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“You can be fluent in English but empty-headed”

Language ideologies underlying Namibian primary school teachers’ beliefs

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Abstract

Societal language ideologies affect language education policy implementation through teachers’ beliefs, which in turn influence their pedagogical decisions and practices. Understanding the relationship between language ideologies and teachers’ beliefs is crucial in multilingual contexts in postcolonial countries such as Namibia. This study explores Namibian mainstream teachers’ beliefs about language policy and its implications for teaching and learning through a questionnaire, individual interviews and focus group discussions. The results show that both monolingual ideologies that stress the importance of English, and decolonising ideologies that advocate for the use of indigenous languages, affect teachers’ beliefs. Deconstructing the hegemonic ideologies and giving teachers opportunities to reconsider their beliefs would contribute to achieving a more flexible multilingual approach in education.

Key words: language ideologies, language education policy, Namibia, multilingual education

1. Introduction

From its beginning, sociolinguistics has studied linguistic variation as related to macrosocial categories and social meaning (e.g. Labov 1966; Wolfram 1969; Trudgill 1974; Macaulay 1977). The so-called third wave in sociolinguistics has shifted the focus of the research from languages as bounded units to language practices and speakers drawing on their different resources (e.g. Moore 2004; Eckert 2008; Zhang 2008). This shift has also underlined the centrality of language attitudes and ideologies to language change (Eckert 2012). According to Ebongue & Hurst (2017, 2), languages “manifest as practices, tied to ideologies”, thus language ideologies can provide an analytical device for exploring variation in language practices (Kroskrity 2004). Teachers are powerful language policy implementers, and their beliefs about what are acceptable language practices in schools affect the way they implement the policies (Ricento and Hornberger 1996; García and Menken 2010). Uncovering and analysing the language ideologies that circulate in a given society allows understanding not only how they affect teachers’ beliefs and educational language practices on the implementational level, but also how they affect language policy and planning.

In this study, teachers’ self-reported language policy beliefs construct discourse that reveals the underlying societal language ideologies. The data consist of 140 questionnaires completed by Namibian mainstream teachers in eight government primary schools, 19 individual semi-

structured interviews and eight focus group discussions with teachers.¹ The dominant language ideologies in postcolonial contexts constitute the theoretical background against which teachers' beliefs in this study are reflected, and they are discussed first. Previous research on teachers' beliefs, especially in African settings, is then discussed before describing the data collection and analysis procedures. The findings about teachers' beliefs are eventually discussed in relation to the societal language ideologies in Namibia, as well as the implications these ideologies have for educational practices and teacher education.

2. Language ideologies in postcolonial contexts

Language ideologies are social constructs that “include the values, practices and beliefs associated with language use by speakers, and the discourse which constructs values and beliefs” (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2002, 123). Language ideologies are sets of beliefs about which languages and varieties may be considered legitimate or appropriate in various contexts and situations, constructed from specific political and economic perspectives (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001; Kroskrity 2004). They provide a means of exercising symbolic domination (cf. Bourdieu 1991) once they become naturalised to the extent that they become invisible and generally accepted. Language education policies are an integral part of general language policy, influenced by the societal language ideologies. Teachers' beliefs about language policy in turn affect the way they implement the policy (Borg 2006, 2018). Therefore, uncovering the ideologies underlying their beliefs is crucial in understanding teacher practices and the way teachers implement the language policy. Teachers' beliefs about the legitimacy of different languages in the educational context are the scope of this study.

Of the multiple existing language ideologies, Weber and Horner (2012) distinguish five central ones. The standard language ideology (see also Milroy and Milroy 2012), the mother tongue ideology and the ideology of purism are closely intertwined and they relate to the concept of legitimacy of languages. The two other ideologies they mention are language hierarchy ideology and one nation–one language ideology. The former describes a societal language ideology that places one language (usually the ex-colonial) above the others. The nationalist one nation–one language ideology further fortifies the status of the ex-colonial language as the official language that is thus associated to a national territory. In the Namibian context, English was not the colonial language. It replaced Afrikaans as the only official language at the independence as a presumably neutral and unifying language, leaving the local languages in a subordinate position (see the discussion on the choice of English as the official language and the main medium of instruction in Norro 2022b). English medium instruction is stipulated from the fourth grade onwards, and even before that, English may be used as the medium of instruction. Though not the ex-colonial language in the literal sense, English in Namibia holds a similar position and represents a monolingual ideology that gives preponderance to a non-local language.

¹ The same dataset and analysis methods were used to analyse teachers' *practices* in Norro (2022c).

