

LANGUAGE USE IN EDUCATION AND ETHNIC CONFLICT AND CHALLENGES AMIDST COMPETING
LINGUISTIC ALLEGIANCES: THE CASE OF THE LUNDAS AND THE LUVALES
IN ZAMBEZI DISTRICT, ZAMBIA

by

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Abstract

In Zambia, the debate surrounding whether or not it is much more salutary to instruct children in their first language (L1) or mother tongue in the early stages of their academic development appears to have subsided in the last two decades, in favour of its proponents. Undoubtedly, this more valorizing and somewhat conflict-mitigating view of African languages is due, in no small measure, to the establishment of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) in Bamako, Mali, in 2001 under the theme, “African Languages for a Peaceful, Prosperous and Integrated Africa”. Scholars have consistently challenged the traditional practice by most African states of adopting ex-colonial languages as a medium of instruction in schools. This is because research has shown that native speakers forced to learn in a foreign language tend to lag behind in their academic development as they attempt to first learn the new (imposed) language. Based on this realisation, in 2013, Zambia set trends among many African countries by adopting a policy of teaching in local languages at lower grade levels (grades 1-4). This policy is reported to be working remarkably well in most parts of the country. For example, the May 2016 Joint Annual Review (JAR) by the Ministry of General Education and Cooperating Partners, covering a sample of 40 schools across the country, revealed a significant increase in test scores, literacy and numeracy, compared to the last two years before adoption of the policy. Further research, however, has also shown that implementation of this commendable policy has come with its own linguistic challenges in Zambezi District, Zambia. Zambezi District has suffered a long-standing conflict over language use between the Lunda and the Luvale ethnic communities, dating back to pre-colonial times. This article seeks to highlight the conflicts and challenges faced in the implementation of the local language policy in education in Zambezi District among the Lundas and the Luvalas. In addition, it offers recommendations that might help mitigate and/or manage the prevailing ethnic conflict induced by this policy-driven use of language in education.

Key words: African Academy of Languages, Education, Ethnic Conflict and Challenges, Language Use, Lunda, Luvale, Zambezi District and Zambia.

Introduction

Many former British colonies, such as Zambia, opted to adopt English as the official language after independence. This is not dissimilar to what transpired elsewhere on the continent such as in Lusophone or Portuguese-speaking Africa where the language of the erstwhile coloniser was adopted as the official language, post-independence (Yorke, 1999). However, the use of English as a medium of instruction (as opposed to indigenous African languages) in the education system has, for decades, generated great controversy among scholars (Nzungu, 1997). This modern debate as to whether or not it is more salutary to teach children in their mother tongue has its grounding in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which places emphasis on education among the basic human rights. Pursuant to the adoption of the UDHR, the right to education has been re-affirmed by many other international and regional instruments. Among others, these include the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Covenant on the Rights of the Child (1989) (see Gaventa and Mayo, 2010), the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992).

Closer to home is the establishment of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) in Bamako, Mali, in 2001, under the pan-African theme, "African Languages for a Peaceful, Prosperous and Integrated Africa". ACALAN, formed just one year before the Organization of African Unity (OAU) morphed into the

African Union (AU) in 2002, now functions as an Official Organ of the AU.

The common factor driving much of the above policies and politics of language has been a human rights-induced commitment to education without discrimination, the promotion of social justice and, more long-term, the deepening of the democratic traditions within the affected states (Brock-Utne, 2003). However, more recently, now that evidence points to a global trend in terms of an increased number of children in school, the focus has tended to shift somewhat towards quality education. The question regarding the most effective language to use as a medium of instruction cannot be avoided as this has profound implications for both access and quality. For instance, children may shun school when forced to learn in an unfamiliar language, thereby compromising access, or they would not be able to comprehend fully what is being taught in a foreign language, thereby affecting quality.

