



Chapter 16

Theory and Practice of Multilingual and Multicultural Education in Botswana Lower Primary Schools

Andy Chebanne

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5393-1771>
University of Botswana, Botswana

Budzani Gabanamotse-Mogara

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2606-9474>
University of Botswana, Botswana

ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses issues of languages in education in Botswana. The authors argue that the current language in education practice is at variance with the realities on the ground in which some parts of the population's children do not speak Setswana and English, yet they are required to learn in these languages. Botswana languages in education practice is contrary to theories of multilingualism and multiculturalism that advocate that where there are many languages, there should be proper planning to facilitate learning and also democratize of the curriculum. The discussion limits itself to early primary education level where the learning difficulties are acute, and a solution is required to manage language learning difficulty by using mother tongue medium of instruction.

INTRODUCTION

The Botswana education system from colonial and post-colonial times recognizes English and Setswana as languages of education in basic education levels (Ndhlovu and Makalela, 2021; Bagwasi, 2016; Nyati-Saleshando, 2011). Thereafter, English is the language of instructions up to tertiary education level. At primary school level, all learners from various ethnic and linguistic groups who do not speak

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Setswana and English at home are required to use these two recognized languages on their first day of school (Chebanne and Kewagamang, 2020). Since these languages are foreign to the young learners, the linguistic trauma, and the pedagogical hurdles are real and daunting for teachers (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004). This happens because the practice of language in education use in Botswana is not a clear constitutional formulation, but merely inferred from various constitutional texts and administrative practices that indicate that English is a requirement in communicating official matters and Setswana is a national language (Chebanne, 2015b; Janson and Tsonope, 1991).

In the Botswana languages use practice, there is downright quietness about other languages of Botswana and thus they do not have any role in education (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004; Nyati-Ramahobo, 2000, albeit school-going children from these disregarded language communities arrive at school not knowing the two languages of schooling (Chebanne and Kewagamang, 2020). Whereas in Botswana education policies of equal access are talked about, the lack of the use of ethnic languages in education at an early stage of education testifies to inequity and inequality (Chebanne and Moumakwa, 2017; Nyati-Saleshando, 2011). Accordingly, the equality in access as expressed in Botswana is a myth (Batibo, 2015a). Related to this restrictive language use in education practice, there is the question of the disregard of enjoyment of culture especially from these other language communities of Botswana (Nyati-Saleshando, 2011). For them, the current minimalist language use practice in education, favouring only English and Setswana means that their languages are effectively rendered superfluous even in family language use domains (Chebanne and Moumakwa, 2017; Chebanne, 2015b; Chebanne, & Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004).

OBJECTIVE OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter will in the first case briefly make an account of the ethnic language communities of Botswana and their language vibrancy. Secondly, it will proceed to present the current socio-linguistics situation that they find themselves in. Thirdly, the discussion critically assesses the current educational languages in use and contends that it is detrimental to the enjoyment of education. Fourthly, the paper will investigate issues of theory and practice of mother tongue education as it obtains elsewhere, and how Botswana could emulate the various models that are adopted by other countries. Fifthly, the grand and compelling intention of this paper is to deliberate on the consequences of the absence of multilingual education in Botswana and how it undesirably effects the Botswana ethnic languages speakers' and their right to preserve their ethno-linguistic identity through the facilitation of their languages (Batibo, 2015a; Chebanne, 2015b). Sixthly and lastly, the argument that will be made is that language use practices have correspondingly culture bias in the curriculum conceptualisation, teacher training and language policy accommodation of equity, which are instrumental in bringing about a just education system in the country. This will be critically investigated and arguments presented to contribute to the debate on the introduction of mother tongue at lower primary level in Botswana. The objective of the discussion is to persistently feed on the debate about the local and speech minority languages in Botswana, and the desire of the communities to use them in the education of their children, especially at lower primary school (Nyati-Saleshando, 2011).

What is significant in the argument of this chapter is that absence or dearth of provisions for the considerations of multilingual education is the paucity of the language use practice, the superficiality of curriculum development and teacher training which is oblivious of linguistic diversity of the country (Jotia & Jankie, 2015). The outcomes of this situation, that generate challenges in the educational pro-

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