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Namibian Teachers' Beliefs about Medium of Instruction and Language Education Policy Implementation

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Abstract

The medium of instruction is a crucial issue in language education policy in multilingual post-colonial countries such as Namibia. Teachers occupy a central role in language policy implementation, and their beliefs affect it. It is therefore important to study their beliefs about language education policy and its implementation. This article explores Namibian teachers' beliefs in this regard in two government primary schools by means of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative analysis shows that the teachers believe the current language policy is problematic and its implementation challenging. The majority see multilingual education as a good option, though the findings of the questionnaire and the interview data are somewhat at odds. Introducing multilingual pedagogy education in teacher training and legitimising translanguaging in classrooms would enhance learner-centred approaches in Namibian schools.

Keywords: language education policy; medium of instruction; teacher cognition research; multilingual education; translanguaging



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1. Introduction

The objectives of language education policy (LEP) in Namibian basic education are twofold: first, to preserve and promote the country's national languages and second, to provide all citizens with proficiency in English. These objectives were already present in the first official language policy (LP) documents from the early years of independence (MoEC 1993). They are also stated explicitly in the current curriculum, at the beginning of chapter 5, which is on language (NIED 2016, 29).

One of the biggest educational issues in multilingual regions of Namibia, as elsewhere in Africa, is the choice of the medium of instruction (MoI). According to the curriculum, classes with instruction in a specific mother tongue will be constituted if there is a sufficient number of learners (NIED 2016, 29). What is meant by a "sufficient number" is not specified. The *National Curriculum for Basic Education* (NIED 2016) uses the terms "mother tongue" and "home language" interchangeably to refer to the languages that are integral to one's identity and culture. Without entering the discussion about the relevance of terms such as "mother tongue," "home language" or "L1" in the context of African multilingualisms, for the purposes of this article, the terms "mother tongue" and "home language" are used to refer to languages other than English, which is the only MoI from grade 4 onwards. In addition, I will use the term "L1" not to refer to the order in which the languages were learned, but as a quasi-synonymous term for "mother tongue."

In African multilingual ecologies, not all children can be instructed in their mother tongue/home language, especially in urban multilingual settings (Lüpke and Storch 2013, 273). The essential question is whether another local language is a feasible option (Ouane and Glanz 2010, 13–14). The Namibian LEP opts for a predominant local language in that case (NCBE 2016, 29). Recent research (e.g. Probyn 2021) on multilingual education and translanguaging pedagogy has also suggested that all the languages and repertoires present in a classroom could be leveraged to support learning in post-colonial contexts. The possibilities of translanguaging in education are discussed in section 2.1.

LEP is created, interpreted and appropriated on multiple levels and in varying contexts (Johnson and Johnson 2015, 225). This process usually leaves room for human agency and variation in the implementation of the official policy (Ricento and Hornberger 1996, 417), the "final arbiter" being the teacher (Menken 2008, 5). Teachers' interpretations of LEP documents and of the discourse in society affect the way they implement it. They can either implement it without questioning it or open up new spaces for e.g. multilingual approaches, even within a primarily monolingual LEP (García and Menken 2010). In Namibian society, English has a central role in the discourse of nation building as a unifying language. In addition, it is the language of upward social mobility and wider communication. Despite the twofold objective of the official policy, the prevalent attitudes in the context in which teachers work highlight the importance of proficiency in English.

The purpose of this article is to explore Namibian primary school teachers' beliefs about the MoI and about implementing the national LEP. It is part of a larger study about the Namibian LEP and Namibian teachers' beliefs and practices (Norro, forthcoming a; forthcoming b). The focus is on teachers because of their central role in LEP implementation. Teachers' own experiences as learners and their working context affect their beliefs, which in turn act as a filter through which they interpret new experiences and knowledge (Borg 2006, 2018). Namibian teachers have themselves been educated according to the language policies that have not changed very much from pre-independence until today (Norro, forthcoming a). It can be inferred that they tacitly and unconsciously share the prevalent beliefs in society concerning LEP issues. In order to bring about change in the LEP and its implementation in schools, it is vital to investigate teachers' beliefs about it, as their beliefs influence their perceptions and behaviour (Pajares 1992, 317) and thus also the way they implement educational policies.

The research questions this article endeavours to answer are:

- 1) What beliefs do Namibian teachers have about the medium of instruction?
- 2) What beliefs do Namibian teachers have about LEP and its implementation?

The article's methodological framework is ethnography of language policy, as it offers a means of revealing and analysing local interpretations and implementation of LEP (Hornberger and Johnson 2007, 510; Johnson 2009, 143–144). The qualitative analysis is based on teacher interviews, focus group discussions, and questionnaire data gathered in two government primary schools in the Khomas region at the beginning of the 2020 school year. The Khomas region was chosen because of its highly diverse linguistic ecology. In one of the schools, the MoI is English from the beginning whereas the other offers instruction in three local languages in junior primary (grades 0–3).

Mother-tongue vs. English-medium instruction and multilingual education are first discussed in section 2.1. These are current issues in post-colonial educational settings and therefore discussed first to set the Namibian situation in a wider context. Teacher cognition research and teachers' role as LEP implementers are discussed in section 2.2 in order to position the present article in the theoretical framework of LEP research and of the role teachers and their beliefs have in LEP implementation. The data and the research method are presented in section 3. The findings are presented in section 4, followed by a discussion in section 5.