Mother tongue ideology is a problematic concept in multilingual contexts and is discussed in more detail in sub-section 2.1. However, in this paper, the terms mother tongue/L1/home language are used interchangeably to refer to the local community languages in contrast to English, which is the only official language and the medium of instruction from grade 4 onwards. These three terms are also used in relation to L1-based multilingual education and other flexible multilingual models including translanguaging pedagogy (Benson 2019; Erling, Adinolfi, and Hultgren 2017; García, Ibarra Johnson, and Seltzer 2017) that are assumed to be beneficial for learning in both postcolonial and other multilingual contexts.

2.1. Conflicting language ideologies

Conflicting language ideologies and orientations (cf. Ruíz 1984) affect educational language planning. Liddicoat and Taylor-Leech (2015) state that two competing ideologies operate even simultaneously, in societies around the world. Monolingual ideologies see multilingualism as a problem, emphasize the role of education for national unity and manage linguistic diversity by establishing few (or one) language as legitimate for education. In contrast, multilingual ideologies see the aim of education to be human development rather than national cohesion and underline the right of all students to have access to educational success in their home languages (Skutnabb-Kangas 2009; Liddicoat and Taylor-Leech 2015, 1–2). In a similar vein, Kamwangamalu argues that the language debate in postcolonial contexts has been informed by two conflicting ideologies: decolonisation and internationalisation. The former entails substituting the colonial language with local languages in education, whereas the latter entails retaining the colonial language that is presumed to be advantageous for international relations and economic development (Kamwangamalu 2013, 326). The distinction between monolingual/internationalisation ideologies on one hand, and multilingual/decolonisation ideologies on the other, is used as an analytical framework in the discussion of teachers' beliefs in this study. Though English was not the colonial language, its status as the only official language and the main medium of instruction represents a monolingual ideology, aimed at national unity and internationalisation.

Retaining the ex-colonial language as medium of instruction is associated with economic development because of the diglossic relationship between the local and the international languages (Kamwangamalu 2013). According to Bokamba, this means that in the African context, there is a complementary distribution of multilingualism across languages. Though the national languages may compete with the ex-colonial language as media of instruction in lower grades, in local broadcast media and administration, most local languages are used mainly in private domains. In contrast, the ex-colonial language is used in education, administration, print media, and other public domains (Bokamba 2015, 38). Languages form a hierarchical relationship with the ex-colonial language on top and the local languages in a subordinate position.

Decolonisation ideologies entail substituting the ex-colonial language with the local languages in education. van Pinxteren (2021) as well as Prah (2016) underline the importance of using African languages in education in order to decolonise African thinking and preserve and

develop African cultural traditions. In the same vein, teachers' beliefs that argue for the importance of mother tongue instruction from the cultural heritage perspective can also be analysed as stemming from decolonisation ideologies. Multilingual decolonisation ideologies also emphasise the pedagogical benefits of mother tongue instruction, such as easier comprehension and deeper understanding of the instruction that aids memorisation of the subject contents, transfer of skills and knowledge to other languages and easier self-expression in class (cf. Benson 2019). When discussing mother tongue instruction, it has to be noted however, that assuming the mother tongue or home language of children based on their ethnicity alone would be erroneous. In addition, Weber and Horner (2012, 162) remind that often the spoken variety of a particular language may be so different from the standard variety taught in schools that children actually understand English or hybrid "street varieties" better than the standard variety of their mother tongue (cf. Makoni, Brutt-Griffler, and Mashiri 2007; Weber and Horner 2012, 162–64).

Flexible multilingual pedagogies take a resource-oriented stance towards multilingualism. When carefully planned, taking into account the local sociolinguistic realities (Paulsrud, Tian, and Toth 2021, xxiv) and based on the use of pupils' strongest languages and their whole linguistic repertoire, including non-standard varieties (Erling, Adinolfi, and Hultgren 2017; García, Ibarra Johnson, and Seltzer 2017; Menken and Sánchez 2019), multilingual pedagogies may be beneficial for both learning and the construction of learners' multilingual identities.

However, there may be constraints based on beliefs about language acquisition as well as educational language and assessment policies that prevent meaningful implementation of multilingual practices in education. First, ex-colonial languages are used because of the misconception that maximum exposure to language leads to faster and better acquisition (Cummins and Swain 2014). Second, assessment policy has been shown to affect pedagogical practices (Cleghorn and Rollnick 2002; Shohamy 2006). In many postcolonial contexts this means that monolingual assessment policies force teachers to maximise the use of the ex-colonial language to prepare their pupils for exams.

