In the context of this study bilingualism is the knowledge and ability to use both siSwati and English.

Implementation of the mother tongue, siSwati, as a medium of instruction refers to not just teaching the mother tongue as a compulsory subject but using it as an instructional language to teach, pass information and give learners instruction while teaching in class. It is not always the case that a mother tongue is the language spoken by the mother, it can be any language that children speak at home.

RUTU Foundation describes the use of the mother tongue as a medium of schooling approach that uses the language familiar to the learners to teach [26]. The use of a mother tongue as a medium is a democratic right aimed at holistic development of the child. However, in order for a local language to qualify as instructional, it should have attained a certain degree of pedagogical suitability and written development [29]. This study investigated the practical implementation of the policy that directs that the mother tongue, siSwati shall be used as the medium of instruction from the 1st four grades of schooling.

1.1. Background of the Paper

Eswatini is a bilingual country with two languages; siSwati, the mother tongue and English, the second language. Both languages are given equal status of being official languages. According to the two languages official status elevates them to be used officially by government, institutions, schools, the justice system and all other domains. The advantage of which is that children who are native speakers of the official languages are at an advantage of being taught in their mother tongue thus, enhancing performance at school. The accorded status also gives room to the two languages to be developed equally as they are used widely. No one ever imagined that the mother tongue siSwati may run the risk of being a dying language considering its accorded status alongside English. This study investigated the practical implementation of the mother tongue, siSwati as a medium of instruction from the 1st four grades.

1.1.1. Historical Development of SiSwati in Education

The mother tongue siSwati is a Nguni language that began to be taught in schools in the year 1969 after independence [31]. However, today siSwati is still regarded as an inferior language regardless of its status as an official language. Numerous publications on the mother tongue, siSwati report on lack of material development as a major concern that has finally led to its low utility [18, 20]. The complaint on lack of material for the siSwati language is not new, it dates back after independence. Before independence, the indigenous language taught in Eswatini was IsiZulu mainly because siSwati was only a spoken language so there was no written material [3]. The need for an indigenous language to be taught at the school

system was hindered by the absence of written material.

The Eswatini primary school curriculum started offering siSwati immediately in 1969 in grade 1. From the onset the siSwati subject was taught both as language and literature. The authors of this paper took that as an advantage towards the development of material in the mother tongue, siSwati because well taught literature triggers the enthusiasm to write. The idea is supported by Ngugi wa Thiong'o as cited in [25] who opines that language and literature should be taught as interphilological components because languages are the principles and literature is the application of the linguistic principles.

A language in education policy was designed. It postulates that *"the mother tongue siSwati shall be officially used as a medium of instruction for the first four grades of school after which English shall be the medium of instruction [6, 28]*. The above language in education policy directs that teachers of the 1st four grades teach all subjects through the mother tongue, siSwati, English is to be taught as a second language. The policy is aligned to almost all other British Colonies. For example in Botswana, though learners learn both Setswana and English, the medium of instruction from grade 1 to 4 is Setswana [29].

1.1.2. Challenges in Current Policy Implementation

Research on the language of instruction in Eswatini brought devastating results: primary schools and pre-schools are reported to be offering instruction in English. The consequences are that learners are not competent in their mother tongue, siSwati [27]. There are reports that siSwati is considered last and English has been taught as a compulsory subject while siSwati has been offered as an option to French. The general practice observed has been that most learners would opt for French. Schooling has been more into English such that some schools had laid down policies intended to promote English. In this regard, schools were hosting debates and encouraging the speaking of English. The speaking of siSwati was condemned; learners were punished for speaking it and it was labelled as a vernacular language. The situation had been like that till the Eswatini 2017 Mother Tongue, SiSwati Conference after which the Ministry of Education and Training issued the 2017 Selected Circulars to back-up the one on the language of instruction. The selected circulars reads:

"SiSwati should not be paired with any other subject"

"All learners are to take English and SiSwati as core subjects any other language to be taken as an elective"

"Learners shall not be punished for speaking siSwati" [27].