2. Background

2.1. Medium of Instruction and Multilingual Education in Africa

According to the official LEP in Namibia, there are 14 school languages: Afrikaans, English, German, Ju'hoansi, Khoekhoegowab, Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga, Otjiherero, Rukwangali, Rumanyo, Setswana, Silozi, Thimbukushu, and Namibian Sign

Language. In junior primary (grades 0–3), the MoI is the mother tongue/home language or a predominant local language (NIED 2016, 29). In senior primary (grades 4–7) and in the secondary phase (grades 8–12), the MoI is English. According to the 2011 census, however, only 3.4% of the population speaks English as L1. Thus, English is not the home language for the large majority of learners. The Ministry of Education Management Information System (EMIS) statistics indicate a sharp decrease in enrolments between grades 4 and 7, as well as between grades 8 and 10. According to the report, the figures may point to high dropout rates between these grades (MoEAC 2019, 15). Though it is not possible to establish a causal relationship between the MoI and the high dropout rates based on these figures alone, the transition from mother-tongue instruction to English in grade 4 may be assumed to play a role.

Despite the official policy, mother-tongue instruction is not implemented in all schools. The EMIS statistics from 2019 show that 58 900 of a total 241 274 learners in grades 1–3, or 24.1%, were enrolled in English-medium schools:

The Ministry’s language policy encourages mother-tongue education in Grades 1–3. A different medium of instruction—typically English—can be used if the parents recommend it. Increasing numbers of learners from different mother-tongue settlements (especially in urban areas) and the lack of teachers of different languages are two of the factors contributing to the increasing use of English as the medium of instruction—a deviation from the language policy. The increasing enrolment in private schools which use English as a medium of instruction in junior primary seem also to suggest that considerable numbers of parents prefer English as a medium of instruction. This might also be an indication that parents do not understand the objectives of mother-tongue instruction in those grades. (MoEAC 2019, 25)

There are certainly reasons other than preferring English-medium instruction why parents enrol their children in private schools, such as crowded classes or lack of material resources in government schools, or subjects that are offered in private schools only. Yet the high enrolment in English-medium instruction concerns government schools as well. Only 6.4% of all learners nationwide and 19.0% in Khomas region are enrolled in private schools (MoEAC 2019, 19). However, 24.1% of all learners nationwide in grades 1–3 are enrolled in English-medium instruction, as mentioned above. According to the *Basic Education Bill* (Namibia 2018, 20), learners (or their parents, in practice) should have the right to choose the language of instruction “where this is reasonably practicable.” It can be inferred that the high enrolment rate in English-medium instruction is largely due to parents’ high demand for it.

The high number of learners in English-medium instruction is a common phenomenon in post-colonial societies. Parents remain committed to the language that provides their children with upward social mobility (Lin and Martin 2005, 2–3; Qorro 2009, 59) and believe that proficiency is best achieved in English-medium classrooms with maximum time-on-task (Probyn 2021, 160). As Tollefson and Tsui (2018, 16) reiterate, official language policies often serve the interests of powerful groups, and even groups with no

opportunity to use English for employment have been persuaded to believe that English is the only way to gain upward social mobility.

There is convincing evidence of the advantages of learning in the mother tongue in post-colonial contexts. First, initial literacy is acquired more easily (Benson 2004, 3) and mastery of concepts is easier and is later transferred to L2 (Brock-Utne and Alidou 2006, 104; Prophet and Dow 1994). Furthermore, students participate more actively in L1 (Afitska et al. 2013, 158; Chekaraou 2004, 323) and they are able to defend their arguments and perform critical thinking (Brock-Utne and Alidou 2006, 104). Teachers use several pedagogical strategies and explain concepts more clearly in their L1, and use more questions and prompts and a wider range of assessment strategies. They use more group and pair work, resulting in less teacher talk time (Afitska et al. 2013, 158) and a more learner-centred approach.

Research evidence of the negative effects of learning in a foreign language in African classrooms is abundant as well. The acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills is delayed (Uwezo 2014, 2), and the students' low proficiency level in the MoI is a hindrance to effective learning (Probyn 2005; Williams and Cooke 2002, 317), especially at the transition from the L1 to L2 medium (Macdonald 1990). It often entails teacher-centred activities, choral responses, repetition, and reading aloud (Bunyi 2005, 134–139), constant unplanned code switching (Bunyi 2005, 141; Clegg and Afitska 2011, 63–64), and rote learning (Arthur 1994, 70). The research evidence presented above suggests learning in a foreign language is ineffective and does not support learner-centred pedagogies or higher order thinking skills.

As regards learners' language proficiency, there is a difference between *basic interpersonal communication skills* (BICS) and *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP). These two notions were originally introduced in Cummins (1979). The acquisition of the former typically takes two years, whereas it usually takes from five to up to seven years to acquire the latter (Cummins 1981). The BICS/CALP distinction has been criticised, but it is supported by empirical evidence (Cummins 2013). In early-exit programs, children are exposed to the foreign language for too short a period before it becomes the MoI in order to acquire sufficient conceptual language skills. The confusion between BICS/CALP also affects the way teachers evaluate the English proficiency of their pupils (Cummins 2013, 11). They may think pupils do not have difficulties with English if they express themselves fluently in everyday situations. This does not, however, mean that they understand the contents of the lessons delivered in more conceptual language.

