

## **Education in the Language of a Learner's Choice in South African Public Schools: an Educators' Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa guarantees everyone the right to receive education in the language of their choice. Since 11 languages were awarded official status, educating learners in their language of choice is a formidable task. English has, thus, become the main language of instruction. In recognising that language users, themselves, determine the extent of change regarding language in education, this study aimed at establishing whether there are indeed a political will and personal conviction among the speakers of the nine indigenous official languages to bring about change in this sphere. Since educators should engage with this range of languages, the perspective of educators is important. It was found that, although many of indigenous language speakers remain to consider their language as part of their cultural identity, they still opt for English as the ultimate official language to be educated in. This is unfortunate as mother-tongue education has proven to be the best.*

**Keywords:** language of instruction, mother-tongue language, education, multilingualism, indigenous languages, equal access, quality education, cultural and linguistic diversity

### ***Introduction and rationale of the study***

Subsection 29(2) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 guarantees everyone the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice at public educational institutions where such education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of this right, the State must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account equity, practicability, and the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices. Subsection 6(4), furthermore, requires of the State to use all official languages to such an extent that they are applied in a fair and equal manner.

A Pan South African Language Board is, moreover, mandated to promote and create conditions for the development and use of all official languages (subsection 6(5)). Despite the above-mentioned constitutional provisions, Judge Du Plessis recently remarked that nothing much has been done by government to regulate the use of all 11 official languages in South Africa (De Lange, 2010). The Pan-South African Language Board had, alongside, no significant impact on ensuring the implementation of the official languages (Fessha, 2008). Government instead, pursue an equalised South African identity which, in itself, contradicts a pluralistic democratic ideal (Naudé, 2010).

Pillay and Yu (2010) as well as Nel and Müller (2010) likewise report on Higher Education Institutions only using the so-called *language of the market and of economic viability* as a purpose to match and feed the labour market (employment) rather than to address the political, social and economic complexity of this country. Lourens and Buys (2010) caution that the State as well as a huge part of the population underestimate the importance of language in developing human beings to reach their full potential.

In this regard, Faull (2009) opine that the failure of the education system to accommodate all languages, and subsequently excluding thousands of learners from receiving quality education,<sup>1</sup> has substantially added to the foremost crises regarding the absence of appropriate skills necessary in the workplace amongst the adolescences. Instead of uplifting and advancing the status of all official languages, and adhering to individual language rights (Fessha, 2008), Wilson (2004) avows that rights are rather used as a way of promoting a broad-minded democratic form of accountability. Consequently, those who pay for their education are not allowed to be taught in their language of choice (Jansen, 2008).

English is rather, increasingly, regarded by the State as the *super official language*. This approach leads to the negation of the other ten languages that has to be satisfied, as referred to by De Lange (2010), with the crumbs. As such, these languages are in danger of disappearing altogether. The choice of the medium of instruction in South African public schools is, however, a notorious issue which can be attributed to the history of this country as well as to the cultural and linguistic diversity among its inhabitants (*Middelburg, Mikro* (High Court and Appeal Court), *Ermelo* (High Court, Appeal Court and Constitutional Court), and *Matukane v Laerskool Potgietersrus*).

Magolego (2008) urges that, in reaching a solution to the problem regarding languages, it is firstly important to establish whether there are indeed a political will as well as a personal conviction (or pride as referred to by Nyamende, 2008) among the speakers of the ten other official languages to bring about change in this sphere and take ownership for their own languages. Since much has been done, thus far, by the Afrikaans speaking population to maintain education in their mother tongue, this article sets out to determine the perspectives held by educators, having one of the nine black languages as their home language, regarding education through the medium of learners' language of choice. In this regard, Jansen (2008) also contends that it is impossible for South Africans to scale the deep racial, ethnic, religious, class, language and nationalistic barriers that separate us, until we have had such a moment.

### ***A legislative background***

Subsection 6(2) of the Constitution insists that the State take both practical and positive measures to uplift the status and advance the use of indigenous languages. This obligation is infused due to the historical reduction in the use and rank of these languages. Section 6(3)(a), furthermore, requires of national government to use at least 2 official languages while section 6(4) necessitates national government to regulate and monitor their use of official languages through legislation and other measures, as all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably. By recognizing multilingualism as a bench mark of being truly South African, the Constitution, as put forward by Nyamende (2008), distinguishes itself from other country's constitutions. The latter symbolizes, according to the same author (2008) a definite desire (vision) on the part of the people of this country to place indigenous languages at the centre of the process of future change and growth. Although nothing is clearly documented in the *South African Schools Act* (84/1996) regarding learners' right to receive education in the language their choice, this Act (subsection 6(2)) provides that Public School Governing Bodies may determine the language policy of a public school subject to the Constitution, this Act and any other applicable provincial law.