The above string of overlapping policies are a signal that something has not been going well in as far as utility of the mother tongue, siSwati is concerned, yet the policy still stands that siSwati is the medium of instruction from grade 1 to grade 4.

The aim of this study was to investigate the practical implementation of the mother tongue, siSwati as a medium of instruction from the 1st four grades of schooling considering the issuing of the above back-up policies.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The dominance of colonial languages is a threat to all African countries. Though Eswatini does not have a language policy, she had issued a string of language in education policies as means to strengthen and enforce compliance with the policy on use of the mother tongue, siSwati as medium of instruction from the 1st four grades of schooling. This study therefore is an ex-policy analysis, it assesses the practical implementation of the mother tongue, siSwati as a medium of instruction from the 1st four grades of schooling. Two studies were done on the medium of instruction used to teach learners at the lower level of primary school, one is by [13] and the other one by [11]. The research gap is that these two studies were done before the mother tongue conference in 2017. This study is a follow-up on the resolutions that transpired with regards to ensuring entrenchment of the mother tongue, siSwati as a heritage language during the Eswatini mother tongue conference for 2017.

1.3. Research Objectives

- 1) To determine the language of instruction used to teach pupils in the 1st four grades of schooling.
- 2) To ascertain the factors that determine the language of instruction used to teach pupils in the 1st four grades of schooling.

1.4. Research Questions

- 1) Which language of instruction is used to teach pupils in the 1st four grades of schooling?
- 2) What are the factors that determine the language of instruction used to teach pupils in the 1st four grades of schooling?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The paper is modelled by the Bilingualism model that was founded by [7]. It is a language acquisition model used to describe how to accord status to each language in a situation where two languages exist like in the Kingdom of Eswatini. The model lobbies for the consideration of languages as useful for both communication and transmission of culture. It divides the use of two languages as either subtractive or additive.

In additive language acquisition, the people put first and give significance to their mother tongue such that the second language is learnt through the mother tongue. In a school set-up approaches used utilise and promote the learners' home language as the vehicle towards learning of the second language [23]. The already acquired skills in the native language are considered useful towards learning the second language.

In subtractive language acquisition it is vice versa, the

people put first the second language, a situation described by [7] as gradually leading to the diminishing value of the mother tongue. In the school context, subtractive bilingualism is when practices and programmes shift learners attention from the mother tongue to the colonial language which is mainly, English. The prevailing social conditions give less significance to the child's native language [23]. Though not intentional, this comes at a cost as learners' cognitive and social development are affected. Scholars therefore came up with the term "subtractive" to define how such practices lead to the learners not performing well in assessment because of the language barrier [23]. In this study, tenets of the bilingualism model are used alongside the language in education policy on the use of the mother tongue, siSwati to teach learners in the first four grades of schooling. The model is therefore used to interpret teachers' adherence to this policy. Hence the findings gave information on the form of bilingualism practiced in Eswatini primary schools.

2.2. The Rationale behind Offering Instruction to Learners in the Mother Tongue

Scholars outline a number of benefits for offering instruction in the mother tongue. They are fulfilment of learners' linguistic rights, creation of a welcoming learning environment, increased parental support and better comprehension of concepts taught.

2.2.1. It Is a Fulfilment of Language Rights

A major language right to be observed in education is that children have the right to learn in a language they fully understand. The right goes on to emphasise that children easily learn if knowledge, concepts, theories, ideas, skills taught build up on their knowledge of the mother tongue. Language rights also emphasise on language, learning and culture as interrelated components, therefore learning in a non-familiar language is perceived as perpetrating childrens' alienation from their culture for the sake of another culture [14, 24]. This means that learning must not be artificial but seek to improve learners' cultural, social and personal identity so that they develop pride in their cultural heritage [8, 16]. The idea is supported by [29] who opine that languages of instruction have got political and social implications in that they impact on the learners' identity.