Based on the evidence discussed above, it would seem natural to extend L1 instruction to upper primary, a choice that is, however, rarely made in postcolonial settings, for political reasons (Tollefson and Tsui 2018). For example, in March 2014, the then Minister of Education in Namibia, David Namwandi, introduced a draft of a new LP for schools. It would have extended mother-tongue instruction up to grade 5 (Haidula

2014). Legislative elections took place the same year and the proposal was never adopted. Extending mother-tongue instruction would be pedagogically recommendable (Tollefson and Tsui 2018, 3), but due to the lack of political will to change the LEP, it seems necessary to introduce other pedagogically feasible solutions such as flexible multilingual education, including translanguaging pedagogies.

If presented with an either-or option—that is, instruction in the home language or in English—parents probably choose English for the reasons discussed above. The preference of English-medium instruction is reinforced not only by globalisation, but also by a misconception that children learn a language better the earlier they are exposed to it (Phillipson 1992, 199–209; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, 575–576). It is true that in the so-called additive models, which maintain L1 alongside L2 instruction, early exposure to L2 can be beneficial. In Namibia, the transition from L1 instruction to English takes place after grade 3. That is why it can be characterised as a subtractive, early-exit transitional model (Wolfaardt 2005, 2358). In subtractive models, the early exposure has negative effects for learning both L1 and L2 (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, 576). Early exit explains why teachers struggle with the transition from mother-tongue to English-medium instruction. Teachers’ own proficiency limitations in the medium of instruction, inappropriate teaching methods, and assessment that takes place only in the foreign MoI all add to the ineffectiveness of these models (Benson 2019, 32). Nevertheless, studies have shown that when they are given truly multilingual options, parents opt for them (Benson 2004, 8–9; Heugh 2002, 15–23).

Flexible multilingual education leverages all students’ languages in instruction; translanguaging is a normal practice, and it is used as a pedagogic resource (Erling, Adinolfi and Hultgren 2017, 23). Allowing the use of learners’ complete linguistic repertoires and translanguaging practices in class could promote multilingualism and support the construction of learners’ multilingual identities, meaning that “one explicitly identifies as multilingual precisely because of an awareness of the linguistic repertoire one has” (Fisher et al. 2020, 449) within their linguistically diverse ecology.

The notion of translanguaging has been gaining ground both in research and classroom practices during recent years. It has made an ideological shift from a monoglossic view of bilingualism as two separate languages to a heteroglossic orientation and a positive view of multilingualism (Probyn 2021, 162–163). Makalela (2016) has theorised the concept from an African perspective, introducing the term “ubuntu translanguaging,” which refers to fluid multilingual language practices, based on the idea of interdependence of people and languages. Translanguaging pedagogy offers a means of adopting a multilingual approach even within a monolingual policy. It strengthens learners’ multilingual identities while allowing them to learn the dominant language they need for social mobility (Shank Lauwo 2018, 144). Instead of ad hoc code switching, different languages are used in a systematic, pedagogically strategic way (García and Wei 2013). Research studies on the possibilities of translanguaging in education in the post-colonial context of South Africa have shown its benefits for

learning (Charamba 2020; Charamba and Zano 2019; Guzula, McKinney and Tyler 2016; Makalela 2015; McKinney and Tyler 2018; Probyn 2015). As has been argued, however, the transformative power of translanguaging has its limits and may become a dominating rather than a liberating force (Jaspers 2018). It is important to consider the context at all levels—language ideologies, attitudes, beliefs, and practices as well as the hierarchies between languages, learners’ backgrounds, and the aims of the programmes, and plan translanguaging pedagogies accordingly (Paulsrud, Tian and Toth 2021, xxiv). Unfortunately, specialist multilingual pedagogy is relatively absent from African teacher education (Clegg and Afitska 2011). Introducing it into teacher training programmes, as suggested, for instance, by Probyn (2021, 171) would help shift classroom practices toward a more flexible multilingual approach.

2.2. Teachers as Language Education Policy Implementers

Teachers are powerful LEP implementers. Their interpretations of LEP documents and of LEP discourse in society affect the way they implement it. They can either implement LEP without question or create new implementational spaces (Cincotta-Segi 2011; García and Menken 2010; Ricento and Hornberger 1996, 417). Thus, teachers may create their own policies, depending on their beliefs (Skilton-Sylvester 2002, 17). They can work towards more equitable educational policies and practices that support learner agency (Denos et al. 2009) and can open up spaces for multilingual approaches, even within a primarily monolingual LP (Hélot 2010).

Beliefs are usually distinguished from knowledge in teacher cognition research. Bruzzano (2018) gives a detailed discussion of this distinction. A common conception is that teachers’ knowledge refers to factual propositions (Meijer, Verloop, and Beijaard 2001, 446) and consists of practical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Bruzzano 2018, 64). Beliefs influence teachers’ behaviour, perceptions and decision making more than knowledge (Pajares 1992, 325–326), and they “are seen roughly as referring to personal values, attitudes, and ideologies” (Meijer, Verloop and Beijaard, 2001, 446). Borg (2011, 370–371) defines beliefs as “propositions individuals consider to be true and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change.” The view on beliefs adopted in this article is that they refer to a teacher’s personal, socially constructed values, attitudes, and ideologies that affect their perceptions, interpretations, and behaviour and are hard but not impossible to change.

Teachers’ experiences as students and their professional education and experience, as well as the official LP and the attitudes and beliefs in the society all affect their beliefs (Alisaari et al. 2019, 49). The relationship between beliefs and practices is interactive; both influence one another (Richardson 1996, 104), and the fact that the teaching context may alter both can lead to inconsistencies between stated beliefs and observed practices (Borg 2006, 275–276).