This study endeavours to analyse teachers' beliefs and the language ideologies underlying them in order to understand how they are related and what constraints hinder adopting a flexible multilingual approach in education in Namibia. This is done within the monolingual/internationalisation versus multilingual/decolonisation language ideologies framework. The aim is to expose the language ideologies prevailing in the language policy discourse and their effects on educational language policy implementation in order to contribute to language education policy development. Multilingual practices in schools may only become legitimated if multilingual societal language ideologies become generally accepted.

2.2. Previous research

As discussed above, language beliefs and ideologies are closely intertwined. In this section, previous research on teachers' beliefs and on language ideologies is discussed. First, a general

review of teachers' beliefs is presented. This is followed by a summary of research findings on teachers' beliefs in Tanzania and Namibia. Studies on language ideologies and practices conducted in Namibia are also presented.

Teachers' beliefs have been studied in the larger field of teacher cognition (Borg 2018) and defined in different ways. They are ideological constructs that refer to conceptions that individuals consider to be true, they have cognitive and affective dimensions, are relatively stable, and influence practice (Skott 2014). The definition adopted in this article is that of Borg who states they are "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" (2011, 370–71). Phipps and Borg (2009) note that teachers' beliefs are strongly influenced by their experiences as learners. Their beliefs are already well established when they enter teacher education and may therefore affect their classroom practices more than the pedagogical education they receive. However, beliefs are not always consistent with teachers' practices though both influence one another.

In a study conducted in Tanzanian secondary schools (Kinyaduka and Kiwara 2013), the majority of both students (69.5%) and teachers (78.9%) believed that English as a medium of instruction had a negative effect on learning. However, well over half of teachers (64.5%) and students (78.1%) preferred English as language of instruction and evaluation. The researchers interpret the discrepancy in their results as being due to English being an international language of wider communication. In my interpretation, the ideologies of internationalisation and the advantages in the linguistic market overruled pedagogical beliefs. A similar discrepancy was observed in Namibia by Norro (2021) whose respondents believed mother tongue instruction was beneficial for learning but were reluctant to extend it to upper grades.

Language ideologies have been studied from general and educational perspectives. Steigertahl (2018) interviewed 77 informants about their perceptions of the relations between the various speech forms and language clusters in Namibia. Her data showed positive attitudes towards most variants, and the informants stressed the mutual intelligibility between many Bantu languages. The author concluded that concepts such as status, nation state, codification, standardization and mutual intelligibility could not be applied to establish clear cut definitions of what constitutes a language in the Namibian multilingual setting. Haingura (2020) studied language practices in the Kavango region within a translanguaging framework. His data were collected mainly from a local call-in radio programme and showed hybrid translanguaging practices, for instance meshing several codes within a single thought unit in casual conversations. These studies show that attitudes accepting multilingual, hybrid language practices prevail in informal domains.

The hybrid language practices described above do not easily enter classroom settings however. In their study, Ipinge and Banda (2020) report English teachers' reluctance to use languages other than English when teaching. The reasons teachers gave were that using languages other than English would be against the language policy, which stipulates English as the only medium of instruction in senior primary and secondary education, and that the assessment is

done in English only. According to the researchers' interpretation, this reflects a monolingual ideology that places the local languages at the lower end of the language hierarchy and reinforces the position of English by according it status as the only official language. Language practices in casual discourse settings seem to differ largely from the language practices in the formal educational domain.

Both Kinyaduka and Kiwara's (2013) and Ipinge and Banda's (2020) data were collected amongst secondary school teachers. In this study, data were collected in primary schools where the switch to English medium instruction takes place. The research questions are

- 1) What beliefs do teachers have about the language policy and how are they related to their medium of instruction preferences?
- 2) What language ideologies underlie teachers' beliefs about language education policy?

Research question 1 is partly the same as that addressed in Norro (2021). Unlike in the earlier study, the relationship between language policy beliefs and medium of instruction preferences is taken into account. In this study, teachers' beliefs are studied in relation to their preferences for medium of instruction and analysed in the language ideology framework which considers monolingual/internationalisation ideologies on one hand and multilingual/decolonisation ideologies on the other, while recognising that contrasting ideologies can be held simultaneously.

3. Data and method

3.1. Context of the study

According to the National Curriculum for Basic Education (NCBE) (2016), the medium of instruction in junior primary (grades 0–3) should be the pupil's home language or a predominant local language. However, English is also one of the 14 possible school languages at this stage. The other school languages are Afrikaans, German, Ju'hoansi, Khoekhoegowab, Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga, Otjiherero, Rukwangali, Rumanyo, Setswana, Silozi, Thimbukushu, and Namibian Sign Language.