2.2.2. Learners Become Interested at School as They Feel at Home

Using the mother tongue as a medium makes the learning environment become friendly as learners progress in a familiar language, children enjoy communicating in their mother tongue. In that way learners' ego or self-esteem is boosted therefore, they feel free to participate in class as they have language freedom. The mother tongue allows for a smooth communication between the teacher and the learner

and within the learners themselves [8, 24].

2.2.3. Increased Parental Involvement in Learners' Education

The home, community and school are structures that work together cooperatively towards supporting childrens' growth. The school receives learners from the home and equips them with KSAVE to be applied back at home and the society, therefore, education that comes in the language of the home strengthens school-home rapport as parents too are able to support learning [24].

2.2.4. Easy Assimilation of Concepts

Linguists argue that children learn better and best through a language they are familiar with, which is the mother tongue as there is increased comprehension [1, 26]. Considering the interdisciplinary nature of school subjects, using the mother tongue as a medium makes for easy transfer of concepts from the known to the unknown, which comes with a lot of benefits. It makes the curriculum flow; concepts are better mastered, schools receive better education outcomes, learners perform better and there is reduced repetition and drop-out [8]. The idea is emphasised by UNESCO who postulates that to improve learners' reading and writing abilities, children should be taught in their home language especially during the early years of primary schooling [30]. Learners are therefore likely to continue with the joy of schooling [24].

Reports that the use of mother tongue instruction is also beneficial to teachers as some of them are not comfortable with expressing themselves in English, thus they are able to explain the concepts better. [24]

The benefits of offering instruction to learners in the mother tongue outlined above are justification why teachers need to comply with the language in education policy. Below is a discussion of some of the rehearses with regards to offering instruction in the mother tongue.

2.3. Issues on Implementation of Mother Tongue Instruction

Literature reports that there are many issues on the use of mother tongue instruction observed and studied. Some are a result of attitudes, different perspectives and political assumptions surrounding delivery of instruction in the mother tongue.

Studies found that most countries offer instruction in the languages of their colonies, especially British colonies [2, 23, 19, 29]. One of the challenges observed with using the colonisers' language to teach especially in the 1st four grades of schooling is that the first years of schooling are a great transition to the learner who is used to the home environment, thus the use of a second language causes another trauma to the learner who has just acquired the first language at home. To avoid the learners' struggling with learning the new envi-

ronment and the new language as well, teachers need to introduce education in a language they know otherwise chances are, learners either sink or swim [26].

Other reports are that education stakeholders: policy makers, school leaders, teachers and parents believe that in order for their children to excel at school they should avoid using their home language at school [19, 26]. The general practice is that schools punish learners for speaking their home languages at school, while they promote and support activities on the second language, English [26]. [24] Refers to this practice as making education commercial as opposed to social; equip learners with Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, Values and Ethics (KSAVE) applicable both locally and internationally. The institute therefore lobbies that education must be delivered in a language familiar to the learners.

In Dutch schools [26] reported that children are not allowed to use their mother language. In Eswatini, the situation was such that the government found herself having to issue out other agent circulars to support existing language in education policies on protection of the mother tongue, siSwati.

The consequences of the use of English as the medium of instruction in Indian schools gave birth to the National Education Policy for 2020 which enforced the mother tongue as a medium of instruction up to the fifth class of primary schooling [24]. The seriousness of the issue of parents' confusion and attitude when it comes to mother tongue instruction led to Asia designing a workshop program capacitating parents on the importance of learning languages. They were taught how languages are learned, and the crucial role played by mother tongue instruction in improving learning outcomes and their role in helping their children learn a language [8].

Arabic presents a different case in that parents from the rural setting supported the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction while those in urban areas supported the use of the foreign language, English, as a medium. The Arabian Ministry of Education still lobbies for use of the local language, Arabic [29].