Research on teachers' beliefs about multilingualism and multilingual pedagogical approaches has mainly focused on language teachers (De Angelis 2011; Haukås 2016; Jakisch 2014; Otwinowska 2014). The controversial results of these studies show that though language teachers have a higher awareness of multilingualism than other teachers, they are hesitant to exploit learners' multilingualism unless they are themselves familiar with the learners' home languages (Haukås 2016, 3). According to the findings of two recent studies on mainstream teachers, even though they have positive beliefs about multilingualism, they support or leverage it to a minimal extent in their classrooms (Alisaari et al. 2019; Tarnanen and Palviainen 2018).

Teachers' beliefs have been chosen as the subject matter of this study because of their evaluative and attitudinal nature and because they guide teachers' behaviour and decision making, and hence their LEP implementation. In addition, they are hard to change; they must be made explicit and challenged in order to bring about change. Research shows that teacher-training programmes that ignore the influence of previous experiences on teachers' beliefs and practices are less effective in changing them than those programmes that make teachers' beliefs explicit and give teachers the opportunity to reconsider them (Borg 2006, 160–163). Based on their intervention study conducted in the context of an in-service professional course, Gorter and Arocena (2020, 9) report a change in teachers' beliefs toward seeing multilingualism and translanguaging as assets for learning. This has implications for teacher training as a means of promoting multilingual education.

3. Data Collection and Research Method

3.1. Participants and Data Collection

Permission to conduct research was obtained from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture of Namibia; the Khomas Regional Council Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture; and the Namibian National Commission on Research, Science and Technology, together with a preliminary ethical review by the ethical committee of the researcher's affiliated university.

The ethnographic instruments used in the collection of the data were a questionnaire and semi-structured individual and focus group discussions. Data collection took place in the beginning of the 2020 school year. Sampling was done based on the availability and voluntary participation of schools and teachers. The samples are limited as data collection was interrupted by the Covid-19 outbreak. The principals of the schools and the participating teachers gave their documented voluntary consent for the interviews and the questionnaire. The information letters addressed to the participants contained information on the focus of the research, the preservation of the participants' anonymity, and the secure storage of the research data.

The questionnaire contained questions about the respondents' linguistic and professional background (Part I), their opinions and practices (Part II), and their needs for in-service training (Part III; see appendix). The question about one's own language-of-instruction preference (Part I, question 10) was exclusive so that respondents were asked to choose either English or home language. An open-ended question about the reasons for preferring one MoI or another followed question 10. The questions in Part II, question 1 (a–i) of the questionnaire, "Language policy and teaching practices"—the scope of this article—were on a five-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire was distributed to the entire staff of two Namibian government primary schools in the Khomas region (83 teachers altogether), resulting in 37 responses (response rate 44.6%). In one school, the MoI is English in all grades, whereas in the other, junior primary instruction is given in three indigenous languages in all subjects. They are situated in low- to middle-income areas inhabited by Black African populations. Ten of the respondents ($n = 37$) were junior primary teachers (grades 0–3) and 27 were senior primary teachers (grades 4–7), representing practically all subjects offered by the school. Fifteen teachers had 10 years or less teaching experience and fifteen more than 10 years. Seven respondents did not state their years in service.

The interviews were conducted in the same two schools. The number of interviews and participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Interview participants

	Individual	Focus group
Number of interviews	4	2
Participants school 1	1	3
Participants school 2	3	4
Total of participants	4	7

Four teachers were interviewed individually, one in the first school and three in the second. One focus group discussion was conducted in each school, involving three participants in the first one, and four in the second. All except one (who taught grades 0–3) of the interviewees and focus group participants taught grades 4–7, where one teacher usually teaches two subjects. The subjects represented were ESL, religious and moral education, social studies, home language, natural science and health education, mathematics, Afrikaans, and arts. The average for years in service was 12. The median was 10, which means that the interviewees represented various levels of experience as teachers (from 4 to 30 years in service).

The interviews were semi-structured. The findings are illustrated using excerpts from the interviews. The individual interviewees are referred to by the running number of the interview, with "T" meaning teacher and "I" interviewer. The focus group participants were given a code reference with the number of the focus group discussion (FGD) and the number of the participant in the order of their interventions in the discussion (P1,

P2, etc.). The excerpts are rendered in an orthographic and simplified form. In all the excerpts, the most relevant passage is presented in bold. Both individual and focus group interviews are analysed as one dataset and referred to as “interviews” in the text.

3.2. Method

Both a questionnaire and less formal interviews were used in this research study. As regards teacher’s beliefs, it has been observed that formal self-reporting instruments such as questionnaires tend to elicit beliefs about “what should be the case” whereas less structured interviews may better elicit beliefs about instruction “as it actually unfolds” (Borg 2006, 141).

First, a descriptive analysis of the questionnaire data was made. The frequencies were calculated in absolute figures and percentages. The answers that agree with the statements (“I strongly agree” or “I agree”) and those that disagree (“I strongly disagree” or “I disagree”) were combined respectively to simplify and better illustrate the findings. Comparisons between variables such as work experience, qualification to teach in mother tongue, and the grades taught were made as well, and the probabilities were tested by using Fisher’s exact test. When the responses of two questions were compared with one another, Bowker’s test was used to calculate the symmetry of disagreement between them.

The interviews were transcribed manually and then coded using NVivo. The interview data were subjected to qualitative thematic analysis (Braun and Clark 2006). After the initial open coding, themes linked to teachers’ perceptions about LEP were identified and analysed (cf. Taylor, Bogdan and De Vault 2016, 172; Warren and Karner 2005, 191–193) to construct the meaning teachers give to them and to reveal their underlying beliefs. The findings in both datasets (the questionnaire and interviews) were then triangulated to allow interpretation and validation of the data (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007, 135), to reveal similarities and inconsistencies within the two datasets (Huberman and Miles 1994, 438), and to compare them with the research literature.