This article emerged from a qualitative study that was conducted in Zambezi District, Zambia, by Chipso Kasoma in 2016. The research covered a total of 63 participants (39 male and 24 female) out of which 29 were Lundas, 23 Luvalas, 5 of hybrid ethnic identity (Lundas and Luvalas) and 6 'other' represented ethnicities (neither Lunda nor Luvale). The data was collected using eight Focus Group Discussions (see below). In addition, 13 key informant interviews as well as a study of relevant secondary literature and documents were undertaken. The collected data was then analysed thematically with the help of the N-VIVO software.

| FGD CLASSIFICATION SHEET | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------|
| FGD Cases | Gender | Ethnicity | Age |
| Cases\\FDG 6 | Female | Luvale | 41-60 |
| Cases\\FDG 7 | Male | Lunda | 18-40 |
| Cases\\FDG 8 | Female | Lunda | 18-40 |
| Cases\\FGD 1 | Male | Luvale | 41-60 |
| Cases\\FGD 2 | Female | Mixed Lunda/Luvale | 18-40 |
| Cases\\FGD 3 | Male | Luvale | 18-40 |
| Cases\\FGD 4 | Mixed Gender | Mixed Lunda/Luvale | 18-40 |
| Cases\\FGD 5 | Male | Lunda | 41-60 |

| INTERVIEW CLASSIFICATION SHEET | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|
| Interview Participants | Age | Ethnicity | Gender | Length of stay in Zambezi |
| Cases\\Interview 1 | 18-40 years | Other (neither Lunda nor Luvale) | Male | 5-10 years |
| Cases\\Interview 10 | Above 60 Years | Lunda | Male | Above 20 years |
| Cases\\Interview 11 | 18-40 years | Other (neither Lunda nor Luvale) | Female | 5-10 years |
| Cases\\Interview 12 | 41-60 years | Other (neither Lunda nor Luvale) | Male | 11-20 years |
| Cases\\Interview 13 | 18-40 years | Other (neither Lunda nor Luvale) | Male | 5-10 years |
| Cases\\Interview 2 | Above 60 years | Luvale | Male | Above 20 years |
| Cases\\Interview 3 | 41-60 years | Luvale | Male | Above 20 years |
| Cases\\Interview 4 | Above 60 years | Lunda | Male | Above 20 years |
| Cases\\Interview 5 | 18-40 years | Mixed Lunda/Luvale | Male | < 5 years |
| Cases\\Interview 6 | 18-40 years | Other (neither Lunda nor Luvale) | Male | 5-10 years |
| Cases\\Interview 7 | 18-40 years | Other (neither Lunda nor Luvale) | Male | 5-10 years |
| Cases\\Interview 8 | 18-40 years | Mixed Lunda/Luvale | Male | 11-20 years |
| Cases\\Interview 9 | 41-60 years | Lunda | Male | 11-20 years |

To put a cap on this protracted and persistent debate about how best to navigate between the foreign and the indigenous, empirical evidence in the last 2-3 decades has shown quite compellingly that it takes 2-3 years to become proficient in basic communication skills in a second language (L2) and 4-10 years to reach grade level competence (Lucas and Katz, 1994; also see Cummins, 2005; Rolstad, 2005; and Degraff, 2017). Given these findings, teaching in English language may therefore not be helpful for African children because it will take them no less than 2 years to go beyond learning the language sufficiently well to competently assimilate the content of the teaching. Consequently, such African children are bound to lag behind their English-speaking counterparts in academic performance and development in that both access and quality run the distinct risk of being severely compromised.

In recent years, this defensible linguistic conviction has generated international activism, specifically promoting the use of indigenous languages in schools and resulting in further international conventions. These include the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, adopted by the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 (Gaventa and Mayo, 2010).

In addition, there was a follow-up conference held in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 which produced the Dakar Framework for Action. The Framework highlighted six (6) goals to be achieved by 2015 relating to universal primary education, gender equality and the reduction of adult illiteracy. Embedded within these goals, however, was an emphasis on education in a familiar language, the absence of which has proven to have the effect of disadvantaging speakers of indigenous languages. Another related and important piece of the puzzle, as it were, is the 2005

AU Decision on the Linkage between Culture and Education which is echoed in ACALAN in terms of its recognition of the importance of African languages as medium of instruction and as conflict-mitigating and culture-bearing vehicles.

It is against this background and aspiration to localise the above policies and politics of language that Zambia in 2013 was among some African countries that adopted a policy of teaching in indigenous languages at lower grade levels (grades 1-4). However, it should be noted that this was not entirely a new development but was, instead, a re-introduction of an indigenous language policy that existed previously under the colonial administration in 1948. And even back then, the implementation of the 1948 indigenous language policy in schools ignited much conflict and controversy in Chavuma District (then part of Balovale land) in terms of language use within the Lunda and Luvale ethnic communities.

