



Exclusion of Ethnic and Other Minority Language Nationals in Education: A Case of Lesotho's Language in Education Policy

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ABSTRACT

The exclusion of ethnic and other minority language nationals within the Lesotho educational system is a cause for concern. In the case of Lesotho, even though language policy as articulated in Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP) stipulates that mother tongue shall be used as a medium of instruction from Grade 1-3, it does not clarify as to which and whose mother tongue language. It is against this backdrop that the exclusion of ethnic and other minority language nationals in Lesotho education context is explored in this article. Qualitative research methodology was adopted for this study. This study unpacks the policy and how its implementation is difficult due to its exclusion of minority languages. The researchers used a case study research design to critically analyse the contents of Lesotho's language policy. The theoretical framework for this research predominantly draws on social constructionism, inclusive education and translanguaging. The study purposely selected four documents being CAP, Education Sector Strategic Plans of 2005-2015 and 2016-2026 and UNICEF 2016 document for analysis. A content analysis approach was used to analyse the data. The study reveals that in the context of Lesotho, ethnic and other minority language nationals are excluded in education. The education system of Lesotho is, therefore, exclusionist. It is recommended that there should be an ideal language policy to bridge the gap between home and school language(s).

KEY WORDS: Curriculum and Assessment Policy, ethnicity, Language policy, minority group, translanguaging, inclusive education

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Language is a vehicle for access to information and knowledge. It, therefore, has a crucial role in education in that, command of it translated to teaching and learning is not only key to classroom communication but also to pupils' acquisition of knowledge. It has shown that types of education based on mother tongue significantly increase the

chances of educational success and give better results (Charamba, 2020).

It is essential to indicate that each nation is expected to have its own language policy. This is significant because in language policy, governments can either include or exclude ethnic and other minority language nationals. It is through the language policy that the government of a certain state is at liberty to give one or more languages

power over the others. In Slovenia for instance, about the integration of immigrants and their descendants, society's attention, and often that of the immigrants themselves, is directed mainly towards mastering the language of the host country (Bešter & Medvešek, 2015). This, however, shows that regardless of how paramount language is in a society, little attention is paid to the learning and development of ethnic and other minority group languages.

In the study conducted in Nigeria, Ndimele (2012) discovered that there is no robust and well-articulated language planning framework in the country but only a language provision of the National Policy on Education. This reinforces the operation of language in education planning process, which unfortunately does not guarantee or strengthen literacy in the indigenous languages especially the so-called minority languages of Nigeria. Similarly, Viriri (2003) maintains that every language represents a special way of viewing human experience and the world itself. Where minority languages are overwhelmed by "big" languages, it is only through well-articulated language policy and planning that can arrest eminent crisis of extinction of the minority languages. Homogeneously, Mensah and Offiong (2004) uphold that the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around is best done and realised in the languages in which the students are more familiar. These then, show that there is a need for inclusion of ethnic and other minority group languages in education through well-pronounced language policies.

Lesotho is not an exception in that the 1993 Constitution of Lesotho shows that there are only two official languages mainly English and Sesotho. The Constitution of Lesotho, however, is silent about other languages present in the country such as Ndebele, isiXhosa and Phuthi to mention but

a few. Apart from this, MoET (2009) stipulates that mother tongue shall be used as a medium of instruction in primary education from Grade 1 to 3, but it does not specify as to which and whose mother tongue. Correspondingly, MoET (2005) in its document of Education Sector Strategic Plan for 2005-2015 shows position of the state on language and education. It is mentioned in the plan that a baseline assessment of Grade 3 and Grade 6 students in 2003 was carried out and the Grade 6 levels of achievement for Sesotho and English were 58 per cent and 45 per cent respectively.

