

Article review**Medium of Instruction in Africa: An Interdisciplinary Discussion
from Educational Linguistics Perspective**Samuel Leykun¹**Abstract**

This review comprises six articles examining various facets of language in education within an African context from an educational linguistic perspective. The first article, titled "The Acquisition of English as Language of Learning and Teaching: The South African Context," primarily addresses issues related to language acquisition in South Africa. The second article, "Parental Perceptions: A Case Study of School Choice Amidst Language Waves," explores parental views on school selection amidst linguistic diversity. The third article focuses on "Language Policy Implementation and Language Vitality in Western Cape Primary Schools." The fourth article, "Medium of Instruction Policies in Ghanaian and Indian Primary Schools: An Overview of Key Issues and Recommendations," thoroughly investigates policy implementation in Ghana and India. The fifth article examines "The Impact of Language on Educational Access in South Africa," while the final article, "French or National Languages as Means of Instruction? Reflections on French Domination and Possible Future Changes," explores language choices in education. The overarching aim of the review is to analyse language in education in Africa through educational linguistics perspectives. Secondary sources and desktop reviews were the primary methods of data collection. Findings indicate that students' academic achievement is significantly impacted when their mother tongue differs from the school's medium of instruction, exacerbating language barriers under challenging conditions. Various policy and remedial measures have been proposed and implemented across Africa to address these issues.

Key words: language acquisition, implementation, policy

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1. Introduction

This article review contains six articles. "The Acquisition of English as the Language of Learning and Teaching: The South African Context," "Parental Perceptions: A Case Study of School Choice Amidst Language Waves," "Language Policy Implementation and Language Vitality in Western Cape Primary Schools," "Medium of Instruction Policies in Ghanaian and Indian Primary Schools: An Overview of Key Issues and Recommendations," "The Impact of Language on Educational Access in South Africa," and "French or National Languages as Means of Instruction? Reflections on French Domination and Possible Future Changes." The researchers' motivation to review these articles stems from both their specific area of interest and a strong curiosity regarding the present state of language acquisition and educational language in Africa.

The first article reviewed is "The Acquisition of English as Language of Learning and Teaching: The South African Context" by Du Plessis, S. (2006), University of Pretoria ETD. The article primarily focuses on the acquisition of English as the language of learning and teaching, with a special emphasis on the South African context. The major sections include: the preference for English as the language of learning and teaching by the South African population, the language acquisition process, the acquisition of English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT), additive and subtractive multilingualism, code-switching as a teaching strategy in additional language acquisition, linguistic aspects of additional language acquisition, influences on ELoLT acquisition in South African learners, individual and external influences in this process.

The initial section of the article delves into the significance of the mother tongue, language proficiency, and language acquisition. Of particular concern to educators is the poor proficiency in English among Black learners, which is believed to adversely impact their academic performance. The inadequacy in English language skills is seen as a contributing factor to the unsatisfactory matriculation results of South Africa's Black learners. The study suggests that addressing English proficiency should begin at the preschool level to avoid later academic challenges.

This section also highlights the importance of the early years in language acquisition. It emphasizes on the critical role of preschool education in enhancing basic communication skills in learners' first language. Furthermore, it explores the controversial issue of the optimal age for acquiring English as an additional language, with some researchers suggesting the preschool years as an opportune period.

The article also describes that, as learner's progress to formal schooling, the acquisition of academic language becomes crucial. Primary school learners who are not

proficient in English may not comprehend instructions and participate effectively in class, potentially leading to academic and emotional difficulties.

The second section addresses issues related to English as the preferred language, revealing that the majority of Black South Africans accept English as the language of learning and teaching in schools, rejecting their first language as the medium of instruction. Parents and caregivers play a significant role in deciding the medium of instruction for their children, often favoring English despite their own limited proficiency in the language.