Subsection 6(3), moreover, protects learners from racial discrimination by indicating that all school language policies should be free from any such violation. The *South African Education Policy Act* (27/1996: section 4(a)(v)), in addition, commits itself towards the development and protection of every learner to be instructed in his/her language of choice, while section 4(a)(viii) acknowledges the right of everyone to use his/her language and participate in the cultural life of his/her own within education institutions. The *Language in Education Policy* (DoE, 1997), which is regarded as part of a continuous process to develop language in education to include all sectors of society (*Education Policy Act*, 27/1996: section 3(4)(m)), is, furthermore, directed at creating an environment in which respect for all languages is encouraged. It is, thus, evident that South African legislation and policy connect with the broader vision of uniformity as set out in the Preamble of the Constitution.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is understandable that the language used by the clients of the education system and their preferences regarding the medium of instruction would have a direct influence on the success of the education system - *Norms and Standards for Language Policy in Public Schools, South African Schools Act* 84 of 1996, sec IV(2), (3) and (4).

<sup>2</sup> It reinforces the normative guide that: *We, the people of South Africa, believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.*

Language in the sphere of education is, however, rightfully regarded as being an extreme multifaceted issue by Kwenda *et al.* (2010). Strydom (2003), accordingly, postulates that the development of a suitable language policy should on the whole consist of a harmonizing process which attempts to strike equilibrium between the accommodations of linguistic diversity, on the one hand and apprehension of national concord and inadequate resources on the other hand. In line herewith, the *Norms and Standards Regarding Language Policy* (DoE, 1998b), aims at striking a balance between the protection of individual language rights, the rights and duties of Public School Governing Bodies and the rights and duties of provincial education departments.

Lubbe (2006), conversely, opines that although the Constitution and other legislation aim at balancing learners' right to education in the language of choice with the right to equal access to education, government decided that the right to equal access should be a first priority. Language policies are, consequently, demoted to serving as mere *symbolic gestures* (Fessha, 2008). In this regard, Henrard (2001) shows that despite the fact that legislation concerning the protection and accommodation of South Africa's linguistic diversity is rather promising practice disclose a *de facto* defiance thereof.

In support, Kamwangalu (2003) maintains that language-in-education policies have failed to promote the status of indigenous languages as medium of instruction. English remains to be the prevailing language (Malan, 2010) although only 8.2% of inhabitants are English mother tongue speakers (Statistics South Africa, 2007). Combrinck and Verhoef (2006) as well as Van Tonder (1999), subsequently, assert that more than mere legislation will be needed to guarantee developmental opportunities for all official languages in South Africa.

### ***South Africa, a multilingual country***

South Africa enjoys significant language diversity (Valley *et al.*, 2002). As a result, the right to education in a learner's choice had to be limited to the 11 official languages as the right to mother tongue education *per se* would be *too unwieldy to be realistic* (Currie & De Waal, 2005) and, according to Nyamende (2008), *too hard to grasp*. The conceding of official status to eleven languages (section 6),<sup>3</sup> nevertheless, acknowledges the multicultural nature of this country which should, according to Louw (2006), make government sensitive to grant any of the languages superior status.

Fessha (2008) and Strydom (2003) propound that if the State favours only certain languages, feelings of marginalization and alienation will be created among those whose languages are neglected, resulting in national unity becoming a mere rhetoric concept. The awarding of official status to 11 languages is, however, criticised by some as being counterproductive and not practically realisable. As such, Sacks (1997) regard such official status as mere *impractical egalitarianism* and Alexander (1998) as mere lip service. Looock *et al.* (2009) indicate that when education role-players come from different cultural groups which use different linguistic conversations, embodying different values and roles, the situation is, conversely, ripe for the development of prejudice which makes the management of multicultural schools a daunting task.

Valley *et al.* (2002), similarly shows that language issues, specifically in the education context, are closely linked to questions of power and the pursuit of fundamental rights. In supporting the latter, Fessha (2008) confirms that language has the capacity to affect the enjoyment of an individual's other fundamental rights. The choice of language is regarded as a fundamental right on the premises that language is an essential aspect of life and, thus, plays a critical role in defining individual identity, culture and community membership (Lubbe, 2006). Indicative of the latter, Fessha (2008) and Watson (2007) underscore that language has always been synonymous with culture, playing a vital role in *ethnic identity and culture*, thus creating a sense of belonging to a certain group and becoming an emotional issue.