Re-introduction of the indigenous language policy in 2013 has, within its first three years of existence, already begun recording a positive output in terms of academic performance. For example, the May 2016 Joint Annual Review (JAR) by the Ministry of General Education and Cooperating Partners, covering a sample of 40 schools across the country, revealed significant increase in test scores, literacy and numeracy, compared to the last two years before adoption of the policy (Global Partnership for Education, 2016). Similarly, another study conducted in 2016 by Francis Kafata involving 45 respondents from 20 Primary Schools in Kitwe District, Copperbelt Province, showed that issuing instructions in the indigenous language is more beneficial as the pupils grasp more quickly and classroom participation improves. Moreover, pupils tend to continue with the same language even after lessons, which helps them to acquire knowledge even more readily as well (Kafata, 2016). It

means, therefore, that, presumably, this is a rather commendable language policy for Zambia which boasts some seventy or so different indigenous languages. In theory at least, such a language policy has the potential to improve overall academic performance and even help to minimize ethnic conflict amidst competing linguistic allegiances.

Notwithstanding the great successes documented elsewhere in the country, however, further research has also shown that, paradoxically, the same language conflicts and challenges experienced in Chavuma District in 1948 have re-surfaced in Zambezi District with the re-introduction of the indigenous language policy in education in 2013. The entire Zambezi District (including Chavuma which is now an independent District) has suffered a long-standing language conflict between the Lunda- and Luvale-speaking people, dating back to pre-colonial times. This has posed a serious threat to the success of the education indigenous language policy in that area, thereby necessitating further exploration as to how best the recently re-introduced policy can be implemented so as to help mitigate and/or manage protracted ethnic conflict.

Zambezi District is located approximately 1,077 km from Lusaka, the Capital City, in the North-Western Province of Zambia. Zambezi (formerly known as Balovale land before the dawn of the First Republic in 1964) recorded a total population of 80,306 people in the 2010 Census (Central Statistics Office – CSO, 2010). The Luvale and affiliate ethnic groups, namely, the Luchazi, Chokwe and Mbunda, are the majority, jointly accounting for around three-quarters of the total population.

History of the Lundas and Luvales

In order to understand the protracted and persistent language-induced conflict between these two ethnic communities, it is needful for us to provide a cursory recital of the history of the two ethnic

communities (Mukunto 2016). It should be noted from the onset, however, that the Luvales seem to have a much more detailed documentation trail than their Lunda counterparts. Kwekudee (2013) in ‘Trip Down Memory Lane’ gives an interesting and informative account of the two ethnic groups before their settlement in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia). They happen to have been part of the Bantu people that migrated from Cameroon in West Africa to the Great Lakes Region and Southern Africa. Kwekudee further traces their emergence to the Lunda princess from the Lunda Kingdom who fell for the charm of Tshinda Ilunga, the adventurous hunter who hailed from the Luba establishment in the 1600s. This act drove her brothers away in anger to establish their own kingdoms, which eventually culminated in the formation of the Lunda and Luvale dynasties. Others were the Lozi, Bemba and Kaonde ethnic groups that emanated from this legacy. These groups adopted different dialects and some small variations in tradition and material culture which Papstein (1989) argues could have contributed to the genesis of the language-induced ethnic conflict under investigation.

The Luvale faction led by Chinyama passed through Angola and first settled at the Chavuma border before entering present-day Zambezi. In Zambezi, the Luvales, who were fierce warriors, drove away the Mbwele to Western Province and took possession of the entire area surrounding the Zambezi River. However, because they were fishermen traditionally, the Luvales opted to settle along the Zambezi River on the West bank. This not only gave them a better view of their approaching enemies but also allowed them to maintain jurisdiction over both sides of the river.

According to the 1939 MacDonald Commission Report, when Ishima, the first Lunda Chief, arrived in Zambezi around 1895, he sought land from the Luvale

Chief and was allocated land on the eastern side of the Zambezi River. Unfortunately, this geographical juxtaposition of the two ethnic communities in such close proximity to each other later spawned the conflict-ridden slave trade in that the more powerful Luvales traded off the Lundas as slaves to the Ovimbundu traders. In their defence, the Lundas sought protection from the Lozis, who by then had already established a powerful kingdom in Barotseland. These battles of conflict and conquest between the Lozis and the Luvales in defence of the Lundas came to be known as the 'Wars of Ulamba' (Papstein, 1989).