The article indicates a strong desire among parents and caregivers for their children to master English, even if they do not speak the language themselves. The preference for English-medium education is driven by perceived future benefits, such as economic empowerment. The article also stresses the financial sacrifices made by parents to provide English education for their children.

The third section discusses the language acquisition process, emphasizing the interconnectedness of language learning skills with overall mental growth and cognitive development in children. Language is considered a crucial tool for learning, enabling children to describe, explain, and inquire about their environment. The holistic approach underscores the continuous interaction of children with their environment through meaningful social activities.

According to Plessis (2006), the figure demonstrates that personal relationships serve as the foundation for a child's language learning. Adults play a role in this process by verbalizing the child's experiences and providing input in language acquisition activities. Rather than actively teaching language, they facilitate language acquisition through their behavior, aligning with the naturalistic approach currently adopted by speech-language therapists.

The development of a second language (L2) follows a naturalistic approach, similar to Krashen's model from the 1980s, which is considered the most contemporary approach to L2 acquisition. Adults play a crucial role not only in a child's acquisition of their first language (L1) but also in acquiring English as the language of learning and teaching. The article emphasizes the importance of a language-rich environment at home and school for effective language development. Cooperation between families and educational institutions is vital to support learners in acquiring ELoLT.

The ideal acquisition of ELoLT is portrayed as a positive experience for preschool learners, educators, and parents or caregivers. The involvement of educators and parents implies a responsibility to understand the ELoLT acquisition process and support the learner. The article underscores the importance of supporting L1 while acquiring ELoLT to enrich the learner's skills and enhance their life. The recognition and promotion of L1 by teachers contribute to a more supportive learning environment.

However, the article notes that some teachers and parents in South Africa may be unaware of the significance of L1 in cognitive development and language acquisition. The empowerment of teachers and decision-makers with information on the benefits of L1 is crucial. The promotion, maintenance, and development of L1 are essential to ensure that the acquisition of ELoLT is an additive process rather than a subtractive one.

The last section of the article discusses additive multilingualism, which involves acquiring competence in an L2 while maintaining L1. The reinforcement of both L1 and ELoLT is seen as beneficial for cognitive and social development. Noteworthy approaches to ELoLT acquisition, such as Macdonald's Threshold Project, emphasize the importance of developing thinking skills in L1 before adding English. Success in ELoLT is seen as dependent on success in L1.

The article also highlights the need for cooperative efforts between families, educators, and institutions to promote additive multilingualism. Recommendations from the Language Plan Task Group support the idea of adding languages without replacing L1, aiming for an equitable balance between access to English and fairness to those unfamiliar with the language.

The section further discusses the challenge of acquiring English within a limited timeframe before transitioning to ELoLT in Grade Four. The development of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) presents difficulties, as it differs from basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) used in everyday spoken interactions. The article acknowledges concerns regarding oversimplification in classifying learners into BICS and CALP categories but notes that these distinctions seem relevant to ELoLT learners in South Africa.

In conclusion, the article advocates for an additive multilingualism approach in ELoLT acquisition, emphasizing the importance of maintaining and promoting L1 alongside English. The cooperative efforts of families, educators, and institutions are crucial for successful language acquisition and cognitive development (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993, P 42; Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000, P5).

Advocates for an additive multilingualism approach believe in embracing and valuing all languages spoken in a community or society. They argue that multilingualism enhances cognitive abilities and fosters cultural understanding. This approach emphasizes the addition of new languages without displacing or devaluing existing ones. Ultimately, proponents advocate for policies and practices that promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity.

The second article is by Rinelle Evans and Ailie Cleghorn (2014), titled – “Parental Perceptions: a case study of school choice amidst language waves.” It was published in the South African Journal of Education, 34(2). The article is available at <http://www.sajournalofeducation.co.za>

The article is structured into sections covering contextualizing school choice in South Africa, the setting at People's Primary School, the methodology employed, the results obtained, and subsequent discussions. Originating from a case study embedded within a longitudinal qualitative inquiry on the implications of using English as the language of instruction in multilingual classrooms, the research focuses on parental school choice in South Africa, particularly exploring reasons behind the selection of a specific school for Foundation phase children.