It is in this regard that Appiagyei-Atua (2005) contends that the conception of rights is located in philosophical constructs, and that philosophy in turn is shaped by the particular historical experiences and cultures of a people.

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<sup>3</sup> The 11 official languages are, under section 6(1) listed in such a manner that it starts with the language that lacks widespread usage and ends with the language that enjoys extensive usage, in contrast to the Interim Constitution in which they were listed alphabetically. The reason for using the latter structure could be a deliberate attempt to give textual prominence to languages lacking widespread usage (Fessha, 2008).

As a result, the same author concludes, that rights and philosophy are located in the same domain - the mentalities of the people, their institutions, values, traditions and history. Henrard (2003), for example, avers that the aspect of choice regarding the medium of instruction fits into a particular political frame and should be interpreted against the background of the apartheid legacy of South Africa during which indigenous languages were perceived in a very negative light. According to Visser (2005) the latter fostered somewhat exaggerated fears about a recurrence of racial discrimination and, correspondingly, lead to minority and collective or group rights being discredited in the public education system.

Fleisch and Woolman (2007) as well as Tulasiewicz and Adams (2005) explain that there will always be political agendas, closely linked with attitudes towards authority, to be addressed when planning language in education. Desai (2003), similarly, emphasizes that reasons for not implementing mother tongue education are often not educational, but rather political, social and economic in nature. This is important to take cognizance of, since what is best for the child psychologically and pedagogically may not be what is best for the adult socially, economically or politically and, what is even more significant, what is best for the child and the adult may not be best or even possible for society.

In South Africa, this polarization manifests itself as tension between the promotion of English on the one hand and the promotion of African languages on the other. Quite often the result is that many learners do not acquire English effectively, nor do they develop proficiency in their mother tongue (Peens & Strydom, 2007). Since learners who have an African language as their mother tongue unfortunately come from language backgrounds which do not enjoy much status in the greater society, Kamwangamalu (2003) avows that governments lack the political courage and will to promote indigenous languages. Countries such as Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, and South Africa, instead, chose rather to promote the assumed neutrality of English in the name of national unity and global usage.

Consequently, parents are critical of governments' commitment to encourage the use of African languages as medium of instruction, arguing that there is no sense of urgency to deal with such issues (SAHRC, 2006). This is an unfortunate situation, as Jansen (2008) points out that, all should try to communicate with young people not only in their own language but in a literary dialect that makes sense to them and enables social connection between them. To achieve the latter, Jansen (2008) along with Kwenda *et al.* (2010) propose that all need to immerse themselves in the language, culture and life of others in order to obtain an understanding of their fears, concerns and future aspirations.

Government is, however, not the only ones employing political motives, as some School Governing Bodies (*Seodin Primary School v Northern Cape Department of Education; Laerskool Potgietersrus v Northern Cape Department of Education*) also use language policies as a measure of discrimination which, indirectly, impacts on accessibility to schools and retards government's broader transformation goals of ensuring that education is available to all.

If this state of affairs continues, Strydom (2003) postulates that the majority of indigenous languages will enjoy official status in name only, while their use will be constricted to communal or local enclaves, whereas Grove (2006) cautions that English will most probably be the only medium of instruction in future. This is unfortunate as Valley *et al.* (2002) point out that South Africa's rich linguistic heritage could be used as a classroom resource, for cognitive development and as a way to enhance the human potential of learners and of all South Africans, rather than being used for diverse and segregationist purposes – as is current common practice.

### ***The state's obligation***

In the matter of *The Gauteng Provincial Legislature in re: Dispute concerning the constitutionality of certain provisions of the School Education Bill of 1995*, the Constitutional Court called attention to the fact that the obligation lies with the State to ensure everyone's right to basic education, equal access to educational institutions, and where reasonably practicable, instruction in the language of the learner's choice – in that specific sequence. Judge Sachs highlighted the fact that immense inequalities continue to exist in relation to equal access to education, while mentioning that no language group has a claim on the State to establish schools exclusive to their particular language, as it would serve to constitute barriers to learning for learners from other language groups.