The transition to English medium takes place in the 4th grade, though other languages may still be used "in a supportive role" (NCBE 2016, 29). In senior primary (grades 4–7), the medium of instruction is English. However, according to the 2011 census (Namibia 2011, 68), only 3.4% of the population speak English as L1. Altogether, there are approximately thirty languages spoken in Namibia but the most widely spoken languages are Oshiwambo (49%), Khoekhoegowab (11%), Afrikaans (10%), Otjiherero (9%), and Kavango (9%). Oshiwambo is a language cluster that includes eight languages, namely Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama, Oshikwambi, Oshimbanhu, Oshigandjera, Oshikolonkadi, Oshikwaludhi, and Oshiunda. Kavango is a geographically coined name for the languages that are spoken along the Kavango River in the North-East, that is, Rumanyo, Rukwangali and Thimbukushu. In practice, the

language education policy stipulates a second language (English) as medium of instruction for most Namibian students.

The data were collected in four government schools in Khomas in Central Namibia, and four in Oshana in the north. Khomas contains the capital area and is linguistically highly diverse. In Oshana, the most commonly spoken languages are Oshikwambi, Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama, though Afrikaans, Otjiherero, Portuguese and English are also spoken, especially in urban areas. The schools included are situated in urban or semi-urban locations. Four of the schools offer local languages as medium of instruction in junior primary, including Khoekhoegowab, Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama, Otjiherero and Afrikaans. The other four offer English only. All eight schools cater to pupils from low- to middle-income families.

3.2. Data collection

Data collection began at the start of the 2020 school year but was interrupted because of the Covid-19 outbreak. The rest of the data were collected in September–November 2021. A questionnaire was distributed to all the teachers in all eight schools and resulted in 140 responses (response rate 51%). It included questions about the respondents' background information, language policy beliefs and teaching practices (see Appendix 1). Items 1–8 were basic demographic items (see Appendix 2); item 9 asked about the teachers' language preference for medium of instruction (discussed below).

Questions about their language policy beliefs which are analysed in this paper, were presented in a five point Likert scale. For the analysis, *I strongly disagree* and *I disagree* answers as well as *I agree* and *I strongly agree* answers were combined into *I disagree* and *I agree*. The collection method often influences the obtained data in the sense that formal questionnaires tend to elicit more conventional opinions whereas less informal interviews may reveal beliefs about “how things really are” (cf. Borg 2006, 2018). Therefore, the questionnaire data was completed with interview data. Individual semi-structured interviews (19) were conducted in each school, as well as focus group discussions (8). The rationale for having both types of interviews was that they would probably yield richer data than if only one was used. The questionnaires were completed anonymously, so it was not possible to know which of the questionnaire respondents were also interviewed. Teachers were sampled for the interviews and focus group discussions based on their availability. Some teachers participated in both. The language of the interviews was English. The interviewees represented both junior primary and senior primary teachers, and practically all the subjects that are taught in senior primary. They were of all age groups and had different amounts of experience in years.

The sampling was based on the availability of the schools. Information letters about the aims of the research, the preservation of the anonymity of the participants and the secure storage of the data were provided to the principals and the teachers who gave their written consent for the data collection.

The required research permits were obtained from the Ministry of Education and the National Commission for Research, Science and Technology, as well as from the Regional Directors in Khomas and Oshana. A preliminary ethical review was also obtained from the researcher's affiliated university (The Ethics Committee for Human Sciences at the University of Turku, Humanities and Social Sciences Division 5/2019).

3.3. Data analysis

The distinction between the monolingual/international and multilingual/decolonisation language ideologies discussed in sub-section 2.1 were used in the analysis as a theoretical framework. Teachers' beliefs were categorised according to whether they represented monolingual ideologies stressing the internationalisation and wider communication, or whether they aligned more to the notions of multilingualism and decolonisation. The latter included preservation of cultural and linguistic heritage and preference for mother tongue instruction, including assessment policies.

Quantitative methods were used in analysing the questionnaire data. Associations between variables, including language policy beliefs and medium of instruction preferences were evaluated using Fisher's Exact Test (Hess and Hess 2017, 878–79) in order to estimate which variables were related. The open-ended questionnaire responses were analysed qualitatively, using thematic analysis.

Interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, using orthographic transcription. Both were analysed as one dataset and are referred to in the text as 'interviews'. Qualitative content analysis (Elo and Kyngäs 2008; Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Schreier 2012) was used to analyse the interviews, as it is considered a suitable method for rich data that requires interpretation. After an initial inductive coding (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Elo and Kyngäs 2008), a coding frame was built using the categories formed during the initial coding. Teachers' language policy beliefs were divided into two broad categories, those supporting English medium versus those supporting mother tongue instruction. These two categories were then divided into sub-categories according to the sub-themes that they contained (see Table 1). The "other reasons" included for instance providing future language teachers and supporting mother tongue instruction because the teachers had themselves been instructed in their mother tongue.