The relatively small sample size is one of the study’s limitations. The findings should be interpreted with caution and they do not allow for generalisations. Eliciting teachers’ beliefs through decontextualised statements has its shortcomings, as do short interviews (Borg 2018, 88–89). The intention of this study was to compensate for this by combining both instruments.

4. Findings

4.1. Teachers’ Beliefs about the Medium of Instruction

The findings are presented in the order of the research questions. The findings in the questionnaire are presented first, followed by those of the interviews.

4.1.1. Findings in the Questionnaire

In the questionnaire, there were three statements directly connected to the MoI (Part II, question 1 b–d). The observations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Questionnaire responses about the MoI

Statement	Number of responses	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
<i>1.b English should be the medium of instruction from grade 1.</i>	$n = 35$	16 (46%)	14 (40%)	5 (14%)
<i>1.c Instruction in the home language should be extended beyond grade 3.</i>	$n = 36$	17 (47%)	13 (36%)	6 (17%)
<i>1.d Both English and the home language should be used as medium of instruction throughout the Primary cycle (Grades 1-6).</i>	$n = 37$	21 (57%)	12 (32%)	4 (11%)

Almost as many respondents agree and disagree with the first two statements (1.b and 1.c). As regards the third statement (1.d), more than half of the respondents see multilingual education as a good option. Some differences were found between less and more experienced teachers. Twelve ($n = 15$) of the teachers with 10 years or less teaching experience agreed with the statement about the multilingual option (1.d) and three disagreed. Seven ($n = 15$) of the teachers with more than 10 years of experience agreed with statement 1.d while as many disagreed. There is a stronger tendency amongst the less experienced teachers to be in favour of multilingual education, but the difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.13$).

When asked about which language they prefer to teach in, 70% of the teachers (25, $n = 37$) answered that they prefer teaching in English. The main reasons they gave were that it is the official language and the MoI and that it is the language of communication between different language groups. Strikingly many did so because they themselves had been taught in English. This shows how teachers' experiences as learners and the acculturation process they have undergone affect their beliefs. The 30% (11, $n = 37$) of the respondents who preferred teaching in the home language commented that it is easier to explain concepts and give examples, speak more easily and eloquently, and help the learners understand better. These comments corroborate the findings of Afitska et al. (2013, 158), according to which teachers explain concepts more clearly in their L1. For these teachers, teaching in L1 is a pragmatically and pedagogically preferred option, though it is not promoted by the LEP after junior primary. Two respondents chose neither English nor home language, and one respondent chose both.

Half of the junior primary teachers (5, $n = 10$) preferred the home language as MoI compared to 6 ($n = 27$) of the senior primary teachers ($p = 0.13$). There was also a difference between those who were qualified to teach in their L1 and those who were

not. None of those who were not qualified ($n = 16$) preferred the home language as the MoI whereas 11 of the qualified respondents ($n = 20$) preferred it ($p = 0.0006$). Both of these differences are strongly biased. It is understandable that teachers who teach classes where home languages are used as MoI should feel more comfortable with them. Moreover, material is available in home languages in junior primary. Having been trained for L1 instruction naturally increases teachers' readiness for this as well. Teachers' professional education, experience and practices, as well as the official LP and the attitudes and the beliefs in society all affect their beliefs (Alisaari et al. 2019, 49), as these findings seem to corroborate.

Beliefs about the importance of mother-tongue instruction for learning or about it being the learners' linguistic right do not occur in the beliefs teachers have about the MoI (see Table 3.)

Table 3: Beliefs about MoI and learning

Statement	Number of responses	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
<i>1.a Pupils learn best when they are taught in their home language.</i>	$n = 36$	29 (81%)	5 (14%)	2 (6%)
<i>1.c Instruction in the home language should be extended beyond grade 3.</i>	$n = 36$	17 (47%)	13 (36%)	6 (17%)
<i>1.e The learning outcomes do not depend on the language of instruction. Other factors are more decisive.</i>	$n = 34$	12 (35%)	9 (29%)	13 (38%)
<i>1.f My pupils have difficulties in understanding when they are taught in English.</i>	$n = 36$	11 (30%)	20 (55%)	5 (14%)
<i>1.g The existence of many languages in Namibia is a problem in education.</i>	$n = 35$	15 (43%)	17 (49%)	3 (9%)
<i>1.h Every child has the right to be educated in his/her own language.</i>	$n = 36$	24 (67%)	7 (19%)	5 (14%)
<i>1.i The many languages of Namibia are a resource in education.</i>	$n = 35$	14 (40%)	9 (26%)	12 (34%)

The majority (81%, $n = 36$) of the questionnaire respondents agreed with the statement *Pupils learn best when they are taught in their home language* while only five disagreed. Moreover, well over half of the respondents (67%, $n = 36$) agreed with the statement *Every child has the right to be educated in his/her own language*. However, less than half of the respondents (47%, $n = 36$) agreed with the statement *Instruction in the home language should be extended beyond grade 3*, whereas almost as many disagreed. According to Bowker's test (*don't know* answers excluded), the symmetry of disagreement was significant ($p = 0.005$) between questions 1.a and 1.c but not between questions 1.h and 1.c. ($p = 0.06$). Though the teachers in this sample tend to be language-as-right oriented (cf. Ruiz 1984), less than half of them support the extension of mother-

tongue instruction and only 40% ($n = 35$) see multilingualism as a resource in education whereas 34% are undecided.