Although the Constitutional Court averted to the considerable importance of cultural diversity and language rights, emphasis was placed on the achievement of equality as the dominant theme of the Constitution. The High Court in the matter of *Laerskool Middelburg v Departementshoof: Mpumalanga Departement van Onderwys*, similarly, held that the right to single medium public educational institutions is clearly subordinate to the right of every South African to education at public institutions. Despite this, the High Court indicated that it does not mean that existing single medium schools can be attacked deliberately and forced to change their language policies contrary to existing requirements.

The main aims of the *Language in Education Policy* (DoE, 1997) also correspond with the above-mentioned court statements as the promotion of full participation in society and the economy through equitable and meaningful access to education is set as a first priority while the promoting and developing of all the official languages and the redressing of previously disadvantaged languages as a last priority. Because of the latter, Henrard (2001) points out that, although the *Language in Education Policy* (DoE, 1997) seems rather progressive, little attention is paid to the way in which African languages should be promoted and developed, as is demanded by section 6(2) of the Constitution.

In line with these court decisions and the aims of the *Language in Education Policy*, government's approach appears, as pointed out by Lubbe (2006) to favour the right to free entrance of all learners to education. These stances are criticized by Strydom (2003) as implying that markedly less constitutional pungency is allocated to language and cultural rights, thus, subsuming language and cultural diversity under the dominant theme of equalizing access to education. Supportive of the latter, Heugh (2002) cautions that access to quality education might be a short-term solution for the education authorities, but that it does not offer any long-term solution to the vast majority of learners who do not have equal access to quality education.

In this process, the right of especially Afrikaans speaking learners to education in their language of choice are trumped as pressure are continuously placed on Afrikaans medium schools to change their admission policies from single to parallel or dual medium instruction. This gave rise to repeated litigation between governing bodies of Afrikaans schools and provincial education authorities. Most important in this regard, are the judgments of the High Court in *Laerskool Middelburg v Departementshoof: Mpumalanga Departement van Onderwys* of the Supreme Court of Appeal in *Mikro Primary School Governing Body v Western Cape Minister of Education* and of the Constitutional Court in the case involving the *Head of Department, Mpumalanga Department of Education & Another v Hoërskool Ermelo*.

All of these judgments reveal an appalling animosity on the part of some provincial authorities towards Afrikaans single medium schools in clear defiance of the law applicable to the question and with blatant disrespect for the governing bodies of these schools as well as for the learners involved. In the matter of *Laerskool Middelburg*, Judge Bertelsmann referred to the ideological desire of the Department of Education. He concluded that this department decided to do away with all Afrikaans single-medium schools despite the provisions of section 29(2) of the Constitution. Government aims at giving legitimacy to its conduct not only by relying heavily on the claims of reasonable practicality, but also – and to a greater extent – on the premises that such schools need to be politically transformed.

Against the belief that mother-tongue education needs to be provided in order to secure education of a high quality, the SAHRC (2006), propounds that South Africa neglects its responsibility to give attention to the important bond between language and quality education. Relevant to the latter, Heugh (2002) postulates that the obvious answer to the language predicament is not to pit equal access to education against minority languages, but to improve the quality of education on the whole which can only be achieved if home-language instruction is given its rightful place. Henrard (2003), accordingly, suggests that any educational policy deviating from mother-tongue education simply fails to lead to equal access to education for members of marginalized and disadvantaged communities.

Although most governing bodies that resisted unlawful conduct of education authorities were successful in their litigation, Malan (2010) puts forward that the remedies granted in their favour, nevertheless, proved inadequate to solve the problem. It is, accordingly, evident that litigation alone is often not sufficient and that pursuing alternative strategies will have to be employed in future to guard the interests of cultural and linguistic communities.

In line herewith, Giliomee (Rademeyer, 2005) asserts that government has failed to accept the eminence of mother-tongue education, while Heugh (2002) elucidates that structural support of multilingual education initiatives has, thus far, been minimal.

### ***Education in the language of choice***

Pilon (2003) criticises facade democracies who usually try to repair bad situations by making them straight, as they ignore the fact that duties and rights cannot be prescribed in adverse political, economic, social and cultural conditions: it makes no sense to prescribe that everybody has a right to play a piano when the piano is not available, and when no one knows how to play it. Van Tonder (1999), for example, affirms that the fundamental right of individual learners to choose the language of instruction has to be exercised within the overall framework of the obligation on the education system to promote multilingualism and inclusiveness, thus placing severe limitations on this right.