When the colonial imperialists came to Zambia, their first point of contact was with the Lozis. As a colonial administration strategy as well as a means of compensation for the support rendered by the Lozis during the Wars of Ulamba, the entire Balovale land ended up as part of Barotseland. Consequently, both Luvale and Lunda chiefs became answerable to the Litunga. Kwekudee (2013) narrates how, for a brief moment in history, the two ethnic groups had to put their differences aside and cooperate in fighting a common threat posed by both Lozi and colonial dominance. This was especially the case after the colonial masters began to show their anti-indigenous administrative tendencies and intentions. This opposition, amidst subtle clashes between themselves (as their own differences were not totally forgotten), quickly gained the Lundas and the Luvales a reputation of being wild and unruly subjects that required much closer control and supervision.

In 1923, for the first time, came a colonial District Commissioner (DC) by the name of Bruce Miller from Mwinilunga, a Lunda-dominated area. All other DCs before him were from Borotseland, which was neither Lunda nor Luvale. Due to his background, Miller was perceived as showing a bias toward the Lundas in that

he facilitated Ishinde, a messenger under the colonial administration, to rise to the chieftaincy. In addition, Miller used the Zambezi River boundary as a natural mark of demarcation with the Luvales ending up on the west and the Lundas on the east (MacDonnell Commission Report, 1939).

This partitioning of Balovale land resulted in a major conflict between the two ethnic groups as, following this, Chavuma District, considered the area's best agricultural land and, in spite of having a larger Luvale population, ended up within Lunda control and confines. To date, the Zambezi River boundary-generating conflict has never been resolved. Instead, it continues to complicate relations between the Lunda and the Luvale ethnic communities with implications even for language use in education. This has become even more acute in recent times given the fact that the Central Business Area (CBA) is on the eastern part (the Lunda area), while the west is waterlogged with little or no potential for meaningful and sustainable agricultural production (the Luvale area).

In addition, and as if to rub salt in the ethnic wound, as it were, Balovale land was later changed to Zambezi District after Zambia's independence in 1964. As the first President of the new Republic, this was Dr Kenneth Kaunda's conflict-resolving strategy in his commendable and concerted attempt to encourage peaceful co-existence between the two ethnic groups. Unfortunately, this did not resonate well with the Luvales who not only saw themselves as unwilling inheritors of poorer land on the west side of the Zambezi river but also knowing that they enjoyed historical precedence over the other inhabitants of the land as a whole.

Below is a map of Zambia, which shows the location of Zambezi District in the North-Western Province of Zambia.