As articulated in the plan, children from minority language communities indicated that the Ministry promised to produce and procure materials for children of minorities such as Xhosa, Ndebele, Baphuthi and Batlokoa to enable them better access to existing knowledge using their main language of communication (UNICEF, 2016). It is against this backdrop that we acknowledge in this article that the inclusion of ethnic and other minority language nationals in Lesotho education is a cause for concern.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Marginalization of ethnic minority languages is universal. This concern forced vast nations to address it. Van Dyken's (1990) study advocates that for decades in many African countries, pragmatism and politics have dictated that the choice of languages for literacy and primary education should be the colonial languages being French, English or Portuguese. In some settings, certain African languages of wider communication have been selected, including Swahili in Kenya and Tanzania and Hausa in Nigeria. However, for most African languages, educational materials have never been developed in terms of which languages take priority in educational system.

Ndimele's (2012) study conducted in Nigeria discovered that there is no robust and well-articulated language planning framework in the country but only a language provision of the National Policy on Education. This reinforces the operation of language in education planning process, which unfortunately does not guarantee or strengthen literacy in the indigenous languages especially the so-called minority languages of Nigeria.

A similar observation is that Lesotho is one of the countries with different minority groups. In Lesotho, research shows that education is exclusionist (Matlosa, 2009; Kometsi, 2014). For instance, Matlosa (2009) shows that 10% of citizens in Lesotho being Batlokoa, Basia, Bataung, Matebele, Bathepu and Baphuthi demonstrates the presence of minority languages such as Setlokoa, Setebele, Sephuthi and Sethepu in the country. Matlosa (2009) further points out that the Lesotho constitution of 1993 is silent about the minority languages in Lesotho. Additionally, Matsoso (2002) in Matlosa (2009) portrays that minority languages in Lesotho are continually being neglected resulting in depriving their speakers of the linguistic rights, hence the present situation confined the use of these minority languages only at home. Kometsi (2014) observes that Lesotho has four indigenous languages, even though it is known as a homogeneous country. These languages are Sesotho, siPhuthi, isiXhosa, isiNdebele and Sign Language. Apart from Sesotho, these other indigenous languages are not "taught or used as a medium of instruction in schools anywhere whatsoever" (Kometsi, 2014, p. 120).

In the same manner, MoET (2009) specifies that "Sign Language and its use in the teaching and learning shall form an integral part of the new language policy in

order to ensure access to information and effective communication." (p. 8).

Based on the foregoing, it can reasonably be assumed that the actual teaching and learning and curriculum content in Lesotho's education system will include the learning needs of ethnic minority languages backgrounds. However, it is still not clear as to which and whose mother tongue to be used, although as early as 2009, the Ministry of Education and Training had already pronounced the use of mother tongue. It is, therefore, not surprising that almost ten years later UNICEF (2016) still questions the use of mother tongue from Grade 1 to 3. The question that emerges and seemingly remains unanswered is, could it be because they did not specify which and whose mother tongue? An understanding of which and whose mother tongue to use in the early years of primary education is the chief focus of this article.

In the light of the above-mentioned gaps, it is pertinent for this article to draw on literature concerning the inclusion of ethnic and other minority language nationals in education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature on ethnic minority language situation in education system of different countries, the inclusion of sign language in education as well as the theoretical framework upon which the problem is addressed.

Ethnic minority language situation in education systems of different countries

Ethnic minority languages are a cause for concern worldwide. UN (1992), in the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, stipulates that states shall protect the existence and the

national or ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity of minorities within the respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity. In Slovenia, Čok (2001) indicates that the constitution and legislation of the Republic of Slovenia guarantee to every citizen of the country fundamental human rights including the rights to use his or her mother tongue, to maintain and develop his or her culture and national particularities, while special protection is provided for the members of the autochthonous Italian and Hungarian national minorities. The constitution guarantees them special common rights such as free use of their mother tongue in private and public life, use of their national symbols, establishment of their own organisations, development of their own cultural activities and information and education in their own language, participation in matters of public concern through their representatives in parliament and local government as well as free communication with their parent nation. Contrary to this, in Lesotho, MoET (2009) designates that mother tongue shall be used as a medium of instruction from Grade 1-3 but it does not specify which or whose mother tongue unlike in Slovenia where special protection is provided for indigenous languages.