In the second section, the researchers discuss the major issues, aiming to assess the significance of English instruction compared to other factors like proximity to home or tuition cost. They inquire whether parents genuinely desire an English-exclusive experience for their children and whether they are cognizant of potential negative consequences associated with a sole emphasis on English. The historical context is highlighted, emphasizing that, in the past, parental choice in South Africa was limited due to government policies based on racial and zoning criteria. The article also draws parallels with other African countries grappling with the allure of English, tied to colonial history and contemporary economic structures.

The third section focuses on the setting, describing People's Primary School, a co-educational primary school in Gauteng with a diverse community. Despite being well-resourced compared to some schools in peri-urban townships, it charges a high tuition fee, attracting over 50% of students from surrounding townships seeking better education. The school's quintile classification implies annual government funding of US\$76,000.

The fourth section outlines the methodology, employing a questionnaire survey administered to over 600 parents/caregivers. The survey aims to understand parental profiles, household compositions, language use at home, and attitudes towards language-in-education policies. The sample, though not randomly selected, achieved a 59.3% response rate.

The fifth section presents the results, encompassing parental profiles, school choice factors such as location, reputation, and medium of instruction. Findings indicate that mothers predominantly completed the questionnaires, and most respondents considered themselves multilingual. Key factors influencing school choice included proximity, school fees, discipline, high standards, and resources. The majority chose English as the primary medium of instruction, with 47% preferring English-only instruction.

The final section discusses the results, speculating on how parents decide on a particular school, especially when multiple options are available. The article suggests that People's Primary School's historical legacy, particularly its Afrikaans background and reputation for discipline, may influence parental choice. Additionally, it observes the emergence of a new language wave, shaped by younger parents aspiring to maintain the mother tongue while ensuring proficiency in English for their children.

The third article reviewed is titled “Language policy implementation and language vitality in Western Cape Primary Schools.” This article provides a comprehensive analysis of how language policies are implemented and influence language vitality in primary schools across the Western Cape province of South Africa. It begins by contextualizing the historical background of language policies in South Africa, tracing the transition from apartheid-era language segregation to the current constitutional mandate for multilingualism and linguistic diversity in education.

A key focus of the article is the examination of how these policies are translated into practice at the grassroots level within Western Cape primary schools. It identifies several challenges hindering effective implementation, including limited resources, insufficient teacher training in multilingual pedagogies, and varying community attitudes towards language use in educational contexts. These challenges often result in disparities in the implementation and enforcement of language policies across different schools and regions.

The study employs qualitative research methods to explore the dynamics of language vitality within primary schools. It examines the use, status, and perceived importance of different languages such as indigenous languages, English, and Afrikaans—both inside and outside the classroom. Findings indicate that while multilingual policies aim to promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity, the dominance of certain languages persists due to historical legacies, societal perceptions, and educational infrastructural limitations.

Furthermore, the article underscores the implications of language policy implementation on educational outcomes and social cohesion. It argues that language plays a crucial role in shaping identity and fostering a sense of belonging among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Effective implementation of language policies is thus seen as pivotal not only for enhancing educational access and equity but also for promoting cultural preservation and social integration within South African society.

In conclusion, the article advocates for more nuanced approaches to language policy implementation in Western Cape primary schools. It calls for enhanced support for teachers in adopting multilingual instructional practices, improved allocation of resources to facilitate language learning, and greater community engagement to address language-related perceptions and challenges. The authors highlight the need for ongoing research and dialogue to address the complex interplay between language, education, and socio-economic factors in South Africa's educational landscape, emphasizing the importance of promoting linguistic diversity as a cornerstone of inclusive and equitable education.