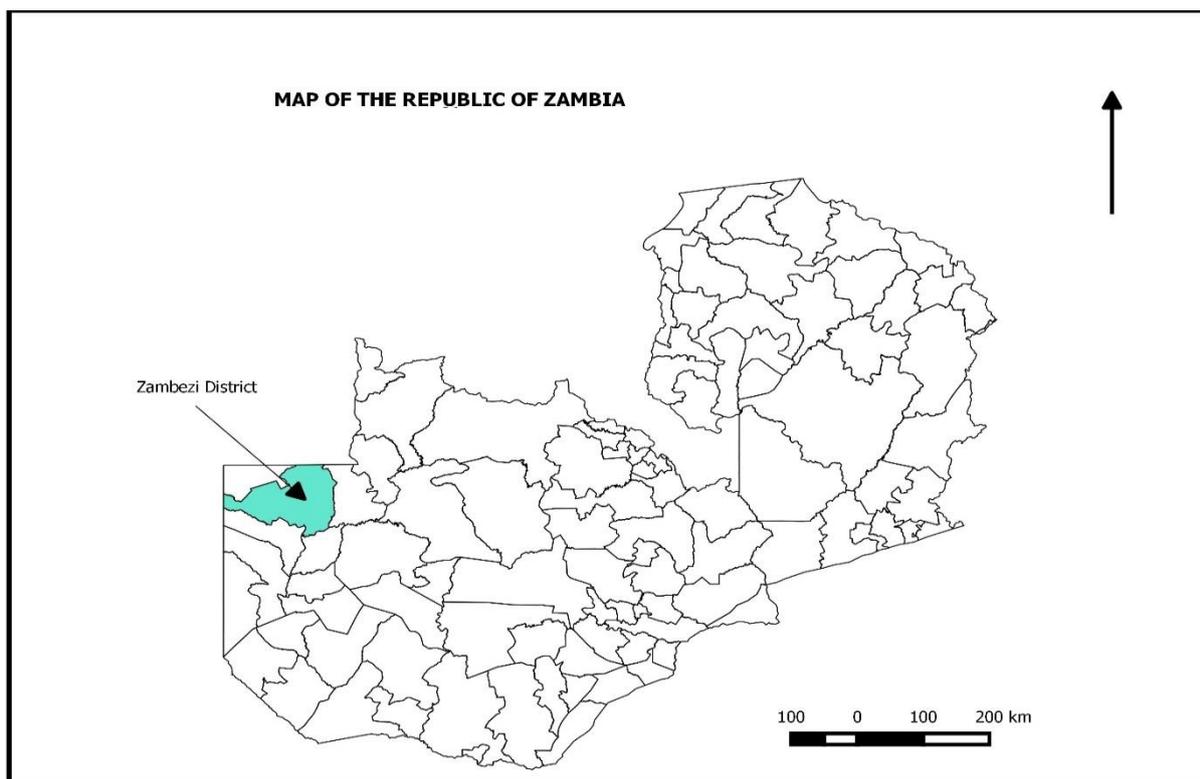


Fig. 1: Map of Zambia

Background to the Conflict-generating Indigenous Language Use in Education Policy in Zambia

In terms of the indigenous language use in education policy in Zambia, Chondoka and Manchishi (1999) point out that the earliest European missionaries, as was true of elsewhere in Africa, introduced the first form of formal education to the local people in Zambia, even before colonialism in 1883. These originators of the initial education system promoted the use of an indigenous language then called SiLozi, since their first point of contact was with Lewanika, the Lozi King of Borotseland. SiLozi was used to teach children in lower grades while English was introduced at higher-grade levels. This pedagogical approach by the early European missionaries is reported to have been largely successful in mitigating conflict based on linguistic allegiances. Also, it helped to promote cognitive and academic

development among the learners (Ibid; also see Snelson, 1974).

However, when Northern Rhodesia was eventually colonised in 1924, the British Government felt the need to conduct an investigation so as to ascertain the efficacy of the prevailing education system. Thus, the Phelps-Stokes Commission was instituted, whose Advisory Board endorsed teaching in indigenous languages. This was in a bid to ensure that education was attuned to the practical needs of the people, most of whom had a very limited command of English. For the first two years of primary schooling, the Board recommended the use of the mother tongue or the first native language to which children are exposed. This was to be followed by a principal zonal language or the dominant local language in a particular geographical area up to standard 5 (Banda D, Mostert L and Wilkan, G, 2012). At the time, there were only four (4) principal indigenous languages that were adopted,

namely, SiLozi, ChiTonga, ChiBemba and ChiNyanja. Furthermore, the Board later recommended that English could eventually become the Language of Instruction (LOI) as soon as the difficulties in reading and writing in indigenous languages were mastered (Banda *et al.*, 2012). These recommendations provided a basis for the 1948 indigenous language policy although the Government would later increase the officially recognized zonal languages from four to seven. The other three languages are Lunda, Luvale and Kaonde.

When Zambia attained its independence in 1964, it was understandably driven by a profound sense of nationalism and patriotism. For example, the fact that very few people were literate and competent in English so as to cope with the immediate demands of administration and governance, posed a real threat to the newly found freedom and to national development. In this regard, it was little wonder that the 1966 Education Act declared English as the sole LOI throughout the country. Predictably, this resulted in an overall decline in literacy and numeracy levels among children who hardly ever used English at home. Kashoki (1990 quoted from Kelly), Kelly (1999 and 2000) and Muyeba (1998 also quoted from Kelly) describe the 1966 Act as one that just schooled and graduated illiterates because the initial teaching was done in English, a language which, as has been mentioned earlier, was completely foreign to most pupils at the time (Banda *et al.*, 2012).