Table 1 The coding frame

Teachers' language policy beliefs, coding frame				
English medium				
	Multicultural groups			
	English needed in the society or wider communication			
	English in public domain, home language in private domain			
	English from the beginning to avoid problems later			
Mother tongue medium				
	Valuing cultural heritage			
	Communicating with relatives			
	Benefits learning and self-expression			
	Other reasons			

The researcher coded the data a second time after ten days to evaluate the stability and reliability of the coding (Schreier 2012, 203–4), and some adjustments were made to attain the final coding.

Findings are presented in the next section; excerpts from the open-ended answers and interviews are used to illustrate. The interviewees are referred to by a running code, for example O, FGD1, P4 (Oshana, Focus group discussion 1, participant 4) or K, S4, Int.2 (Khomas, School 4, Interview 2).

4. Findings

The analysis revealed some relations between teachers' beliefs about language education policy and their medium of instruction preferences. The distribution of the beliefs is presented first, followed by a discussion on teachers' medium of instruction preferences. The language ideologies underlying teachers' beliefs are discussed in sub-section 4.2, based on the analysis of the interview data.

4.1. Teachers' beliefs about language policy and medium of instruction preferences

In the questionnaire, there were nine questions about teachers' beliefs about language education policy.

Table 2 Teachers' language policy beliefs

Statement (Questionnaire)	I agree	I disagree	I don't know
a) Learners learn best when they are taught in their home language.	74 %	18 %	7 %
b) English should be the medium of instruction from Grade 1.	61 %	31 %	7 %
c) Instruction in the home language should be extended beyond Grade 3.	46 %	40 %	14 %
d) Both English and the home languages should be used as medium of instruction throughout the Primary cycle (Grades 1-7)	63 %	26 %	11 %
e) The learning outcomes do not depend on the language of instruction. Other factors are more decisive.	45 %	30 %	25 %
f) My learners have difficulties in understanding when they are taught in English.	31 %	56 %	14 %
g) The existence of many languages in Namibia is a problem in education.	40 %	44 %	16 %
h) Every child has the right to be educated in his / her own language.	68 %	17 %	15 %
i) The many different languages of Namibia are a resource in education.	56 %	21 %	23 %

About three quarters, that is, 74% of the respondents believed that pupils learn best in their home language. However, 61% believed that the medium of instruction should be English from grade one. Reasons for preferring English as the medium of instruction are discussed below. Less than half (46%) believed that instruction in home language should be extended beyond grade three, 40% were against it, and 14% were unable to decide. The education model that offers mother tongue instruction during the first three years has been called the “default model” in postcolonial systems (Benson 2019, 32), and it seems teachers align to this model. The responses are also in line with Kinyaduka and Kiwara’s (2013) findings that both parents, teachers and students prefer English as medium of instruction. However, over half (63%) of the respondents believed that both English and home language should be used as media of instruction during the entire primary cycle (grades 0–7), showing a resource-oriented stance (cf. Ruíz 1984).

Less than half (45%) believed that factors other than the language are more decisive, 30% disagreed, and about a quarter were unable to say. Over half (56%) believed that their pupils do not have difficulties in understanding the instruction in English whereas a third (31%) believed they did, and 14% were unable to say. These teachers’ beliefs differ from Kinyaduka and Kiwara’s (2013) findings that showed almost 80% of teachers in their study believed English as medium of instruction negatively affects learning outcomes. However, a third of the respondents in this study believed the medium of instruction to be a problem for their pupils, and a third thought the language of instruction is a central factor, which corroborates the importance of the medium of instruction in basic education. It is interesting to note that though 74% of the teachers believe education in home language to be a human right (cf. Ruíz 1984; Skutnabb-Kangas 2009), only 46% think mother tongue instruction should be extended. The results indicate that over half of the teachers align to the official policy, not wishing to extend mother tongue instruction to upper grades. Practical problems such as lack of qualified teachers

and materials were also mentioned in responses to the open-ended questions as hindering factors.