The marginalisation of other languages within a given society is trending globally. This, Pinnock (2009) strengthens by stating that most of the countries across the globe have different linguistic and cultural groups. Yet, systems in those countries deem other languages more important over other languages which are spoken by smaller groups of people. This results in cutting many children off from their culture and being forced to spend their time in school trying to grasp the language used instead of building new knowledge. This struggle by learners from minority language groups compels most learners to eventually drop out of school.

On the same note, this is fortified by Van Dyken (1990) who alludes that millions of African children find their first days at school incomprehensible as they adjust to not only strange environment of school but also to a teacher who cannot speak their language. Ndlovu (2011) observes that most of the learners from the minority languages end up dropping out of school as early as before completing their primary education. This, according to Ndlovu (2011), emanates from the challenge of the transition from the home to the school environment and the inability to cope with the medium of instruction. Therefore, "until the official minority languages have a place in the classroom, high illiteracy rates, low enrolment and retention rates, and high failure and dropout rates will continue unabated among learners who speak the official minority languages" (Ndlovu, 2011, p. 232).

Matlosa (2010) observes that many African countries ignore minority languages and signed languages are usually omitted from the constitutions and hardly considered in language policies. Grounded on this, we contend that it is important to include the minority groups in the education system of each country. For, this can be very helpful not only to the children who struggle at schools to understand the concepts taught there but also to the countries as well since children who go to school will be mainly building new knowledge, as a result minimising the high dropout rate.

Interestingly, children from ethnic and other minority language backgrounds are expected to know the school language in their early years of primary education. Studies show that mothers take cautions to raise their children in the "school" language, rather than their own native tongue. This is to ensure that their children will have a head start as they enter primary or even pre-school (UN, 2010). Smith (2003) asserts that in Malaysia, the

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national language policy established Bahasa as the official language but also includes provision for the use of the nation's numerous other languages, including those of the indigenous minorities, if parents request it and that there are at least fifteen students to make up a mother-tongue class. The author continues to demonstrate that for years only two language communities (Tamil and Mandarin) were acting on the provision. However, lately, several indigenous people groups concerned about the decline of their ethnic language among younger generation, have begun language development and/or mother tongue education programmes. To add to this, World Bank (2005) in Dooly, Vallejo and Unamuno (2009), announced that 50% of the world's out-of-school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever used at home. This underscores the biggest challenge to achieving Education for All (EFA) which is a legacy of non-productive practices that lead to low levels of learning and high levels of drop out and repetition. Reflecting on this, it is important to include ethnic minority languages in education policy to avoid high levels of drop-out-of-school children. Again, the inclusion of ethnic minority languages in education addresses one of the EFA goals as stipulated in MoET (2005) that by 2015, all children in different circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities should have access to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Each nation is expected to take appropriate measures to include ethnic minority languages in their education systems. This is supported by UN (1992), which portrays that states should take suitable measures so that wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have satisfactory opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue. Even though Baubock (2002)

contends that sometimes in public discourse immigrant languages are seen as a source of problems and barriers to the integration process, but the knowledge of the majority language is considered a source of enrichment and a pre-requisite for integration (Extra & Yagmur, 2004). Echoing the same sentiments, Marupi, Tshotsho and Nhongo (2021) eloquently argue that language in education policies is political. In Zimbabwe, there are 16 languages of which only English, Ndebele and Shona enjoy the supremacy, especially in education. Therefore, "because Sotho, Venda, Kalanga, Nambya, Tonga and Xhosa are found in Matebele land, they were deliberately excluded because they were considered to be dialects of Ndebele, yet they differ linguistically, culturally and historically" (Marupi et al., 2021, p.141). According to Ndlovu (2011), Ndebele and Shona are used as medium of instruction in the foundation phase, and they are also taught as subjects. In the same vein, Marupi et al. (2021) argue that English, Shona and Ndebele still remain the major languages and continue to obscure other local languages even in areas where the original inhabitants of the area do not speak these languages as their L1.