The fourth article, by Elizabeth J. Erling and et al, (2008), focuses on “Medium of Instruction Policies in Ghanaian and Indian Primary Schools: an overview of key issues and recommendations.” The content delves into the effectiveness of language policies, challenges in policy implementation, and perceptions surrounding these policies.

Firstly, the article provides an overview of language policies' effectiveness in both Ghana and India. In Ghana, there is evidence that mother tongue education in early years often fails to equip students with the necessary skills for a smooth transition to English as the sole medium of instruction from grade 4 onwards. Studies on teacher practices suggest that teachers are more effective when using their mother tongue. However, the use of English from grade 4 onwards creates anxiety and hampers effective classroom participation. In India, learning English as a curricular subject poses significant challenges, with a large number of students struggling with reading and math. The highly multilingual nature of many Indian states often means that the school language does not correspond to the mother tongue of many students, creating disadvantages from the beginning of their education.

Secondly, the article explores problems associated with the implementation of these policies, emphasizing resource and commitment issues. Ghana faces difficulties due to a lack of resources in all government-sponsored languages. In India, especially in states with high linguistic diversity, the school language often does not correspond to the mother tongue of many students, contributing to unsatisfactory learning outcomes.

Thirdly, the authors delve into perceptions of these policies, acknowledging that attitudes toward indigenous languages can affect policy implementation. In both Ghana and India, there are instances of mother tongue education being perceived as perpetuating marginalization, associated with powerlessness and insufficiency.

Finally, the article presents recommendations based on the literature to address the identified challenges. These recommendations include addressing economic realities, fostering greater collaboration among stakeholders, decentralizing language-in-education policy, implementing systemic changes, developing resources for sustainable multilingual education, modeling sustainable multilingualism in teacher education, enacting sustainable multilingualism in the classroom, and changing the rhetoric to make sustainable multilingualism the goal of language-in-education policies.

The fifth article titled "Impact of Language on Educational Access in South Africa" by Lafon (2009) addresses four main issues: a general overview of language policy in South African schools, realities in South African schools, negative effects of using non-native languages as the medium of instruction, and efforts to address language-related access problems.

Firstly, the general overview of language policy in South Africa highlights the difference between western formal education systems and indigenous learning systems in Africa, emphasizing the role of literacy. Literacy is considered crucial in the western

system, and education is often measured by the capacity to acquire linguistic skills, especially when the medium of instruction is different from the community language.

Secondly, the current realities in South African schools reveal that the education system still reflects the legacy of the past, with English being the main language of instruction from grade 4 onwards. Many African parents prefer English-medium schools, even in the early grades, associating English with global success. This shift poses a risk of African learners failing to acquire a deep understanding of their own language.

Thirdly, the negative effects of using non-native languages as the medium of instruction are discussed, emphasizing the significant impact on the academic achievement of learners whose mother tongue differs from the medium of instruction. Overcoming language barriers becomes even more challenging in unfavorable circumstances.

Lastly, the article explores attempts to address language and access problems at the departmental level. Measures include policy measures and palliative measures. The author suggests two options to extend the use of home language in education: disseminate English to the point where it becomes a home language for a growing number of African children or rehabilitate African languages as the language of learning and teaching beyond grade 3.

In conclusion, Lafon (2009) recommends several actions, including equalizing funding and resources for all state schools, reducing socio-economic gaps between schools that use African languages and those using English/Afrikaans, ensuring fewer racial patterns in the allocation of teaching staff, and encouraging African parents to demand partial tuition in African languages when their children join former white schools.

The last article reviewed is that National language or French as a means of Instruction by Inge Skattum. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cced72>

In the initial section of the article, the sociolinguistic situation in Francophone Africa is examined, highlighting how the language of instruction, predominantly an imported language spoken by a minority resulted from French and Belgian colonization. Despite the term "Francophone" being useful internationally to distinguish these countries, it is important to note that Africa is not uniformly English-, French-, or Portuguese-speaking. Both France and Belgium implemented distinct linguistic and educational policies in their colonies. France pursued assimilation to French civilization and language while Belgium, primarily administering the Congo Free State and Ruanda Urundi as a mandate, delegated education to missionaries and instated a segregation system.

