



Mozambique

The impact of language policy
and practice on children's learning:
Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa
2017

2.11 Mozambique

2.11.1 Background information

Mozambique was under Portuguese rule from the sixteenth century until 1975, when it gained independence. Mozambique is thus one of the few countries in Africa in which Portuguese is an official language. Lopes (2004) points out that “Portuguese is the exclusive medium of instruction from first grade onwards, as well as a subject in primary and secondary education”, even though at the time of independence from Portugal in 1975, only 7 per cent of Mozambicans spoke Portuguese, and 93 per cent were illiterate” (Chimbutane and Benson, 2012, p. 9).

Ethnologue lists 43 languages for Mozambique.

2.11.2. Current language policy

Until very recently, language policy demonstrated very little change since 1975. Lopes (2004) observes that the tenets of Mozambique’s official language policy are expressed in Article 5 of the 1990 revised version of the Constitution of the Republic by reinforcing Portuguese language as the official language, but valuing national languages and promoting their development and encouraging growing usage as vehicular languages and in the education of citizens

This was the first time ever that the official language issue was addressed in the Mozambique Constitution (ibid., p. 458).

Chimbutane and Benson (2012) point out a new trend generated by this constitutional change toward expanded use of languages other than Portuguese in education.

- “The 1990 Constitution and a 1992 National Education decree both mentioned, for the first time, the possibility of using African languages in education. Although neither was binding, they could be considered ‘enabling’ (per Alexander, 1992) in

that they lent legitimacy for both intellectuals and ordinary citizens to debate language issues. As a result, experiments were developed in bilingual adult literacy, as well as primary education, and the roots of change took hold.” (Chimbutane and Benson, 2012, p.10)

The authors note, however, that this has been less a firm, binding government policy than a provision of space for allowing the education system to begin to use languages other than Portuguese. As noted below, the dominant practice today is still to use Portuguese as the medium of instruction.

At the same time, positive evaluations of the current pilot bilingual program, described below have generated significant policy change. According to the Instituto Internacional da Lengua Portuguesa, the Mozambican Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) has announced plans to nationalize the use of 16 Mozambican languages alongside Portuguese, in primary schools across the nation by 2017 (see below).¹

2.11.3. Education policy and practice

As noted by both Chimbutane (2011) and Henriksen (2010, p. 6), a dual education policy of Portuguese and a national language is operating in Mozambique. In the great majority of the country’s 8000+ primary schools, Portuguese is the language of instruction. This is the only language policy mentioned in the national Education Strategy Plan for 2012-2016 (MINEDH 2012) or in the World Bank’s 2012 report on education reform in Mozambique (Fox, Santibañez, Nguyen and André 2012).

Two pilot bilingual education programmes have been operating since 1993: the first was a 5-year (1993-1997) bilingual education experiment in two languages of Mozambique, called Projecto de Escolarização Bilingue em Moçambique (Bilingual Schooling Project in Mozambique, PEBIMO). The PEBIMO programme was evaluated, with positive results (Benson, 2000).

¹ <https://iilp.wordpress.com/2015/03/18/ensino-primario-mocambicano-sera-ministrado-nas-16-linguas-nativas-a-partir-de-2017/>. Accessed 11 March, 2016.

A second bilingual education pilot initiative was then begun in 2003. This programme was initiated by the Government of Mozambique and implemented primarily by the Instituto Nacional do Desenvolvimento da Educação (National Institute for Educational Development, INDE), Eduardo Mondlane University, and two Mozambican NGOs: Progresso² and Unidade de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (Basic Education Development Unit, UDEBA) (Chimbutane and Benson, 2012, p. 18). By 2013, the programme was operating in 370 schools in 10 provinces, using 16 Mozambican languages (Capra International, 2013); as of 2015, 551 schools and 98,000 students were part of the programme.

Chimbutane (2011) maintains that, unlike the situation in other African countries, there is popular support for bilingual education in Mozambique, particularly in rural areas:

“There is also considerable political will within the current government, although the [low] level of attention devoted to the bilingual program (e.g. lack of resources in African languages) may lead one to conclude otherwise.” (ibid., p. 68)

In fact, Chimbutane argues that this 16-language programme “places Mozambique as one of the countries with the most audacious language-in-education policies in Africa” (2011, p. 54).