In the context of Nigeria, Ndimele (2012) discovered that there is no robust and well-articulated language planning framework in the country but only a language provision of the National Policy on Education. This reinforces the operation of language in education planning process, which unfortunately does not guarantee or strengthen literacy in the indigenous languages especially the so-called minority languages of Nigeria. Viriri (2003) reiterates the same point by maintaining that every language represents a special way of viewing human experience and the world itself. Where minority languages are overwhelmed by "big" languages, it is only through well-articulated language policy and planning that

can arrest eminent crisis of extinction of the minority languages. Following this, in Lesotho, MoET (2009) seems to address the importance of language by stipulating in the CAP under National Goals of Education that language policy shall be accessible in relation to medium of instruction as well as effective communication, but it is silent pertaining to which and whose mother tongue. Hence one of the interests of this article is to find out which and whose use of mother tongue is referred to in the policy. At this point, it is noteworthy to look at the inclusion of sign language in education in the section which follows.

The Inclusion of Sign Language in Education

Minority languages around the world including sign language are under threat. As put by Jones (2014), all languages, spoken or signed are at imminent risk if there is no intergenerational transmission from parent to child, as stated by Fishman, a renowned linguist and instigator of a scale to measure at what level of endangerment languages are fixed and how to address the problem. The author further points out that since approximately 5% of parents of deaf children are themselves deaf, this means that sign language is automatically at risk unless steps are taken to ensure transmission from one generation to the next. The study conducted by Jones (2014) displays that British sign language, for example, has only around 1000 deaf children who use it “to some extent” from a potential of approximately 42000 deaf children in Britain. It can be understood from this that there are gaps which need to be filled by both the society and classroom practices. Hence the implication is that sign language is at risk of fading if it is not taught or passed on to the younger generation leading to little attention being paid to it in the education system. This article seeks to find out how inclusive the language policy is in Lesotho

education system given that MoET (2009) seems not to be specific about the use of sign language in the current policy rather expressing the use of sign language forming an integral part of teaching and learning processes in the new language policy.

It is worth noting that the Republic of Zambia and of South Africa are examples of few countries which have saluted ethnic minority groups in their education systems. Mulondo (2013) pronounces that in Zambia, the government through the Ministry of Education recognises the rights of persons with disabilities, the deaf inclusive, to have access to good and quality education. Through the 1996 policy document, the Ministry of Education stresses the need to ensure that there is equality of educational opportunities for children with special needs. The policy further emphasises the need to provide education of particular good quality to pupils with special educational needs (Ministry of Education, 1996). The Ministry speaks of the principle of integrating the special needs children to the greatest extent possible in the mainstream schools. Yet, they have made no special provisions to cater for the special communication needs of the deaf which is sign language in mainstream classes. Mulondo (2013) states that there are still challenges for learners with hearing impairment when it comes to the language of teaching and learning. In Munali secondary school in Zambia, for instance, deaf children were put in mainstream classes without teachers being given proper training to handle such classes. This says that the Ministry has not fully prepared for such learners in terms of their competence in education even though the 2011 Education Act provides for the fact that educational institutions shall use sign language as a medium of instruction to any learner who uses sign language as the learner’s first language or who has special need for sign language. It is, however, unfortunate that

even at teacher training level, the main institutions of learning in Zambia which provide training programs for the teachers of the deaf, sign language is not given the prominence it deserves in the curriculum. It has been dropped as a core course for Certificate students who progress to Diploma level. They do not see the need for it.

A study conducted by Matlosa (2009) highlights that after their independence, the new South African Constitution of 1996 elevated nine African languages to official status in addition to the three which were the only official languages. Kamwangamalu, 2004 in UNICEF (2016) posits that the new language policy spelled out in the 1996 Constitution, “accords official status to 11 languages: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu... All official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and be treated equitably”. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996b), the White Article 6 (DoE, 2001) and the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996a) have elevated the status of South African Sign Language (SASL) as it was declared the medium of instruction and a home language for deaf learners. In Chapter 2, the Constitution declares that “Everyone has a right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where the education is reasonably practicable” (29(2)). The South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996a) also points out that “A recognised Sign Language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at a public school” (Chapter 2, 6(4)). Mokala and Sefotho (2022) view this as an inclusive approach which advocates for social justice, where deaf learners are empowered and accommodated in education. As Glaser and Pletzen (2012) put it, SASL is the mediator as it bridges the gap between the hearing and the deaf, more especially in a multilingual

South African educational context. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Lesotho. Since her independence in 1966, English and Sesotho remained the only two official languages in the country, hence the niche for inclusion of ethnic and other minority language nationals in Lesotho education system seems to be of concern.