Only 11 respondents (30%, $n = 36$) agreed with the statement *My pupils have difficulties in understanding when they are taught in English* whereas 20 (55%, $n = 36$) disagreed. Twelve (35%, $n = 34$) respondents agreed with statement 1.e (*The learning outcomes do not depend on the language of instruction. Other factors are more decisive*) and 9 (29%, $n = 34$) disagreed. Relatively many—13—respondents did not know what to think of the statement (38%, $n = 34$). This shows that there are many other issues in addition to the MoI (lack of parental involvement and material resources, etc.) that were mentioned in the interviews as well, but the MoI is definitely one of them.

4.1.2. Findings in the Interviews

The themes that emerged in the interviews concerning the MoI were of two kinds. In 10 of the comments, teachers expressed their beliefs about the current system being difficult for learners. In four comments, beliefs about English as MoI being non-problematic were expressed. The number of comments related to the MoI in the interviews are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Comments related to the MoI

Difficult for learners		English not a problem
Learning easier in L1	1	
Transition difficult	3	
Reading and writing problems	3	
Understanding and expressing	3	
Total	10	4

As can be seen in Table 4, only one of the interviewed teachers stated explicitly that, in her opinion, children learn better in their mother tongue, as in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1 **I feel like kids learn better in their mother tongue**, the moment they follow that pattern of learning in their mother tongue they already start with putting sounds in their mother tongue. They can already start with little bit of ... words together. (Int. 1)

She states that literacy learning is facilitated by using the mother tongue as the learner can use guessing strategies and “putting sounds/words together” to decipher the text (cf. Benson 2004, 3).

Three of the interviewed teachers reported that most learners experience difficulties when the MoI changes in the fourth grade (Excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2 In most cases you find that **most grade four learners ... they find it very difficult to switch the language ...** (Int. 4)

In these remarks, teachers mention explicitly that when the MoI switches from the home language to English, learners experience problems in the transition. One remark two teachers in the second school made was about the fourth graders' English literacy learning when the MoI in junior primary has been the home language (Excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3 T: Some learners have difficulties in writing and reading, there is a problem. ... They can speak the language very well
I: Yes
T: **The problem is with reading and writing.** (Int. 3)

In Excerpt 3, reading and writing are seen as causing problems, though the learners' oral proficiency is perceived to be good. The same teacher commented on the proficiency in English and the participation of the learners in class (Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4 But **I cannot say they're ... the same like they're participating in their mother tongue** (Int. 3)

Though children seem to be fluent in English, as can be seen in Excerpt 3, they still express themselves better in the home language (see Excerpt 4 above). In both schools, there were also teachers who thought learners acquired English quickly and did not have difficulties because of the English medium (see Table 4).

4.2. Teachers' Beliefs about Language Policy Implementation

Some issues concerning the implementation of LEP arose in the interviews that were not addressed in the questionnaire. They are typical challenges in a multilingual environment such as the choice of the MoI and the lack of human and material resources. Some of the teachers interviewed also made suggestions for LEP. The distribution of the comments is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Comments related to the implementation of LEP

Challenges		Suggestions	
Multilingual environment	3	Parents could choose	3
Learners that have to take the predominant language	3	Grades 0–3 L1	1
Lack of resources	7	English from the beginning	4

As can be observed in Table 5, three teachers stated their belief that implementing mother-tongue instruction is challenging in a multicultural environment.

Excerpt 5 It's **multicultural, so English is actually the only effective language we can cater for**, for example I have almost eight different tribes of kids in my class. (FGD 1, P2)

These teachers thought that the sheer number of different languages made it impossible to implement mother-tongue instruction in multilingual regions. The choice of the language(s) of instruction was another issue that emerged in the interviews (Excerpt 6).

Excerpt 6 **We can't just choose one language** that needs to be taught here, then the other (students) will also need to go, to be taught that language. (FGD 1, P1)

As can be seen, these teachers thought the learners who had to be instructed in the predominant local language that was not their home language would be discriminated against.

Two other issues concerning the implementation of policy came up in two interviews: the shortage of teachers qualified to teach in the mother tongue and of teaching materials in the indigenous languages (Excerpt 7).

Excerpt 7 Personally, I think ... we still maybe need many years to ... get there. Because **first of all, we don't even have the teachers**. The capacity is not there, the it's ... just, **teaching materials are not there**. (FGD 1, P3)

Being unqualified to teach indigenous languages was a real concern for some of the teachers, as they feared losing their employment if mother-tongue instruction were implemented in their school. As regards the material, it is available for junior primary, but not for senior primary.

In the interviews, the teachers made some suggestions for LEP. Four teachers stated that English should be the MoI from the beginning.

Excerpt 8 **I think we can start with English from the beginning from grade zero to grade seven**, we can already start with English, then the learners are acquainted with English already when they're in grade four. (FGD 2, P3)

The beliefs expressed by these four teachers are clearly English-oriented and reflect the presumption about the benefits of early exposure discussed in section 2.1. Three of the teachers also suggested that the children or their parents could choose the MoI. According to the official policy, they do in fact have this right: "every learner has the right to instructions in the language of his or her choice where this is reasonably practicable" (*Basic Education Bill*, Namibia 2018, 15. (1), p. 20). When asked which language the parents would probably choose, the answer was English. This reflects a common stance in Africa according to which neither schooling nor literacy in the indigenous languages is seen as something worth acquiring: "for many teachers and parents across the continent, teaching literacy is assumed to mean teaching in English" (Bloch, Guzula and Nkence 2010, 97). Not only the official LEP, but also the attitudes and beliefs in society, affect teachers' beliefs and practices (Alisaari et al. 2019, 49).