Reports that children taught in their local languages do not perform very well in assessment when compared to those taught in non-local languages because they are surrounded by writings in non-local languages in both formal and informal surroundings. [29] For example, in the formal environment, available textbooks, information at the library, teachers' instructions and writings on the chalkboard are in non-local languages. In the informal environment children are exposed to posters, signs and symbols written in non-local languages [29].

In Eswatini, [13] examined views of teachers in using siSwati as the medium of instruction in the Lubombo region of Eswatini. Findings revealed that teachers codeswitch, and there is no material written in siSwati such that some scientific terms did not exist in the siSwati language. Teachers also suggested that the fact that English is a passing/failing subject, learners must start English as early as possible. The study also revealed that teachers did not subscribe to the idea that if

learners start learning in their mother tongue, learning English would be easier.

Studied teachers' implementation of the 2011 language in education policy directive in primary schools in the Manzini region [11]. The findings revealed that some teachers were not aware of the policy directive and teachers code switch. On the other hand, [21] in Eswatini found that learners' competency in the language of instruction greatly influenced the instructional strategies used.

The authors of this paper have also observed a tendency by teacher training institutions to teach the mother tongue through a foreign language. [29] Explained that such practices are caused by limited provision of teaching and learning material in the mother tongue. The disadvantage of teaching through a non-local language is that the skills acquired through the foreign language are traditional and routine, not aligned to the 21st century much demanded ones. Even if learners are able to read, it is at a lower level; instead of acquiring level-specific vocabulary, learners only memorise it.

In this regard, research reveals that for a language to be used as a medium of instruction, it must have developed linguistically and culturally, its orthography reviewed constantly and its vocabulary development structures be put in place. It must also undergo material development, and curriculum review, teachers too must be capacitated [12, 17].

Scholars also observed that to effectively implement the mother tongue as a medium, implementers must consider that cultural and linguistic development of a language goes together in that language reflects culture therefore, its use must embrace cultural concepts [10, 16, 29]. These authors argue that language is used in society, a dynamic sector, thus when society changes and improves there is need for new vocabulary or terminologies. The other argument is that vocabulary is a major issue with language, countries must have well put structures aimed at its construction. For example, in some countries there is a language board responsible for new words. Scholars view that development of material in a language used as medium enriches and keeps it alive [15]. The curriculum must also be constantly reviewed to accommodate trends. The same applies to teachers as people who are at the centre of curriculum delivery need to be well trained and exposed to using a local language as a medium [29].

3.2. Participants for the Study

3. Methodology

The study utilised qualitative research methodology, a case of primary school teachers teaching at the first four levels of schooling, grade 1 to 4. [5] Mentioned that amongst the concepts studied through qualitative research are prevailing practices, beliefs, point of views and attitudes. This study investigated current practice, the practical implementation of the mother tongue, siSwati as a medium of instruction from the 1st four grades of schooling. It was a case study of selected primary schools in the Hhohho region.

The study adopted the multiple case study design and the researchers compared the implementation of the mother tongue, siSwati as a medium of instruction from the 1st four grades of schooling in two different contexts: urban and rural.

3.1. Research Participants

The participants of the study were teachers of the mother tongue, siSwati in the first four grades of schooling in the Hhohho region of the Kingdom of Eswatini. Purposive sampling was used to select two (2) primary schools in the Hhohho region; one (1) geographically located in town and the other one in the outskirts. The use of the two different settings helped us understand how implementation of the mother tongue, siSwati as a medium of instruction from the 1st four grades of schooling vary across differing teaching and learning environments. It helped us triangulate perspectives from both urban and rural contexts thus enhancing the transferability of the findings to other contexts.