Significantly, mother tongue language of every group must be taken into consideration for ethnic and other minority language nationals to be placed in any education system. Kioko et al. (2014) observe that many children in African countries enter school to face foreign language as a medium of instruction, ignoring the body of research which has proven the benefits of the use of home languages in education. However, many recent report materials point out that the use of mother tongue bridges the gap between school and community (UNESCO, 2011; Awasthi, 2004). This highlights the importance of mother tongue language in any education system, hence MoET (2009) displays that mother tongue shall be used from Grade 1 to 3 in lower primary schools. Likewise, many others view mother tongue as a way to redefine education systems with broader efforts to democratise, pluralise, and reconstruct public lives. In doing so, it addresses the needs of those who traditionally have been excluded from the dominant education discourse and counters the effects of language “unplanning” (Giri, 2011). Based on this, it is of essence to find a place of ethnic and other minority language nationals in education because learners, especially from the ethnic minority groups will have the opportunity to freely decide on the language that best meets their learning needs. Hence the chief focus for this article is on which and whose mother tongue to use from Grade 1-3 in the lower primary education in Lesotho.

Despite all these, it is evident from literature that for the ethnic minority languages to be catered for in the education system, they can be presented as optional subjects which learners can be at liberty to learn using them. Tambahang (2010) fortifies this by signifying that indigenous languages should be introduced in schools at least as elective subjects. Other authors like Rai (2009) also add that the concept of regional languages should be developed. These then would indicate the importance of all the languages spoken in an education system of a particular society not stamping power on one or few languages in that society. Again, the idea of raising the regional languages can be valuable in that no language would be marginalized and that would lead to the inclusion of ethnic and other minority language nationals in Lesotho education which is worrisome currently. The next section analyses the theoretical framework that is used in this article to examine the inclusion of ethnic and other minority language nationals in education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the purposes of this article, social constructionist, inclusive education and translanguaging frameworks are used to understand how ethnic and other minority language nationals can be included in Lesotho's language policy. Galbin (2014) explains that social constructionism theory deals with subjects such as culture and society; in this case, ethnic and minority language nationals. This theory as Galbin (2014, p. 82) puts it, "...sees the language, the communication and the speech as having the central role of the interactive process through which we understand the world and ourselves." We find this framework to be relevant since ethnic and other minority language nationals are excluded in the education system of Lesotho. We argue that learners' mother tongue language as

stipulated in CAP (MoET, 2009) should be used as a medium of instruction from Grade 1-3. This because we are of the opinion that, for learners to be able to interact through the language which they understand in order to follow what is being taught at school, their mother tongue should be used.

For inclusive education, the theory denotes a change in attitudes, school ethos change to address all learners' needs, teaching approaches to be diverse, assessments reformed and inclusive policies (Mosia, 2014). More, Mokala (2021, p. 19) explains inclusive education as "...an effort to structure a school environment in a way that accommodates and addresses learners' needs. It also strives for the removal of all barriers that may prevent the learner to participate fully in learning." Language can become a barrier when it excludes the minority, therefore, making use of learners' languages reduces that. As Mokala (2021) notes, the inclusion of minority languages in language policy is a move towards the country's language policy to strengthen the capacity to respond to the diverse nature of the learner population effectively.