The second section explores the differences between former French and Belgian colonies, highlighting a hierarchical, functional relationship between languages categorized as "high" and "low." French is the "high" language with prestige, used in formal functions, while African languages are the "low" languages, associated with informal, daily functions. This functional distinction influences people's attitudes, contributing to negative perceptions of their own languages. In Africa, high languages are minority languages, challenging the dichotomy of majority/minority languages often used in international research.

The third section delves into factors such as the presence/absence of a national majority language, geographical location, degree and duration of contact with Europeans, and educational and linguistic policies. These differences in Francophone Africa make it challenging to predict a common future for French or African languages as means of instruction.

2. Discussion

In the African context, the process of acquiring language and educational language should be closely connected. Future research on language acquisition and educational language in Africa needs to address the current challenges associated with the obstacles in the development and standardization of African languages. This approach aims to facilitate the advancement of African languages while aligning with the fundamental principles of language acquisition theories.

Throughout various periods, scholars have proposed different theories of language acquisition. These include the Behaviorist theory by Skinner, the Innateness theory by Chomsky, the Cognitive theory by Piaget, and the Interaction theory by Bruner. The fundamental concept of the Behaviorist theory suggests that children imitate adults, and their accurate expressions are reinforced when they achieve desired outcomes or receive praise.

The choice of language is contingent upon the specific speech community's preferences, which can vary over time. Examining this within the framework of language acquisition theories provides insights. Taking the South African experience through the lens of the Behaviorist theory, where the central notion is that children imitate adults, prompts us to explore who these children imitate. They imitate individuals within their families, extended families, caregivers, and the broader community. Through this process of imitation, children engage in the practice, learning, mastery, and acquisition of language. It's essential to recognize that language acquisition is a prolonged process, not something mastered overnight. This concept can be applied through various mechanisms. In the South African context, these mechanisms encompass the Language Acquisition Process, the acquisition of English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT), additive multilingualism, subtractive multilingualism, code-switching as a teaching strategy in additional language (L2) acquisition, linguistic aspects of additional language acquisition, and

influences on ELoLT acquisition in South African learners, both individual and external influences.

Another aspect highlighted is the parental perspectives concerning school choice amid shifts in language preferences. Across numerous African nations, language selection is closely tied to the languages of the colonizers, viewed as a pathway to modernization and job opportunities. This linguistic appeal is intricately connected to a colonial past and the prevailing capitalist economic system. Proficiency in English remains significantly influential as it is seen as a key facilitator of empowerment (Nkosana, 2011:11).

As previously mentioned, this influence extends to the primary school curriculum. For instance, in Botswana Setswana and English serve as official languages, with Setswana utilized for instruction in grades 1 to 4. However, a noteworthy policy shift occurred in 2002, making English the language of instruction from Grade 4 onward, with a conspicuous lack of consideration for the role of other languages in fostering national unity (Mooko, 2009:27).

Namibia has implemented a transitional bilingual program that promotes early literacy development in various local mother tongue languages alongside English. The current intricacies in language-in-education arise primarily from South Africa's historical language dynamics, coupled with factors like internal migration, regional variations, and attitudinal influences.

In an article by Rinelle Evans and Ailie Cleghorn (2014) regarding Parental Perceptions and School Choice Amidst Language Waves, it is highlighted that a significant majority, more than 50%, of parents opt to enroll their children in People's Primary from nearby townships, seeking an institution that promises better educational quality as a former Model C school. The emphasis here is on the medium of instruction within the school, indicating that school choice is closely intertwined with language preference. In essence, the choice of school is effectively a choice of language. Consequently, the medium of instruction and the language adopted by the school become influential factors in familial decisions related to school selection. This emphasizes the importance of standardizing African languages and promoting them as mediums of education. Encouraging the use of local languages in education can pave the way for broader acceptance and adoption, empowering Africans to choose their indigenous languages for educational purposes. This shift has the potential to make African languages viable choices within the educational system, a transformation that was less likely before Africans actively chose their languages for academic instruction.