Education in the language of choice is, furthermore, not an unqualified right (*Belgium Linguistics Case*), as it is limited to the 11 official languages and to a general limitations which refers to the reasonable practicality.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the general limitation found in section 29(2), there are also three more specific internal limitations, which have to be taken into consideration and weighed against the right to education in a learner's official language of choice. Section 29(2)(a) calls for equity to be taken into account in any decisions made regarding the languages of choice. In order for such decisions to be equitable, it is necessary to ensure equality and prevent unfair discrimination when such decisions are made.

Even though there is no doubt in general that mother-tongue education is the ideal (Nel & Müller, 2010; Lemmer, 2002); Desai, 2003; Henrard, 2003; Kamwangamalu, 2003; Martin & Maree cited by Rademeyer, 2005; Pottas, 2005; SAHRC, 2006; Uys *et al.*, 2007; Currie & De Waal, 2005), various aspects such as socio-economic imperatives (Combrinck & Verhoef, 2006), social considerations (Tulasiewicz & Adams, 2005), practicality (Phatlane, 2006), a shortage of adequate materials (PRAESA, 1992), and educators who are not able to speak the language or dialect of the learners resulting in ineffective education taking place (Nel & Müller, 2010; Heugh, 2002; Kgosama, 2006) still hampers the realization of this right in practice.

Accentuating the benefits of mother-tongue education, Smit (2006) maintains that English, or any other second language, has nowhere been shown to be the most successful language of learning for learners who speak other languages at home. Prinsloo (2007) indicates that, where black learners were enrolled at former Model C schools while not being proficient in English or Afrikaans, education proved to be ineffective. Similarly, Kamwangamalu (2003) avows that the demand for English will alienate, rather than emancipate African learners.

The use of inappropriate language(s) as medium of instruction is recognized by the NCSNET/NCESS Report (DoE, 1997) and White Paper 6 (SA, 2001) as a barrier to teaching and learning. In addition, a report by the United Nations shows that the continuous neglecting of Africa's indigenous languages is one of the important reasons why Africa is still struggling with poverty, violence and a lack of self-respect (Rademeyer, 2005). Underscoring the latter, Grove (2006) urges the State to obtain answers to many language questions and to start putting its promises into action.

### ***The users of the nine African languages***

Even though South Africa is recognized as a multi-lingual society, it is essential that the needs of the society are given express reference to. In this regard, Grove (2006) postulates that, although it is common to demand from government to bring about language changes, it is the language users who determine the character and the extent of change. Giliomee (2005), however, cautions that the government, through marginalizing languages, expects that the elite of smaller languages being in decision-making capacities will, by themselves, murder their own languages. Such an expectation is, according Nyamende (2008), immoral as there are many who still value their home-languages.

<sup>4</sup> It stands to reason that the right to education in an official language of choice will only be reasonably practical if there are a sufficient number of learners who are insisting on being educated in this particular official language. *The SA Language Policy* stipulates, on this matter, that it is reasonably practical to provide for education in a particular language if at least 40 learners in Grades 1 to 6 and 35 learners in Grades 7 to 12 request instruction in the particular official language.

Although African communities may wish to hold on to their languages, they opt for education through the medium of English due to the fact that they are under the incorrect impression that it will lead to, *inter alia*, them being successful in their future careers (Van Tonder, 1999), furnish them with social status (Rizvi, 2006) and lift them from poverty (Fourie, 2006a). That this is an incorrect impression is underscored by Becham and Visser (2005) who researched the influences of the different home-languages of employees on South Africa's corporate organizations. These authors (2005) found that individual cultures indeed have a strong influence on how perceptions of organisational structures such as conflict management, interaction during meetings, decision-making and acceptance of authority are formed.

In making choices concerning the medium of instruction on behalf of their children, D'Oliveira (2003) avows, that parents are inclined to choose a particular school first as language is regarded as part of the fixed package offered by schools and since parents seem reluctant to disturb the *status quo*. The SAHRC (2006), therefore, argues that there are no guarantees that, parents, or even educators (Muthivhi, 2008), would opt for language policies that are supportive of cognitive growth. On the same theme, Nyamende (2008) urges society to lay down the foundation towards realizing the importance of home language in the lives of the coming generations.

Due to these myths, Nyamende (2008) shows that many schooled people associate the indigenous languages with illiteracy, ignorance and backwardness, and are often ashamed to identify themselves with these languages. Martin, in addition, avows that many learners undervalue their home languages and regard them as being inferior (Rademeyer, 2005), leading to them lacking interest in being educated in their mother tongue (Muthukrisna, 2000; Phatlane, 2006). In order to alleviate false perceptions regarding English as the best medium of instruction, Webb propounds that the term *mother-tongue* should rather be replaced by the concept *language of academic proficiency* (Rademeyer, 2006).