Translanguaging advocates for the use of learners' Languages as mediums of instruction. Mokala, Matee, Khetoa and Ntseli (2022) define translanguaging as an innovative pedagogy that is employed to address diversity in multilingual classrooms. In this article we find translanguaging framework relevant as we advocate for the inclusion of minority languages in teaching and learning. Makalela (2015) concurs that translanguaging is an inclusive alternative teaching strategy that maximises teaching and learning. Moreover, Khetoa, Mokala and Matee (2023, p. 156) reiterate, "Language is an important tool that facilitates the project of teaching and learning." Hence, we argue for inclusion of minority languages in the Lesotho education system.

These frameworks were employed to investigate how the current language policy in CAP affects the education of students from ethnic and other minority language nationals in Lesotho.

METHODOLOGY

The inclusion of ethnic and other minority language nationals in Lesotho education context is explored in this article through qualitative design method adopting documented content analysis. Qualitative studies characteristically call for the need to understand the research phenomenon in the voices of the people most directly affected by the status quo (Leedy & Ormrod, 2009 in Matsoso, 2020). Qualitative design as expressed by Wyse (2011) is a primarily exploratory research design used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations hence document analysis was employed as a method of qualitative data analysis. In this study qualitative data were analysed using content analysis method (Kariyana, Maphosa & Mapuranga, 2017). Hamad, et al. (2016) in Sengai and Mokhele (2021) refer to content analysis as a research method which allows the qualitative data collected in research to be analysed systematically and reliably so that generations can be made in relation to the categories of interest to the researcher. Adding to this assertion is Leedy and Ormrod (2005), who state that document analysis is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases. This method was considered appropriate and as "...the main mechanism by which data was analysed" (Machingambi, Nkomo & Gwandure, 2021, p. 70) in this article because official documents from MoET have been dealt with. These documents were explored with the aim of analysing language policy as laid in CAP and they as well form the population of the study.

This population of the study was selected depending on the nature of the article. The population and analysis of the study were based on language policy as placed in CAP, Education Sector Strategic Plans of 2005-2015 and 2016-2026 and UNICEF 2016 document.

Sample

Purposive sampling was utilised for identification and selection of information rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest in this article. The sample was drawn from different sections of four documents being CAP, Education Sector Strategic Plans of 2005-2015 and 2016-2026 and UNICEF 2016 document. According to Brown and Saunders (2008), a sample is a group of cases selected from the complete set or population with the purpose of revealing things about the population. In line with Brown and Saunders (2008), Cohen et al. (2007) describe sample as a subset of a population which occurs because of a researcher's inability to test all the individuals in each population. Therefore, we selected those sections of the chosen documents which are related to the phenomenon of interest in this study. Research questions and the purpose of the study guided us in choosing the sections to analyse for the current study as Lodico et al.'s (2006) advice. We used purposive sampling because we selected the sections which served the purpose of the study being language policy from the four selected documents (Teddie & Yu, 2007 in Chabaya et al., 2014). Adopting Maree's (2016) view, there were predetermined criteria relevant for the purpose of the study in selecting the documents. Having established the sample chosen for the current study, in the next section we discuss the analysis of the generated data.

Analysis

Table 1: Analysis of different documents

The following table illustrates a summary of different sections of four documents being CAP, Education Sector Strategic Plans of 2005-2015 and 2016-2026 and UNICEF 2016 document.

CAP 2009	EDUCATION SECTOR STRATEGIC PLAN (2005-2015 AND 2016-2026)	UNICEF 2016
Language policy: mother tongue will be used as a medium of instruction up to class 3 while English will be taught as a subject at this and other levels. From Grade 4 English shall begin to be used as a medium of instruction and to be taught as a subject as well.	2005-2015: Under mission, Goals and Objectives: Goal (ii), Ensuring that by 2015, all children particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.	Language Policy in Education: Sesotho features in the education system as the medium of instruction from Grade 1-3 but switches to English in Grade 4 even though approximately 75% of the population of Lesotho do not speak English.
National Goals of Education: Goal 7: accessible language policy in relation to medium of instruction as well as effective communication.	2016-2026 SDG4: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.	
Curriculum Aims of Basic Education: Aim 1: have acquired communication skills of listening, speaking and writing in Sesotho and English and apply them in everyday life.	Mission Statement (2016-2026): To enhance the system that will deliver relevant and inclusive quality education to all Basotho effectively, efficiently and equitably.	
Organisation of School Curriculum: under learning area of linguistic and literary, compulsory subjects are Sesotho and English.		