There were minimal factors required for participation, which included being a teacher teaching at primary school in the Hhohho region. Therefore, to avoid overrepresentation of individual participants' experiences, convenience sampling was used to select two (2) teachers in each school making a total of four (4) participants for the whole study. [5] Approves the use of more than one participant in a similar context as a form of data triangulation in that it helps the researcher learn peculiar practices in the same situation. The two teachers who were participants in each school were given the opportunity to explain how they adhere to the policy on the mother tongue, siSwati as a medium of instruction from the 1st four grades. Their responses enhanced the validity and credibility of the findings.

Table 1. Biographic information for participants.

School	Location	Pseudonym	Teaching experience	Qualifications
No. 1	Urban	Teacher A	6-10	Primary Teachers' Diploma
No. 2	Urban	Teacher B	11-15	Primary Teachers' Diploma
No. 3	Rural	Teacher C	11-15	Bachelor of Arts in Humanities

School	Location	Pseudonym	Teaching experience	Qualifications
No. 4	Rural	Teacher D	6-10	Primary Teachers' Diploma

3.3. Research Instrument

A semi-structured one-on-one interview guide with twelve (12) items designed by the researchers was used as a data generating tool.

The semi-structured one-on-one interviews guide was divided into two parts. Part one was investigating the participants' profiles in terms of teaching experience, qualification and language practice. Part B were open-ended questions designed from the two objectives of the study. The use of these types of questions enabled us to probe teacher deeper on the medium of instruction they used and the reasons behind. Semi-structured interviewing allow for use of open-ended questions that help researchers inquire more about the phenomenon studied [5]. Each interview session took between 30 to 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded.

3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the semi-structured one-on-one interview guide was analysed using thematic content analysis. According to [5], thematic content analysis is helpful for analysing data that describes people's action. It was relevant for this study in that it was investigating implementation of the mother tongue, siSwati as a medium of instruction from the 1st four grades of schooling. familiarisation yourself with the data, coding, searching for themes, categorising, defining and designing names for the themes are the steps involved in thematic content analysis [4]. After going through the data, we identified patterns with the data generated for each research question. Data was therefore coded according to each research question. Our interpretation was that, two features or concepts emerged for research question 1. They are "teachers' knowledge of the policy" and "the language of instruction used to teach learners in the first four grades of schooling". These two became the themes for research question 1. Themes identified for research question 2 were "the language of instruction used in textbooks" and "the learners' proficiency in the siSwati subject".

3.5. Trustworthiness

Though the researchers were also teachers of the mother tongue, siSwati; the first two are lecturers, the other one is the senior inspector for the siSwati subject responsible for monitoring and evaluation, and efforts were made to avoid subjectivity. [5] Mention that one of the ways of ensuring credibility in qualitative research is reserving your own judgment

as a researcher. The most critical researcher vulnerable and prone to judging the teachers' practices was the Senior Inspector because of her job description. Therefore to ensure credibility, she was not involved during data generation. However, the senior inspector's expertise was used for expert validation of the interview questions. She checked for clarity of the wording and their relevance to the research questions. Before generating data we sought permission to record the interviews and the participants consented to it. That is why the participants' responses were recorded and data analysis was done immediately. Reliability was also maintained during data presentation, participants' responses were presented verbatim.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study was voluntary, all participants were given a consent form explaining that they have a right to agree or disagree and to withdraw their participation at any time when they feel so. The consent form also made them aware of the objectives of the study and clarified to them that information generated was to be used for the findings of the study and nothing else. All the four teachers who participated in this study submitted their consent forms indicating their willingness to be part of the research. Not only that, the research ethics of anonymity were respected. The participants were referred to using letters of the alphabets as "Teacher A", "Teacher B", "Teacher C" and "Teacher D" respectively. The names of the schools were not mentioned at all.

4. Presentation of Findings

A total of four (4) teachers participated in the study and all were qualified, three (3) hold a diploma in primary teaching the other one a Bachelor of Arts degree in Humanities. Two (2) teachers had teaching experience between 6-10 years and the other two between 11-15 years. All of the participants were teaching all subjects at the lower grades.