To summarise, the findings show that even though the majority of the questionnaire respondents (81%) believe that pupils learn best when they are taught in their own

language, and 67% believe mother-tongue instruction is a linguistic right, less than half of the respondents (47%) think that mother-tongue instruction should be extended beyond grade 3. Most of the teachers themselves prefer teaching in English, which might be one of the reasons why they do not wish mother-tongue instruction to be extended to senior primary. The interviews raised the issues that the early transition from mother-tongue instruction to English medium causes the learners problems (cf. Benson 2019, 32), together with the reading and writing problems they have in spite of their relatively good oral proficiency in English. Moreover, implementing mother-tongue instruction in a multilingual environment is challenging, and teachers believe that learners who have to take the predominant language instead of their own language are discriminated against; the lack of both human and material resources is also a hindrance to effective implementation of mother-tongue instruction.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis reveals the beliefs behind the teachers' stated opinions and perceptions. It shows that many teachers in this sample believe the current LEP, as regards the MoI (research question 1), is problematic, especially at the transition from mother-tongue instruction to English medium instruction (cf. Macdonald 1990; Benson 2019, 32). According to them, learners have problems with reading and writing (cf. Uwezo 2014, 2) and they express themselves less fluently in English (cf. Afitska et al. 2013, 158). On the other hand, many of them believe that English does not cause the learners problems (55%, $n = 36$) because they become used to it quickly. Yet there might be some misinterpretation there, due to the difference between oral fluency and academic language proficiency (Cummins 1979; 1981). The teachers interviewed may only think their students do not have difficulties with English because they express themselves fluently in non-academic contexts.

Though the majority (81%) of the questionnaire respondents thought that pupils learn best in their mother tongue and over half of them (67%) believed that receiving instruction in mother tongue is a linguistic right, they were reluctant to extend mother-tongue instruction beyond grade 3. It is possible that the English-oriented teaching context affects teachers' beliefs in this respect (cf. Borg 2006, 275–276). Though teachers acknowledge the advantages of mother-tongue instruction, the prevalent beliefs and attitudes in society and practical challenges override pedagogical concerns. It is also possible that teachers think changing the official policy is simply something over which they have no influence. Extension of mother-tongue instruction or multilingual education was not even mentioned in the interviews. However, over half of the questionnaire respondents considered multilingual education a good option. The questionnaire and interview data are somewhat at odds with each other in this respect. This correlates with previous research, which has shown the difference between beliefs elicited through formal vs. less structured instruments (Borg 2006, 141; see section 3.2). The questionnaire responses are more in line with the official LEP, but in the interviews

many respondents share common beliefs about the importance of English for social mobility and the presumed advantages of early exposure to English as MoI.

Less experienced teachers were slightly more favourable toward multilingual education. This difference might be interpreted as a sign of the acceptance of multilingual education gaining ground when new cohorts of teachers enter the profession. However, one should bear in mind the limited size of the sample, which does not allow for generalisation. It is worth investigation in future research, however. It is noteworthy that almost a third of the teachers preferred teaching in English because they had themselves been taught in it. It shows the importance of teachers' previous experiences, especially those they had as students, for their beliefs and teaching practices, as has been reported in previous research (Borg 2006, 276).

Teachers believe the implementation of LEP (research question 2) to be challenging, especially in a multilingual environment such as their own region (Khomas), because of the lack of resources. These comments are in line with those of teachers participating in the programme promoting Xhosa mother-tongue instruction in Cape Town reported on by Bloch, Guzula and Nkence (2010, 94–95). The EMIS report (MoEAC 2019) mentions similar challenges.

As regards the shortage of material, there are textbooks and other materials available for junior primary (NIED 2019). Most junior primary teachers use their own material most of the time, as one of the respondents pointed out. Most of the material found on the internet is in English, which means that ready-made material may be hard to find in indigenous languages. Many of the questionnaire respondents expressed their desire to receive in-service training in material production. Training on multilingual material production especially may well prove to be very useful in promoting multilingual education in Namibia.

Introducing multilingual pedagogies requires teacher training that makes teachers' existing beliefs about multilingual education explicit (Borg 2006, 160–163) and equips them with adequate skills and strategies to cope with multilingual education (Clegg and Afitska 2011, 73). Multilingual pedagogy should be recognised and promoted by educational authorities by including it in initial teacher training and providing it as in-service training (Clegg and Afitska 2013, 74). It is possible to influence teachers' beliefs (Gorter and Arocena 2020, 9) and the range of their pedagogical strategies in L2, even through a short intervention (Afitska et al. 2013, 160).

Language policy and planning is never done by educational authorities or politicians alone. There are several layers and several agents, including teachers, that affect the process. It is difficult to change an established LEP, as it would meet with opposition for the reasons discussed above. Therefore, extending mother-tongue instruction to senior primary might not be possible in the near future. Instead, introducing and legitimising multilingual pedagogies such as translanguaging would allow teachers to

create multilingual spaces even within the current LEP. All home languages in a classroom could then be leveraged, even if the official MoI were English, with the teacher not being obliged to be proficient in all of them. According to previous research discussed in section 2.1., parents also tend to accept multilingual policies more easily that guarantee proficiency in the official language. Training teachers in multilingual pedagogy and multilingual material production would offer a cost-effective way forward.