Source: MoET; 2009, 2005; 2016 and UNICEF 2016

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

This article is designed to analyze different sections of four documents: CAP, Education Sector Strategic Plans of 2005-2015 and 2016-2026, and UNICEF 2016 document. Table 1 indicates that the first column represents selected sections under

CAP 2009; language policy, national goals of education aim, curriculum aims of basic education, and organisation of school curriculum. The second column embodies designated sections under Education Sector Strategic Plans for 2005-2015 and 2016-2026 while the last column presents a selection of

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a particular section under the UNICEF 2016 document.

The information displayed in the table above shows that under language policy CAP portrays that mother tongue shall be used as a medium of instruction from Grade 1-3 but it is not specific about which and whose mother tongue to use (MoET, 2009). Kolobe and Matsoso (2020) affirm the foregoing statement that “English is used as a language of business and administration. It is further used as a medium of instruction in schools from Grade 4 to tertiary. Sesotho, on the other hand, is used as a medium of instruction from Grade 1 to 3 because it is mistakenly regarded as the only mother tongue in Lesotho”. Yet, there are other languages for the minority in Lesotho. Again, although the government of Lesotho’s commitment under National Goals of Education is to promote and support accessible language policy in relation to medium of instruction as well as effective communication, the policy is silent about which and whose mother tongue to use.

Under Curriculum Aims of Basic Education (MoET, 2009), ethnic and other minority languages are excluded since learners are expected to have acquired communication skills in Sesotho and English and apply them in everyday life. Also, under Organisation of School Curriculum, ethnic and other minority languages are left out since for Linguistic and Literary learning area, only English and Sesotho have been selected as compulsory languages (MoET, 2009).

With respect to Education Sector and Strategic Plan 2005-2015, children belonging to ethnic minorities are incorporated in the Mission, Goals and Objectives in that it was mentioned that as put by MoET (2005), by 2015, all children particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities would have

access to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality. However, it is not specific in terms of what medium of instruction is to be used. We argue that the exclusion of minority languages in education brings the gap to the advocacy for inclusive education practices.

It is worth noting that the Ministry of Education and Training evens up with SDG 4 in that it reinforces the commitment to improving the quality of education and the important role that education can play in supporting the development of more just and inclusive societies (MoET, 2005). Lastly, UNICEF (2016) under Language Policy in Education maintains that Sesotho, which is the national language in Lesotho, features in the education system as the medium of instruction from Grade 1-3 but switches to English in Grade 4 even though approximately 75% of the population of Lesotho do not speak English. This document, however, is silent about ethnic and other minority languages. Therefore, our contention is that the exclusion of minority languages does not promote and protect the languages as advocated by translanguaging pedagogy and social constructionism.

DISCUSSION

Implications of the analysis are discussed for the inclusion of ethnic and other minority language nationals in education. Based on the findings, the inclusion of language policy in CAP 2009 which states that mother tongue shall be used in primary level from Grade 1-3 portrays that CAP in MoET (2009), on one hand, seems to be aligned with SDG 4 whose mandate is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” On the other hand, the education system seems to be exclusionist, hence clarity is sought pertaining to whose mother tongue, whether for the learner or the

teacher. According to Matlosa and Matobo (2007), this has been a problem since time immemorial. "For a long time, the education system in Lesotho has socially excluded persons with disabilities since it was heavily skewed in favour of those who were socially considered to be abled" (Matlosa & Matobo, 2007, p.191).