Tulasiewicz and Adams (2005) submit that the preference of using other languages must be seen as a loss of identity and as a betrayal of linguistic loyalty, resulting in low morale among both educators and learners. Underscoring the latter, Fourie (2006b) proposes that parents and learners, alike, must be empowered to recognise the importance of mother tongue education. This is important as Mgqwashu (cited by Smit, 2006) posits that the absence of the will to strive for the *de facto* equality of African languages, continues to be an insurmountable burden.

### **Empirical survey**

Since it is recognised that language users, themselves, determine the character and the extent of change regarding language in education, this study aimed at establishing whether there are indeed a political will, as well as a personal conviction, among the speakers of the nine indigenous official languages to bring about change in this sphere. Taking into consideration that practical educational experience may influence educators' opinion regarding the practicality of teaching in all 11 official languages, only experienced educators formed part of the population.

The 95 respondents (sample) were randomly selected from a group of educators enrolled for the Advanced Certificate of Education at the North-West University's Vaal Triangle Campus, thus representing different schools in southern Gauteng. In order to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, its design was preceded by a qualitative pilot study. The concise final, user-friendly questionnaire, containing closed-ended questions to which respondents only had to indicate whether they *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree* or *strongly disagree* was completed voluntarily by all respondents after the aims and scope of the study were explained to them. Assurance of confidentiality of data was also provided to them. The questionnaire consisted of 2 sections – section A dealt with biographical data and section B with language matters.

### **Findings**

In reporting and interpreting the findings, attention is first paid to biographical data followed by an exposition on respondents' view on language in South African education. The total number of respondents in the survey was 95, and their age distribution was as follows: 20-30 years (3%); 31-40 years (40%); 41-50 years (38%); 50 years and over (19%). Their number of years in education was: 1-2 years (4%); 3-6 years (14%); 7-12 years (57%) and 13 years and over (25%). These percentages confirm the fact that more experienced educators were targeted for this survey. The respondents' gender representation was 29% males and 71% females which are typical of the education profession being dominated by females.

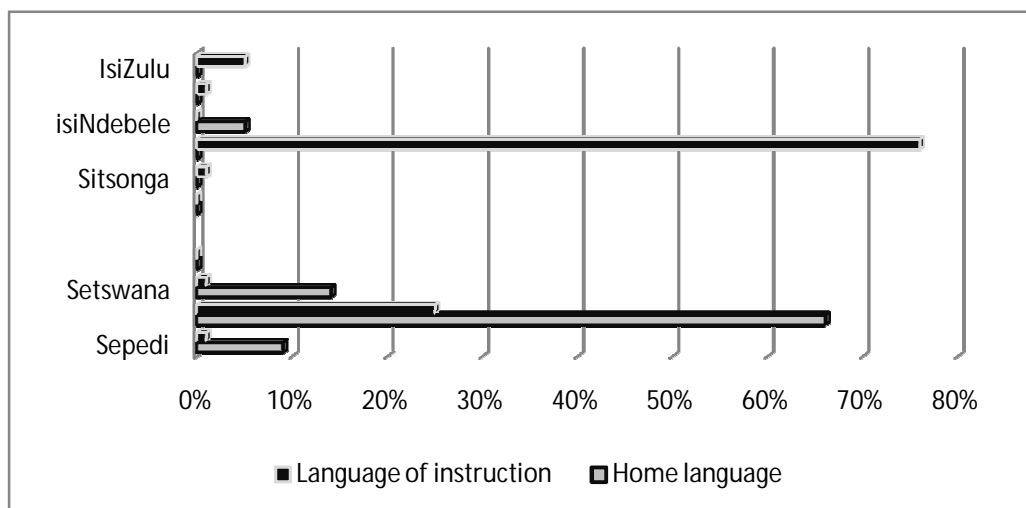
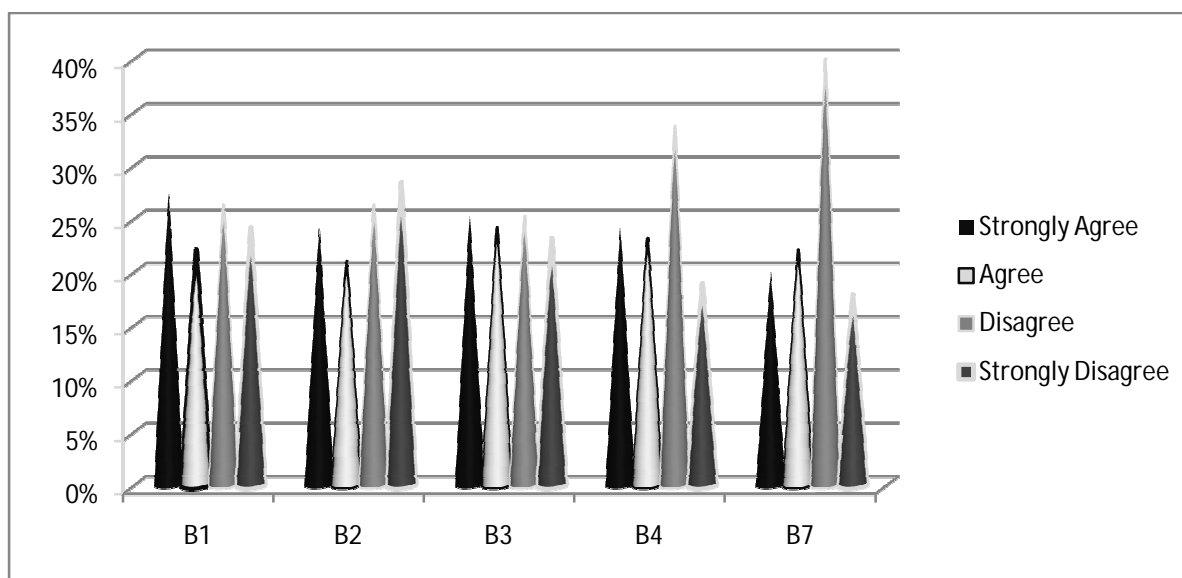
**Figure 1: Home language v language of instruction**