4.1. Research Question 1: Which Language of Instruction Is Used to Teach Pupils in the 1st Four Grades of Schooling

The question on the language of instruction used to teach was asked alongside three (3) other questions. They were teachers' knowledge of the policy, how teachers got to know about it and its educational significance. Two themes emerged

from this research question, the first was teachers' knowledge of the policy and the second was the language of instruction used to teach learners.

4.1.1. Theme 1: Teachers' Knowledge of the Policy

All teachers said that they know the policy. Teacher A said; *"I know the policy from the Competency-based Education (CBE) workshop where we were discussing ways to easily adapt to the curriculum. It allows teachers to use the mother tongue as a medium of instruction and to further explain difficult concepts to learners in a language they understand"*.

Teacher B said that; *"I got to know the policy through the primary school education policy. It says learners should be taught in siSwati as a medium of communication to encourage them to know their mother tongue"*.

The last teacher who responded said that; *"I learnt about it through a University student's questionnaire that stated the policy clearly. The policy is aligned to the Competency-based education that states that every learner is capable and it promotes skills-based than white collar jobs"* (Teacher, D).

The above responses revealed that all the teachers interviewed were aware of the policy. Teachers were further asked on the importance of the policy considering the goal of education. They gave the following responses:

Teacher A said; *"I think the policy does serve the purpose. I have taught Grade 1 for over four years and I have understood or noticed that some learners do not attend early childhood education or pre-school so English is bound to be a challenge"*.

Contrary, Teacher B explained that; *"The purpose of education is to teach individuals skills that will prepare them to be critical thinkers, be creative and become meaningful citizens of the society. I don't think this policy can best serve the purpose of education as education is diverse and we have to face diversity. We also have foreign learners who have to benefit from our education system"*.

Teacher C lamented that English has already taken over. This respondent said; *"Teaching our learners in siSwati yet already they are masters of the English language, I think that can be a setback to them and the educator as well. Firstly, the learner needs to unlearn some things he or she already knows, why not add into what he or she knows and clarify with the mother tongue"*.

Teacher C was echoed by teacher D who explained the impact of using the mother tongue as a language of instruction with other learning levels. The teacher said; *"This policy does not serve the purpose of education, the learners will have learning challenges at high school and tertiary"*.

4.1.2. Theme 2: The Language of Instruction Used to Teach Learners

The findings revealed that teachers used English, siSwati or both languages as a medium to teach pupils. Responses from teachers who used English were that;

"I use English for all other subjects except when I am teaching siSwati subject" (Teacher B).

Teacher C said; *"I use siSwati in my teaching when teaching siSwati language and also when clarifying a point. Therefore, teaching all the English subjects in English more often than not is liberating"*.

The teachers who used both English and siSwati said;

"I use both English and siSwati because most of our books are written in English; I however translate difficult concepts in siSwati so learners grasp the concept" (Teacher A). Teacher B got into the specifics by saying; *"I use siSwati for the siSwati subject, English for the other subjects to promote the learner to express themselves in English"*.

4.2. Research Question 2: What Are the Factors That Determine the Language of Instruction Used to Teach Pupils in the 1st Four Grades of Schooling

Data from the findings revealed that factors that determine the language of instruction used were the language of instruction used in textbooks and the syllabus and the learners' proficiency in the siSwati subject. These two formed the themes for this research question.

4.2.1. Theme 1: The Language of Instruction Used in Textbooks

Teachers said the language used to write the textbooks for the lower primary school level greatly impacts the language they use when teaching. Teacher B explained that the use of English in textbooks for primary school affects learners' ability to read in the siSwati language. The teacher said; *"Teaching learners siSwati reading skill is a challenge as most of them use English as a medium of instruction"*.