Language policies and educational language policies were formulated for numerous African nations; however, these policies often remained confined to written documents. Regrettably, the crucial aspect of these policies implementation was frequently overlooked. Implementation is an integral component of any policy, and its execution varied across regions and towns. In this context, the study conducted by Peter

Plüddemann, Daryl Braam, Peter Broeder, Guus Extra, and Michellé October in 2004 on Language Policy Implementation and Language Vitality in Western Cape Primary Schools will be explored.

In rural areas, the prevalence of languages is as follows: Afrikaans constitutes 79%, while English accounts for 20%. Notably, Afrikaans holds a significantly stronger position than English in South Africa, and it is considered an indigenous African language. The emphasis on local languages is more pronounced in rural areas compared to English. Conversely, in urban areas, English tends to dominate over local African languages. For example, in South Africa's primary schools, Afrikaans comprises 32%, and English comprises 42%. It's important to highlight that these figures are from the same country, South Africa, with a similar language policy. Notably, there is no distinct language policy designed for urban areas. Specifically, in Grade 1 groups, three major home languages, each lacking an absolute majority, are prevalent. The current language policy in South Africa promotes local languages, including sign language. Surprisingly, there is a substantial difference in results between urban and rural areas. In urban areas, English (42%) holds a slight lead over isiXhosa (39%), while Afrikaans lags a few percentage points behind (32%). Only 5% report the presence of other home languages, with Sesotho being the largest among them (3%). The language used in schools is crucial for language development.

The significance of the policy's effectiveness cannot be overstated, especially for developing countries in Africa and Asia. Addressing this concern, Elizabeth J. Erling and her colleagues explored the issue extensively in their study titled "Medium of Instruction Policies in Ghanaian and Indian Primary Schools."

As mentioned earlier, many African countries tend to overlook policy implementation as an integral aspect of their policies. In contrast, India actively promotes mother tongue education across the curriculum. However, merely advocating for the inclusion of the local language in the curriculum is insufficient. This inadequacy is evident in Ghana, where policy implementation issues have led to policy violations. Therefore, fostering collaboration among stakeholders and decentralizing language and/or language-in-education policies becomes crucial.

3. Conclusions

Language holds a crucial role in the cognitive development of children. Gardner recognizes linguistic skill as one of the intelligences. Therefore, children need to actively engage in developing linguistic competence and language performance. This aligns with the cognitive theory, asserting that language is a component of a child's broader intellectual growth. To enhance linguistic abilities, a robust connection among the family or caregivers is essential, in line with the interaction theory, which underscores the significance of interactions between children and their caregivers.

Moreover, linguists should collaborate in their research on language acquisition and educational language. In Africa, there should be an emphasis on promoting home languages as the language of instruction in schools. Linguists play a crucial role in facilitating African languages to become proficient at the educational level and be chosen by families or caregivers. All stakeholders in schools can contribute significantly to the development and standardization of African languages. Additionally, the implementation of language policies should be recognized as a fundamental aspect of policy execution in Africa.

4. Recommendations

Parents and caregivers should prioritize their engagement in their children's language development without delay. Seeking support from a clinical linguist for speech therapy is recommended if there are concerns or delays in language acquisition. Studies have consistently shown that early language development plays a crucial role in enhancing cognitive abilities and overall competence.

Research underscores the importance of parental involvement in fostering early language skills, emphasizing that proactive engagement can positively impact a child's cognitive development. It is advisable for parents to seek guidance from professionals, such as clinical linguists, if there are any concerns regarding their child's language acquisition process. This early intervention can help address potential issues and support the child's overall linguistic and cognitive growth.

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