Figure 1 clearly indicates that the majority of the respondents speak Sesotho (66%) as home language while the other languages spoken are Sepedi (9%), Setswana (14%), Tshivenda (6%) and isiNdebele (5%). In clear contrast the greatest majority use English (76%) as medium of instruction, while the only other language used as medium of instruction by a significant percentage of respondents are Sesotho (25%). These findings are supported by Makalela (2005) stating that local indigenous languages are seldom, if ever, used as a language of instruction.

Thus, although the Constitution provides for choice of language of instruction, English is clearly used predominantly. The question arises if this is because English is really the chosen medium of instruction or due to other reasons. The questions asked in section B focused on the perceptions of the respondents regarding different language matters relating to the choice of language of instruction. Five questions (B1-B4 & B7) dealt with the respondents' feelings regarding choice of language of instruction. The questions ranged from the respondents' feelings with regard to being taught in their home language, or to have their children taught in their home language, to their feelings regarding teaching in their home language and what is best for learners.

**Figure 2: Choice of language of instruction**

Questions B1-3 respectively asked of the respondents to indicate if they want to be taught in their home language, if they want their children to be taught in their home language and if they prefer to teach in their home language.



As portrayed in figure 2 respondents are divided in the matter, with only a percentage point between those agreeing and those disagreeing with the statements in questions B1 and B3<sup>5</sup>. There is a slightly bigger difference between the responses when it comes to the question if they want their children to be taught in their home language, with 54.7 % disagreeing, while 45.3% agreed with the statement. Question B4 required of respondent to indicate if all learners should be taught in their home language. In this instance 52.6% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, while 47.4% agreed. The response on question B7<sup>6</sup> mirrors the response to question B4 with 57.9% of the respondents indicated that they disagree with the statement and only 42.9% agreeing to the statement.

As mentioned, the respondents are all practising educators who should be aware of the difficulties of teaching, and being taught, in a language other than your home language. Despite this the majority indicated that they prefer to have their children taught in English and consider it better to be taught in English. This response becomes even more interesting when one considers that in response to the statement that *a language can only survive if it is written and can be read* eighty per cent of the respondents agreed.

The above findings underscore the results obtained by Nel and Muller (2010) from student-teachers, namely that they prefer to use English as communication tool at schools, despite the fact that they felt themselves lacking sufficient knowledge to teach in English. Although respondents indicated their preference for education in English they do not negate the importance of their home language as part of their cultural identity. Table 3 summarises the responses received in this regard.