Teacher A gave an example of how the use of English language in textbooks greatly influence the language they use to teach the mother tongue siSwati subject, the teacher said; *"I teach siSwati by first asking learners to say letters of the alphabet in English then ask them to sound the letters then we say them in siSwati so as to help the learners differentiate the languages and boost their reading"*.

This teacher explained the reason behind such practice; *"If a learner cannot read English, that learner will also have a problem with siSwati. Also, learners are diverse and in most cases you find yourself having a need to cater for their different learning needs, however, this is possible when learners are of a manageable class size"*.

The findings revealed that besides prescribed textbooks, teachers complained that English was also used as a medium for the teaching syllabus. Teacher B elaborated that; *"The syllabus is written in English, so I only translate where learners seem to have a problem. I mix both English and siSwati but hardly use siSwati as the teaching syllabus is written in English"*.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Learners' Language Proficiency

The teachers voiced out that the learners' ability to read, write, speak and listen in both English and siSwati determines the language they use to teach. A response from Teacher C was that; *"Most of my learners are from English medium pre-schools, therefore, siSwati to them is a challenge. When you ask or teach siSwati most of them answer in English. It needs one to cultivate the siSwati in them"*. This teacher also complained that helping learners use siSwati words sounds impossible as the siSwati syllabus has many components to teach. She said; *"the teaching of siSwati is so challenging, too much content to be covered yet there are too many sounds to be learnt too"*.

Teachers also explained that the diverse learners they have in the classrooms gave them a challenge even with the language of assessment. Teacher D said; *"Learners do not understand some questions, they fail to answer in English, their learning capabilities are not the same"*. One of the measures used by Teacher C to minimise the above challenge was switching in between both languages. Teacher C said; *"When I teach them in English, I drop in a few siSwati words where learners do not understand"*.

4.3. Discussion of Findings

Findings revealed that all teachers were aware of the policy directive on the language of instruction recommended to be used to teach pupils at the lower grades. The responses were contrary to findings of the study by [11] which revealed that some teachers were not aware of the policy directive. Teachers' responses revealed that they got to know about the policy through different forums; one from CBE workshops, one through a student-researcher and the other teacher said it is cited in the school policy.

The findings also revealed that teachers were aware of the educational significance of the policy. One teacher said that it helps them simplify difficult concepts to the learners in their mother tongue, a language they understand better. Another one described the policy as something that motivates learners to use their mother tongue. The teachers' understanding was similar to [26] who describes the mother tongue as a language familiar to the learners therefore makes learning interesting.

Two teachers described the policy directive as aligned to the Competency-based education philosophy, one which regards that every learner has got the potential to do better. The teachers' description was similar to [26] who views use of the mother tongue as a democratic right. These teachers consider the use of the mother tongue siSwati as a medium as something that enhances learners' development of skills as the major goal of the CBE curriculum.

One of the teachers said that implementation of the policy helps make a good transition from home to school for those learners who were deprived of the opportunity for pre-schooling. This teacher viewed that use of English as a language of instruction for such learners can totally get them

negative towards school. The idea is echoed [26] who described the first years of schooling as critical and therefore suggests that education must be introduced to the learner in a familiar language as one that is not traumatic.

The policy was viewed negatively by one teacher who regarded 21st century education as one that must help learners become critical and creative thinkers. This teacher considered the two skills as diverse and therefore explained that they cannot be easily taught to the learner in a mother tongue. This teacher viewed the policy as discriminating or alienating non-siSwati speaking learners in the learning process. The findings were contrary to the [24] which regards policies that enforce use of the mother tongue as languages of instruction as efforts towards fulfilment of language rights.