On a lighter note, sign language has received some attention as sign language dictionary was produced recently. Kometsi (2014, p.120) further affirms that "The Lesotho sign language is luckier as an emerging language to have attracted the attention of the authorities for just recently a dictionary of Lesotho sign language was produced." Lesotho language policy points to the use of sign language being included and elevated to the status of official languages. Many research studies conducted in Lesotho give contradictory reports (Matlosa & Matobo, 2007; Matlosa, 2009, 2010). Matlosa (2010) explains that the language policy considers English and Sesotho as official languages, assuming that Basotho learner population is bilingual and makes use of oral methods of communication. Kometsi (2014, p.120) shares the same sentiments that "The Constitution of Lesotho recognises Sesotho and English as the only official languages in the country." Therefore, other languages and the method of communication are excluded. Thus, we adopt Cenoz and Gorter's (2017) contention that that "these languages are vulnerable, and their future is not always secure" (p. 904).

Matlosa's (2009) study found out that deaf learners drop out of school very early because teachers lack language skills to include them in their classrooms. In addition, schools that cater for their needs are expensive and many people are not even aware of their existence. This is a contradiction of what the language policy and the strategic plan stipulate. Therefore, this

study argues that there are differences between policy and implementation. The Education Sector Strategic Plan of 2016-2026 SDG4 articulates that it will "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." The feasibility of this goal is questionable when the education system does not consider learners' home languages. Another area of concern is that the constitution itself ignores learners' home languages by not including them as official languages to be used to acquire scientific knowledge.

The exclusion of some learners in successfully participating in education is further strengthened by MoET (2009) since for organisation of school curriculum, under learning area of linguistic and literary, compulsory subjects are Sesotho and English. Choosing these two languages as compulsory subjects has an implication that learners from minority languages are not considered and are mostly disadvantaged in the classroom (Charamba, 2021). The language policy also stipulates that Sesotho will be used as a medium of instruction up to class 3. This is contradictory to the National Goals of Education: Goal 7 which indicates that there is a need for "accessible language policy in relation to medium of instruction as well as effective communication". We therefore see this as a threat to inclusive education's mandate to respond and address diversity in education. The question remains, how do we expect effective communication in a classroom where learners are taught in the medium of instruction which is not their mother tongue? Adopting Charamba's (2021) view, education planners and curriculum designers impose norms which are not appropriate for all the learner population. English as a medium of instruction among black learners is largely responsible for their inadequate educational performance, particularly since most of these learners do

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not have the required skills in the language (Webb, Lafon & Pare, 2010). In view of this, there is a need therefore, "for the development and implementation of language-in-education policies which address the basic educational and sociolinguistic realities" (Webb et al., 2010, p. 275).

Research has shown that language is also an important causal factor of poor performance (Webb et al., 2010; Charamba, 2020). When the language of teaching and learning is foreign, it distorts knowledge acquisition, "the general acquisition of knowledge and skills is restricted; the resources learners bring to school (not only experiences, views, beliefs, but also linguistic resources) are ignored and not utilized; and meaningful co-operation between the school and the parents is constrained" (Webb et al., 2010, p. 280). The use of learners' home languages in education is an inclusive pedagogic practice that provides opportunities for enriching learning environments (Mokala, 2021). As such, the exclusion of minority languages in education is unjust and undemocratic. The study argues that using learners' home languages in classrooms promotes high-quality classroom practice which enhances their development and learning (Soukakoua, Evangeloub & Holbrookeb, 2018, p. 1124).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having scrutinised the language situation in Lesotho for the inclusion of

ethnic and other minority language nationals, the discovery is, the Lesotho education system is exclusionist in that the language policy in CAP 2009 is uncommunicative pertaining to which and whose mother tongue to use as a medium of instruction in lower primary levels. To this end, we hope that the article has hatched insights for further exploration on the inclusion of ethnic minority languages in Lesotho education system.

Regarding the findings, it is recommended that:

There should be an inclusive national language policy whereby indigenous languages in the country are all promoted to a national level to be used in all public functions, including education, administration, judiciary, politics and media.

The government of Lesotho should therefore recognise and standardise ethnic minority languages as a sign of acknowledging their speakers as human beings and legitimate citizens of Lesotho.

Institutions of higher learning especially teacher training institutions, should also offer programmes that are inclusive of ethnic and other minority languages.

Further investigation on other aspects of ethnic minority language nationals is recommended.

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