**Table 1: Feelings regarding home language**

Questions		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
B8	My language is part of my identity.	53.7%	31.6%	7.4%	7.4%
B10	Mother tongue is absorbed unconsciously. <sup>7</sup>	29.5%	37.9%	16.8%	8.4%
B11	A child's acquisition and development of language is primarily a parental responsibility. <sup>8</sup>	43.2%	30.5%	18.9%	5.3%
B19	I am proud of my home language.	74.7%	25.3%	0.0%	0.0%
B25	I have a passion to teach my home language to learners. <sup>9</sup>	36.8%	35.8%	14.7%	8.4%

The data as represented in table 1 clearly shows that the respondents consider their home language as an important part of who, and what, they are. The majority of the respondents also clearly perceive the development of language, *i.e.* home language as the responsibility of the parent and not the school. As the same time the majority of the respondents also has a passion to teach their home language to learners, but still they will choose English as medium of instruction for their own children. By their attributing the responsibility for the development of home language to the parent one begins to understand the choice of English and not home language as language of instruction. The respondents were also asked to give their perceptions regarding the position of learners and their feelings about home language. The responses are portrayed in table 2.

**Table 2: Feelings regarding home language**

Questions		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly
B31	Learners prefer to be taught in their home language.	28.4%	29.5%	29.5%	9.5%
B32	Learners are proud of their home languages.	34.7%	44.2%	14.7%	3.2%
B35	Learners regard their home language as part of their identity and culture.	49.5%	37.9%	7.4%	2.1%

<sup>5</sup> Two percent of the respondents did not respond to this statement.

<sup>6</sup> Question B7 made the statement that education in the home language is better than education in English.

<sup>7</sup> Seven percent of the respondents did not respond to this statement.

<sup>8</sup> Two percent of the respondents did not respond to this statement.

<sup>9</sup> Four percent of the respondents did not respond to this statement.

From table 2 it is clear that although the majority of the respondents perceive learners to prefer to be taught in their home language, the difference between those agreeing and disagreeing are not as great as in the case of the other two questions. Interestingly exactly the same number of respondents agreed and disagreed with the statement. As in their own case the respondents perceived their learners to also regard their language as part of their cultural identity. However when one then studies the data illustrated in figure 3 the perception that English should be the language of instruction in the classroom is once again strongly portrayed.

**Figure 3: The value of instruction in English for the future**

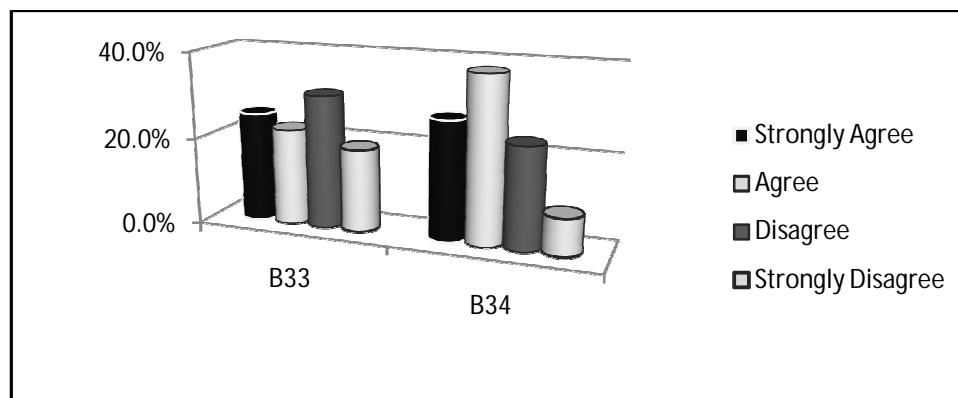


Figure 3 portrays the perceptions the respondents have with regard to the value of English as language of instruction. In question B33 the statement was made that *learners can be better equipped for the future if they are taught in their home language*, while the statement in B34 regarded the use of English as a medium of instruction in the improvement of future of quality of life. The majority of respondents support the view of Van Tonder (1999), Rizvi (2006) and Fourie (2006a), by regarding education in English to better the changes of learners to a bright future.

### Conclusion

Although mother-tongue education has proven to be the best, there are still many factors inhibiting its realization in practice. Because of the latter and the fact that the speakers of the 9 indigenous languages lack the will and urge to press for education through the medium of their choice, and because of the political will to regard equal access to education for all as the dominant priority, government is taking its time to give effect to subsection 29(2). So, although many of indigenous language speakers remain to consider their language as part of their cultural identity and are proud of it, they still opt for English as the ultimate official language to be educated in.

In this regard the words used by Nyamende (2008) can to the forth: Herein lies the irony of a society with flawed personalities, trying to construct a perfect future for themselves and their languages. Within this framework, learners' right to education in the language of their choice are very limited: English or English – what a choice!

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