This teacher's view was echoed by another one who regarded English as "the" language known and popular with schooling therefore, complained that offering instruction in the mother tongue is new knowledge to the learner who have been initiated in English. These teachers' responses showed signs of believing in subtractive bilingualism approach. The findings opposed the justification by [8] that using the mother tongue helps learners master the concepts, produces better learning outcomes, and minimizes school dropout and repetition ratios. They also contradict the findings of a study by [13] which revealed that teachers did not believe in the overly mentioned educational benefits that if learners commence learning in the mother tongue, learning English language becomes easier. Thus, for these teachers, the use of mother tongue instruction cannot lay a strong foundation for learning. The teachers' negativity towards use of the mother tongue as a language of instruction was also similar to the observation by [31] that siSwati is still regarded as a non-prestigious language.

The findings revealed that all teachers used siSwati as a language of instruction to teach the siSwati subject and English to teach all the other subjects taught in the lower primary school curriculum. These findings were similar to the complaint by [1] that African countries still offer instruction in the colonial languages. The findings also revealed that in most cases siSwati was used during the period for teaching siSwati and to simplify concepts that are challenging in English. They are similar to the explanation of additive bilingualism, that the mother tongue is used to support learning of the second language [7]. The teachers' responses were also the same with what was reported by the [24] that some teachers who are not at ease with using English, utilise the mother tongue to clarify concepts to the learners.

The findings also revealed that use of English as the language of instruction also affects learners' reading abilities. This was supported by [29] who criticised skills learnt in a foreign language as teacher-centred, [29] gave an example of reading that led to learners' memorisation instead of acquisition of vocabulary.

From the teachers' responses it could be deduced that teachers adopted the subtractive language acquisition model, one that gives significance to the colonial language before the

mother tongue. According to [26] and [19], one of the causes behind such practices are education stakeholders: policy makers, school leaders, teachers and parents who view education as a commercial therefore, hold the belief that for learners to perform well they should be taught in the colonial language. These stakeholders' mentality is similar to that of [29] who compared the performance of learners taught in the mother tongue against those taught in a colonial language and discovered that those taught in the mother tongue did not perform well.

The subtractive bilingual model is criticised by [7] for gradually leading to the diminishing value of the mother tongue. However, the teachers' justification was that all prescribed texts and the syllabus were written in English except for those of the siSwati subject. Another reason given by teachers was that the pupils in the classrooms were from diverse linguistic backgrounds therefore, to cater for their diverse learning needs teachers code switch. The practice of switching between the two languages was also observed by [11].

Other reasons cited were the limited use of siSwati vocabulary by the learners, and the use of English as the language of instruction to teach learners at pre-school. The findings were similar to the observation made by [29] that the language used in the learners' surrounding environment, mainly in textbooks and teachers' instructions, greatly impacts learning. [21] added that it also influences the teachers' choice of instructional strategies.

Consequently the study found that the language used in textbooks and the syllabus, the learners' diverse language needs and backgrounds were three factors that determine the language of instruction.

5. Conclusions

It can be concluded that all teachers used as participants for the study knew the policy directive on the language of instruction for the lower grades. Information disseminated during workshops on teacher preparation for teaching the CBE curriculum helped teachers understand the language in education policy. The policy imparts learning positively and negatively. Though teachers used both languages to teach, English was the dominant. Code switching was used by teachers to balance learners' language needs. Thus, the teachers used the subtractive bilingualism model of language acquisition. The language of instruction for the prescribed textbooks and teaching syllabus and the language familiar to the learners were the factors that determine the language of instruction used. The learners' diverse language orientations was a push factor towards teachers' use of both languages as a medium of instruction.

6. Recommendations

It is recommended that there is a greater need for teacher capacitation on the psychological benefits of offering in-

struction to learners on the mother tongue versus the colonial language, English. Also, the Ministry of Education and Training needs to strengthen the policy directive on the language of instruction with early childhood education considering that early childhood is the lower grade of the 21st century. Lastly, all stakeholders are obliged to consider ways of producing material in the mother tongue siSwati as the gateway towards entrenching siSwati as a language of textbooks for the lower grades.

Abbreviations

CBE	Competency-based Education
KSAVE	Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, Values and Ethics

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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