A later study by the Zambian Ministry of Education and the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) which was conducted in 1995 showed that only 25% of Grade 6 pupils could read at defined desirable levels. Kafata (2016) asserts that it was evident that the first 30 years of English as the only medium of instruction had been less than entirely satisfactory. Teaching

and learning in a foreign language had meant that, essentially, for the vast majority, school was unrelated to real life (Kafata, 2016).

Many other subsequent studies conducted generated similar findings, which prompted the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders in Zambia to realise that, perhaps, to enhance academic performance and to mitigate conflict, teaching and learning were better done in a familiar language. For Kafata, this means taking the children, epistemologically speaking, from the known to the unknown. For him, this enables pupils to express themselves and actively participate in their own learning, prevents cognitive overload, minimizes ethnic conflict and psychologically boosts their self-esteem (Ibid).

Thus, the Ministry of Education began to take slow and cautious steps to re-introduce and re-emphasise the role of local or indigenous languages in education, beginning with the 1996 'Educating our Future' policy. This policy revived the use of a familiar language to teach literacy (reading and writing only) in Grade 1, although English was maintained as the LOI. This was achieved through programmes such as the Primary Reading Programme (PRP) and the Zambia New Breakthrough to Literacy (ZNBL).

The challenge with this new approach, however, was the confusion caused by teaching Grade 1 literacy in a local language, on the one hand, and then continuing with English as the overall medium of instruction, on the other. Although these additional programmes did score some notable successes, their performance was compromised by the conflict and controversy which was aroused by teaching initial literacy in local languages while English, a foreign language, still enjoyed the supremacy. This awareness later prompted the ultimate policy decision in 2013 to completely

revert to teaching in local or indigenous languages at lower grade levels, i.e., grades 1 to 4.

Implementation of the Conflict-generating Local Language Use Policy in Education in Zambezi District

As earlier indicated, empirical evidence has shown countrywide relatively impressive results ensuing from the re-introduction of the education local language use policy in its first three years of implementation. Nevertheless, Zambezi District in the North-Western Province of the country seems to be the one notable exception, owing to protracted and persistent language-driven conflict between the Lunda- and Luvale-speaking ethnic communities resident there. Today, for example, Lunda continues to be geographically recognised as the zonal language of Zambezi District. This is simply based on the Zambezi River boundary regulation of the 1920s to which we referred earlier and which officially divided the District into two parts, with the Luvalas to the west and the Lundas to the east.

This locational scenario only adds to an already conflict-generating context in which Luvalas account for the majority of the population on both the east and the west banks of the Zambezi River. To complexify matters even further, the Luvale ethnic group ought to be considered to be even much larger in that, as was mentioned earlier, they also encompass the Luchazi, Chokwe and Mbunda sub-ethnic groups within the region.

When the local language policy was re-introduced, Muzata (2015) re-counts that the Ministry of Education first took statistics of ethnic groups in the different parts of Zambia before determining which local languages to adopt. It was found that the Luvale-speaking pupils were more on both sides of the Zambezi River. In

addition, the Lundas are mostly settled on the east bank and almost non-existent on the west. Therefore, adopting Lunda entirely on the east bank as the LOI has proved to be a recipe for conflict in that it seriously disadvantages the Luvale pupils who are coerced into learning in an unfamiliar language. This is contrary to what the commendable local language policy seeks to achieve in the first place. In light of this complex and conflict-generating linguistic scenario, the Ministry of Education decided to have students taught in Luvale in the Luvale-dominated parts of Zambezi east as well as all parts of Zambezi west, while the Lunda-populated parts of Zambezi east would maintain Lunda (Muzata, 2015). However, Chief Ishinde of the Lunda-speaking people, perhaps influenced by the history of conflict and hostility between the two ethnic communities, proved not to be a conflict-resolver in that he stubbornly refused to abide by this decision. Instead, he demanded to have the natural aquatic boundary respected by having Lunda (and Lunda only) taught in all parts of Zambezi east of the river. Unfortunately, and not surprisingly, this has remained a source of conflict since then with the on-going Zambezi District-based Lunda-Luvale conflict-generating politics of language being very much a part of that whole trajectory.