Ninety-four (69%) respondents told they prefer teaching in English whereas 34 (25%) preferred the home language, and eight (6%) both. Teachers' own medium of instruction preferences were related to the following statements in the questionnaire: 1.a) *Learners learn best when they are taught in their home language*, and 1.b) *English should be the medium of instruction from Grade 1*. Those who prefer teaching in both languages have been excluded from the comparison due to their small number (8). The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Teachers' beliefs about language policy and their medium of instruction preferences

Statement a) Learners learn best when they are taught in their home language				
Medium of instruction preference	I agree	I disagree	I don't know	Total
English	65% (60)	25% (23)	10% (9)	92
Home language	94% (31)	3% (1)	3% (1)	33
Total	73% (91)	19% (24)	8% (19)	n=125
		Fisher's Exact Test		0,003
Statement b) English should be the medium of instruction from Grade 1				
English	70% (63)	24% (22)	6% (5)	90
Home language	36% (12)	52% (17)	12% (4)	33
Total	61% (75)	32% (39)	7% (9)	n=123
		Fisher's Exact Test		0,003

As could be expected, the majority (94%) of those who prefer teaching in home language also believe that pupils learn best in their own language. However, 65% of those who prefer English also believe learning is more effective in pupils' home language. There are several reasons why teachers prefer English as medium of instruction despite believing that instruction in pupils' own languages enhances learning. The comments from different teachers in the open-ended question shed light on them as shown in excerpt 1.

Ex. 1 I have had most of my exposure in English classes and I was only taught as a child with medium English mostly.

English is the official language for all people in Namibia. Beside there are learners of different ethnic groups.

I got my primary education in English, grew up speaking it, go on the internet daily and equip myself with it, most teaching material is in English.

Thus the most common reasons for preferring English as medium of instruction include teachers' own experiences as students (cf. Borg 2006; 2018) and the difficulty of using local languages in multilingual groups. Practical reasons such as teaching materials being more abundant in English were mentioned as well. The most cited reason was that English is the official language of the country and the official medium of instruction. It shows clearly the alignment of these teachers to the official policy based on the language hierarchy ideology (cf. Weber and Horner 2012) that gives English legitimacy over the other languages in the Namibian society and aligns with the monolingual/internationalisation orientation.

Table 4 Teachers' beliefs about the medium of instruction and their language preferences

Statement 1.b) English should be the medium of instruction from Grade 1				
Medium of instruction preference	I agree	I disagree	I don't know	Total
English	70% (63)	24% (22)	6% (5)	90
Home language	36% (12)	52% (17)	12% (4)	33
Total	61% (75)	32% (39)	7% (9)	n=123
Statement 1.c) Instruction in home language should be extended beyond grade 3				
English	42% (37)	47% (42)	11% (10)	89
Home language	65% (20)	26% (8)	10% (3)	31
Total	48% (57)	42% (50)	11% (13)	120

As can be seen in Table 4, the majority (70%) of those who prefer teaching in English also believe that English should be the medium of instruction from grade one. Only 36% of those who prefer teaching in the home language share this belief, and 52% of them believe that English should not be used as medium of instruction in junior primary. Some of the teachers who prefer teaching in the home language are teaching in schools where home language is the medium of instruction during the first three years, though it is impossible to know which, as this was not asked in the questionnaire. It is possible that this has an impact on the proportion (52%) of those who prefer teaching in home language and believe that English should not be the medium of instruction in junior primary; a similar difference cannot be observed as regards statement 1.c) *Instruction in home language should be extended beyond grade 3*. However, over half (65%) of those preferring teaching in the home language agree that teaching in the home language should extend beyond grade 3 while 42% of those who prefer teaching in English agree that teaching in the home language should extend beyond junior primary.

4.2. Language ideologies underpinning teachers' beliefs

In the interviews, teachers' beliefs and the reasoning behind their beliefs were discussed in more depth than in the questionnaire, and they revealed interesting insights into the underlying ideological constructs. It must be stated, though, that teachers did not only have beliefs supporting either English or home language instruction, but often the same teachers expressed arguments for both. Sometimes they were unable to decide which is better, like the one who formulated the dilemma by saying "I have two minds". Many expressed beliefs in favour of mother tongue instruction in junior primary and English in senior primary, similarly to the official policy.

4.2.1. Monolingual ideologies

The monolingual ideologies that seem to underlie teachers' beliefs include the importance of being fluent in English in order to be able to function in a society where only English is used in public domains.

Ex. 2 The country's official language is English... So wherever they go, they must be able to speak English ... it also affects their confidence. Because now they cannot express themselves properly in English, because the foundation was laid in the mother tongue. (K, FGD3, P2)

Ex. 3 Our official language is English ... we should prepare our learners to fit in the same society, which will send them back ... So actually, there is no use of training learners at school in their mother tongue, but in the office and the in the society, they will be asked to speak English. (K, FGD4, P1)

As excerpts 2 and 3 show, these teachers align to Namibia's monolingual language policy that accords the status of official language to English only and combine it with a practical view that in all public domains, English will be the only legitimated language (cf. Bourdieu 1991), and therefore pupils need to learn it. They also refer to the need of having English as medium of instruction from the beginning in order to lay a solid foundation in English (excerpt 2) and support the learners' self-confidence as English speakers. Some teachers even expressed their belief about the necessity of having English as medium of instruction from the beginning for not marginalising pupils by withdrawing them the right to learn the official language.