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Appendix

Questionnaire (Abbreviated)

I Background information

Tick the right alternative.

- | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1. | Age: | 19–24 yrs | 25–30 yrs | 31–40 yrs |
| | | 41–50 yrs | 51–55 yrs | over 55 yrs |
| 2. | Years in service: | under 3 yrs | 3–5 yrs | 6–10 yrs |
| | | 11–15 yrs | 16–20 yrs | over 20 yrs |
| 3. | Academic and professional qualifications: | | | |
| | | less than Grade 12 | | |
| | | Grade 12 or 1–2 years' tertiary | | |
| | | more than 2 years' tertiary | | |
| | Do you have formal teacher training? | yes | no | |

4. School region:
 5. What grade(s) do you teach this academic year?
 6. What grade(s) have you taught during the last three years?
 7. If you are a subject teacher, what subject(s) do you teach?
 8. What language(s) do you most identify with yourself? (What would you call your mother tongue/first language?)
- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|------------|
| Khoekhoegowab | Ju'/hoansi | Oshiwambo |
| Otjiherero | Afrikaans | Silozi |
| Setswana | Thimbukushu | Rumanyo |
| English | German | Rukwangali |
| Portuguese | Other: | |
- Comments (if any):
 Are you qualified to teach in your mother tongue? yes no
9. In which language do you find it most comfortable to teach?
 English home language
 Why?
 What are the main home languages of your pupils? (You can tick several boxes.)
- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|------------|
| Khoekhoegowab | Ju'/hoansi | Oshiwambo |
| Otjiherero | Afrikaans | Silozi |
| Setswana | Thimbukushu | Rumanyo |
| English | German | Rukwangali |
| Portuguese | Other: | |
- Comments (if any):
 What other languages do your pupils speak at home? (You can tick several boxes.)
- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|------------|
| Khoekhoegowab | Ju'/hoansi | Oshiwambo |
| Otjiherero | Afrikaans | Silozi |
| Setswana | Thimbukushu | Rumanyo |
| English | German | Rukwangali |
| Portuguese | Other: | |
- With whom do they speak these languages?

II Language policy and teaching practices

1. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Choose the amount of agreement that best corresponds your opinion.
- 1= I strongly disagree
 2= I disagree
 3 = I don't know
 4 = I agree
 5 = I strongly agree
- a) Pupils learn best when they are taught in their home language. 1 2 3 4 5
 b) English should be the medium of instruction from grade 1. 1 2 3 4 5
 c) Instruction in the home language should be extended beyond grade 3. 1 2 3 4 5
 d) Both English and the home languages should be used as medium of instruction throughout the Primary cycle (Grades 1–6) 1 2 3 4 5
 e) The learning outcomes do not depend on the language of instruction. Other factors are more decisive. 1 2 3 4 5
 f) My pupils have difficulties in understanding when they are taught in English. 1 2 3 4 5
 g) The existence of many languages in Namibia is a problem in education. 1 2 3 4 5

- h) Every child has the right to be educated in his/her own language. 1 2 3 4 5
 i) The many different languages of Namibia are a resource in education. 1 2 3 4 5

2. In what ways do you facilitate learning in class? Circle *often/sometimes/never* according to your teaching practices. You can comment on your answers in the end.

- a) I switch the language if I notice that my pupils do not understand. *often/sometimes/never*
 b) I introduce a new topic in the home language. *often/sometimes/never*
 c) I prepare (myself or with the pupils) vocabularies to help them understand a new text in English. *often/sometime never*
 d) I explain the core terms and concepts in the pupils' home language. *often/sometimes/never*
 e) I let the pupils use their home languages when doing group work. *often/sometimes/never*
 f) I ask other pupils to translate to their peers. *often/sometimes/never*
 g) I use some words, e.g. greetings, in the pupils' home languages in class to make them feel comfortable. *often/sometimes/never*
 h) I make the pupils' home languages visible in class (e.g. posters/word walls/drawings). *often/sometimes/never*
 i) I use charts, pictures, drawings and other visual support. *often/sometimes/never*
 j) I edit English texts by removing extraneous information and/or by replacing difficult words by easier ones. *often/sometimes/never*
 k) I provide handouts containing some of the language the pupils will need when completing the task. *often/sometimes/never*
 l) I split new content into smaller chunks. *often/sometimes/never*
 m) I ask questions to direct the attention to the essential concepts to be learned. *often/sometimes/never*
 n) I help my pupils correct their oral utterances by asking them to repeat and by providing clues to the correct form. *often/sometimes/never*
 o) I reformulate my pupils' erroneous utterances in correct form. *often/sometimes/never*
 p) I accept that my pupils use their home languages or mix codes in class. *often/sometimes/never*
 q) I accept that my pupils use other languages than English in assessments. *often/sometimes/never*
 r) Can you give examples of your best practices in class? You can also comment on your answers to questions a–q.

III In-service training

1. What in-service training have you attended?
2. What did you find the most valuable in the training(s) you have attended?
3. If you were to attend in-service training in the future, what areas would you find the most important? Tick the five most important.

Discipline in class

Mother-tongue instruction

Use of different elicitation techniques

English grammar

- Explaining concepts
 - Use of non-verbal support
 - Preparing teaching material
 - Mastery of subject content
 - Use of home languages as resource
 - Assessment
 - Other
- If you chose “Other”, please specify what:

IV Comments

Is there anything you would like to add or are there any comments you have on this questionnaire?

Thank you for your participation!