The situation is further compounded by what appears to be undue external political interference by certain state actors. This precludes the Ministry of Education, as the official regulatory organ of the state, from taking decisive and definitive action. For instance, in succumbing to pressure from the Lunda faction, the then Minister of Education (through his Permanent Secretary) in 2014 ruled to have Lunda taught in all of Zambezi east and Luvale in the west. This decision was later overruled and reversed by the then President of the Republic, the late Mr. Michael Chilufya Sata.

It means that the schools in Zambezi District continue to operate in a precarious and conflict-charged linguistic environment so much so that even the ethnic orientation of staff and management or the majority of pupils at a given school sometimes determine the LOI at lower grade levels. To complicate matters further, some schools such as Dechawang (or Kateta as known by the Luvalas), and perhaps out of sheer frustration and to avert any further ethnic conflict, have opted to maintain English as the only LOI.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In sum, two contrary enabling instruments are often cited or invoked in the Zambezi District-based conflict over the role and relevance of the LOI. First, there is the Luvale argument that Luvale should be adopted as the sole LOI in the lower grades (1-4) as opposed to Lunda. The rationale for this is that the high number of Luvale-speaking pupils in the district on both sides of the Zambezi river would justify it. This argument seems to find some support in the 2013 Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (ZECF). It is a Framework which stipulates that the LOI from grades 1-4 should be a language which is familiar to the pupil (Curriculum Development Centre, 2013). However, the Lunda counter-argument in support of Lunda being the exclusive LOI east of the Zambezi River stems from preceding policies such as the Education Acts of 1948, 1966 and 1996. Such pieces of legislation seem to place some emphasis on adoption of the principal or zonal language--which ever that happens to be.

This means, essentially, that both ethnic communities seem to have a firm historical basis for their argument. Granted, this ongoing conflict might not have arisen in Zambezi District if the familiar language to the pupil happened to have been the zonal language as well. This is mostly the case in other parts of the country except

for some random exceptions induced by pupil transfers and voluntary migration from other Districts.

In short, the case of Zambezi District is unique in the country in that the zonal language (Lunda) is not necessarily the familiar or most common language (Luvale). This points to the root cause of the conflicts and challenges being encountered by the re-introduced indigenous language policy in education.

A quick historical recital of how Lunda ended up as the zonal language instead of Luvale, which accounts for the majority of the population, takes us back to the colonial era. Particularly important in this protracted conflict-generating scenario based on language use and allegiances is how the Zambezi River was designated the boundary marker to separate the Lunda and the Luvale ethnic communities.

The MacDonnell Report of 1939 describes how the Zambezi River boundary was used by Bruce Miller, a District Commissioner (DC) transferred from Mwinilunga under the colonial administration, and who demonstrated what appears to be a clear Lunda bias. Mwinilunga happened to have been a predominantly Lunda area at the time. Due to his perceived bias and background, Miller offered the Lundas the much more fertile east bank at the expense of their Luvale counterparts who remained with the more sandy and waterlogged west bank (MacDonnell Commission Report, 1939). Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the Luvalas were the first settlers in Balovale land (including Chavuma District) as well as the majority in population, Miller saw to it that Lunda emerged as the zonal language. This pattern was different from other parts of the country where the majority speakers logically determined the ultimate selection of the zonal language. Undoubtedly, this accounts for the fact that the indigenous language policy in

education is generating little or no ethnic conflict in other areas of the country.

Unfortunately, Zambezi District stands out as the only known exception. Thus, in an effort to mitigate and/or manage ethnic conflict induced by language, it would be useful, in our considered opinion, to revert to the original objectives and tenets of the language policy. That is, expose pupils to initial academic concepts in a language that they can best understand and competently speak. This would then lay the foundation for conflict-mitigating learning, a relatively smoother transition to English as the second LOI and, ultimately, it is hoped, to a more peaceful society.

Thus, if Luvale-speaking pupils are the majority in Zambezi, then educating them in Lunda defeats the entire purpose of the indigenous or local language policy. Hence, it stands to reason that the ethnic orientation of the majority of the students ought to determine what the local language of instruction in a given area should be-- whether this happens to be the zonal language or not. In addition, the Ministry of Education, as the principal regulatory institution, should be given the authority, free from any undue political interference, to enforce this language policy.

And finally: if such a policy were to be implemented, it would be instructive, by way of future research, to plot the academic performance of children in Zambezi District as compared to other parts of the country where, so far, implementation of the language policy has been largely conflict-free.

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