Ex. 4 When the learners reach grade four, these learners are now struggling to express themselves in er English, because they are used to being taught in Oshiwambo all the subjects in the lower grades ... I think they should be taught in English, because English ... is the language that is used everywhere so I feel like they are being left out. (O, FGD1, P3)

As excerpt 4 shows, some teachers think that having a local language as medium of instruction in the lower grades diminishes learners' exposure to English (cf. Cummins and Swain 2014) and thus puts them in an unequal position vis-à-vis their peers who have been studying in English from the beginning. The alignment to the hierarchical language ideology is also reflected in the diglossic views some teachers expressed concerning the use of home languages, as in excerpt 5.

Ex. 5 You can still speak ... your mother tongue at home with your family, with your friends. But when it comes to the academic, the school work ... let English take priority there. (K, FGD3, P2)

Ex. 6 We try to combine all this diversity and ... unite them so through English so you you can't really rely on mother tongue ... to be there (K, S2, Int.3)

Ex. 7 We have to teach them so that they can communicate in future, maybe some, they are going abroad, studying abroad, in that case they are going to to communicate in English. (K, S4, Int.1)

Excerpt 5 shows clearly a hierarchical language ideology (Weber and Horner 2012) that places English above other languages in the Namibian society by legitimising it as the only appropriate language to be used in academic and other public domains and restricting the use of local languages to the private domain only (cf. Pütz 1995, 2). A monolingual language ideology is also seen in excerpt 6 that describes English as the only possible uniting and neutral

language in a linguistically diverse society. This argument has been used widely in postcolonial language policies (Pütz 1995, 2–3) to rationalise the choice of European languages as official languages. In excerpt 7, a belief in the utility of English as a language of international communication (Kamwangamalu 2013) is expressed. The same argument was used already in the discourse preparing the language policy for independent Namibia (see Chamberlain, Diallo, and John 1981; Norro 2022b).

To conclude, the beliefs that reflect a monolingual/internationalisation language ideology include seeing English as the only legitimate language to be used in public domains and restricting the use of other languages to the private domain only, as well as considering English as the language of upward social mobility and international communication.

4.2.2. Decolonising ideologies

The beliefs that fall into Kamwangamalu's (2013) category of decolonisation ideologies include those that stress the importance of preserving the cultural heritage (cf. van Pinxteren 2021) and the pedagogical benefits of mother tongue instruction (Weber and Horner 2012; Benson 2021). Assessment is a crucial part of education and is mentioned by several teachers as a constraint that hinders the use of local languages in instruction.

Ex. 8 Mother tongue is it's part of our cultural inheritance ... So a child needs to learn something from the the ancestors ... Generation to generation. (K, FGD4, P1)

Ex. 9 Learners should learn ... the vernacular language in order for them to communicate with ... elders in the village. (K, FGD4, P3)

The beliefs expressed in excerpts 8 and 9 are related to Prah's (2014, 78) statement about the interconnectedness of language practices and cultural practices and van Pinxteren's (2021, 218) claim that it is necessary to rethink the use of African languages in order to decolonise education. It is worth noting, though, that for these teachers, using local languages as medium of instruction in junior primary only is sufficient.

Ex. 10 I believe kids tend to understand more better in their mother tongue than in English. And ... it's even easy for them to give their views ... in their mother tongue, unlike in English ... Because some kids cannot even express themselves in English that fully. (O, S4, Int. 2)

Several teachers expressed their belief in the benefits of mother tongue instruction, at least in junior primary (e.g. in excerpt 10). The reasons they gave were the same that have been stated in research literature (e.g. Benson 2019). One of the things that forms an obstacle for mother tongue instruction, though, is the national assessment policy that was mentioned by several teachers, as in excerpt 11.

Ex. 11 I have a problem with now the government policy of now denigrating or penalising learner who cannot express themselves in the English language ... But knowing English does not measure one's intelligence. So you can be fluent in English but empty-headed. (O, FGD3, P2)

Teachers stated their opinion that the assessment policy should be changed to allow learners enter tertiary education with the same mark in English as in other subjects, whereas in the current system, their mark in English has to be better than in other subjects regardless of the subject they apply for. In order to change the language policy in lower grades, the requirements on upper levels have to change first, because "you cannot teach a child in Oshiwambo and then expect the child to respond you in English", as one of them put it.

There were also teachers who opted for a bilingual policy that would combine the use of both local languages and English, though some also expressed their concern for the challenges of language choice raised by the high diversity of languages.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The aims of this paper were to explore 1) what beliefs teachers have about the language policy and how their medium of instruction preferences relate to their language policy beliefs, and 2) what language ideologies underlie teachers' language policy beliefs. As discussed above, teachers' beliefs about what are acceptable language practices in schools affect the way they implement the language policies (García and Menken 2010), and that they can only be changed by providing opportunities to reflect on them (Borg 2018). Considering the underlying societal language ideologies is also necessary to make conscious choices of classroom language practices. This has important implications for both initial and continuous teacher education.

First, well over half (74%) of the respondents believed, in line with research (see e.g. Benson 2019), instruction in learners' home languages to be beneficial for learning. However, as regards implementing mother tongue instruction, 61% believe English medium instruction from the beginning is a better option. As has been stated (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001), teachers often have to harmonise conflicting interests. It seems Namibian teachers are caught between the two opposing ideological discourses prevalent in the society, that is, mother tongue instruction and the monolingual ideology of English as a language used in public domains and international contacts and therefore indispensable for the learners. It is worth noting, though that 63% of the respondents believe bilingual education to be a good option.

Second, almost all teachers (94%) who preferred home language as medium of instruction also believed that pupils learn best in their home language. However, 65% of those who preferred English shared the same belief. Nevertheless, 70% of the latter believed English should be the medium of instruction from the beginning. Reasons for preferring English included teachers' own experiences as students, the difficulty of using home languages in multilingual groups and lack of materials in local languages. Developing multilingual education in Namibia would necessitate introducing more flexible teaching practices in teacher education, as well as

increased production of multilingual teaching materials. Including multilingual and multimodal assessment practices and modifying the national assessment system to set the requirements in English on the same level with other subjects would also contribute to a more multilingual approach in education. The most usual reason teachers gave for preferring English as medium of instruction was that English is the official language of the country and the medium of instruction stipulated by the language policy. Alignment to the monolingual language ideology seems to be the strongest factor explaining teachers' willingness to implement English medium instruction, despite and contrary to their pedagogical knowledge of the benefits of mother tongue instruction.

The language ideologies underlying teachers' language policy beliefs contain conflictual elements from both monolingual/internationalising and multilingual/decolonising ideologies. The former underline the importance of English as the only legitimate language (Bourdieu 1991; Heller and Martin-Jones 2001) in public domains and as the language of international communication. The latter advocate for preserving the cultural heritage and intergenerational communication, as well as the pedagogical benefits of mother tongue instruction.

As defined by Blackledge and Pavlenko (2002, 123), language ideologies include the values and beliefs, but also discourse associated with language use. In the Namibian society, the monolingual English policy has been the hegemonic discourse since the preparation for independence in the 1980s (Norro 2022b). The monolingual policy has been balanced by the discourse of preservation of the cultural heritage. That is to say, the standardised national languages compete with English to a certain extent in print media, local broadcast media, and in the lower levels of education (cf. Bokamba 2015, 38). Nonetheless, English is still the only legitimate language in most public domains and the top language in the language hierarchy in the national level (Weber and Horner 2012). The nation building discourse that considers it as the unifying language was echoed in teachers' comments. Monolingual assessment maintains and reinforces the position of English as the language of upward social mobility, as pointed out by several teachers. The results of this study point to a need of continuing societal discourse about the language policy and the ideologies underlying it.

The decolonisation ideologies that emerged in the data raise questions about their applicability and relevance in the present urbanised and globalised society. First of all, extending mother tongue instruction to senior primary classes has proved to be a politically difficult decision. Second, the current educational language policy does not take into account the non-standardised speech forms and the hybrid language practices typical for urban youth especially. Instead of their cultural and linguistic heritage, pupils' identities are often more tied to fluid multilingual language practices (cf. Haingura 2020), and they are more proficient in them. This is not to say that preserving and promoting the heritage languages in education would not be encouraged. Legitimising the fluid multilingual language practices in schools is however necessary for ensuring epistemic access and supporting learners' multilingual identities.

The data of this study was collected in primary schools in urban and semi-urban settings in two regions, thus adding to the previous research conducted in secondary schools cited in section 2.2. The results do not necessarily apply to all contexts in Namibia or elsewhere, and more

research needs to be done in different settings. There is probably difference especially between urban and rural schools as regards the importance of the heritage language in the language practices and identity construction of the pupils. The results of this study show, however, that many teachers are favourable for bi- or multilingual education models, but hesitate with the implementation in a linguistically diverse context. Introducing flexible multilingual pedagogies, based on the use of pupils' strongest languages and their whole linguistic repertoire could increase epistemic access and support learners' multilingual identities. Use of multilingual methods such as translanguaging should naturally be carefully planned and the local sociolinguistic realities be taken into account.

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