Henriksen (2010) agrees that the bilingual education programme is seen as a great achievement in the history of education in

Mozambique to promote the value of national languages, reduce dropout and repetition rates and improve academic success. Henriksen believes that “the policy decision by the Ministry of Education to mainstream this experimental program by 2017 responds to the positive outcomes realized in the programme” (p22). However, Henriksen notes this is not universally held opinion and that other stakeholders would prefer a focus on the Portuguese language.

2.11.4. Studies

Benson (2000) describes an evaluation of the five-year (1993-1997) Projecto de Escolarização Bilingue em Moçambique (Bilingual Schooling Project in Mozambique, PEBIMO) referred to above. PEBIMO was funded by the Government of Mozambique, UNESCO and the World Bank; it was implemented in the Cinyanja speaking community in the north western province of Tete, and in the Xichangana-speaking community in the south-central province of Gaza.³

Qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the project took place in the last two years of its operation. Benson, 2000 p.149) reports that students benefited significantly from the use of the mother tongue in the classroom. At the end of the experiment, “two school directors reported that families in PEBIMO communities had taken in children from relatives or friends in anticipation of their being able to attend [future] bilingual classrooms” (ibid., p. 161).

However Benson also notes problems in the design, implementation and findings of the study.

² <http://www.codecan.org/progresso>. Accessed 11 March, 2016.

³ Both languages chosen are cross-border languages; Cinyanja is called Chichewa in Malawi, and Xichangana is called Xitsonga in South Africa. These choices allowed the Mozambican researchers to benefit from work done in the other countries.

An evaluation of the current pilot bilingual education programme was carried out by Capra International (2013), commissioned by MINEDH and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analysed. The most effective aspects of the programme (termed “moderately effective”) included the support of NGOs and civil society organizations, the use of the first language as medium of instruction, transitioning from the first to the second language as medium of instruction, and in-service teacher training and placement. The least effective aspects, according to the evaluation, were the use of the first language as a subject from Grade 4, and the pre-service teacher training.

2.11.5. Language education initiatives

Vamos Ler

This USAID-funded programme has been developed as a follow-on from the Aprender a Ler early-grade reading programme (see below). Carried out by Creative Associates, the MINEDH and other partners between 2016 and 2021, Vamos Ler is focusing on building reading and writing skills among children in the Emakhuwa, Elomwe and Echuwabo language communities of Nampula and Zambezia Provinces.

UNICEF/Livro Aberto teacher capacity building and libraries

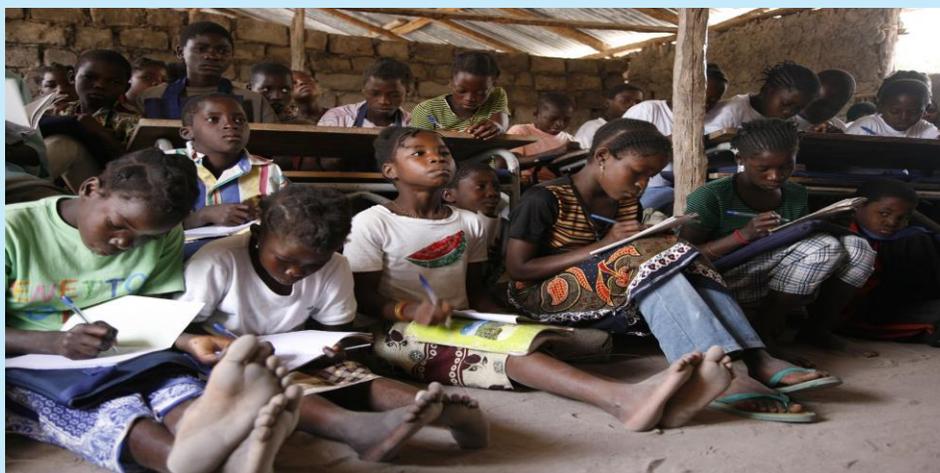
UNICEF Mozambique is supporting a new in-service teacher training for promoting reading, in five districts of Tete Province. This programme is to be carried out from May 2017, in collaboration with the Mozambican NGO Livro Aberto. One aim of the programme is to enhance teachers’ ability to bridge reading skills from local languages to Portuguese. In addition to building teachers’ capacity, ten community libraries are to be established

Aprender a Ler (ApaL)

This early-grade reading programme was implemented in Zambezia and Nampula provinces by World Education International, with funding from USAID.⁴ Begun in 2012, the four-year programme aimed to improve reading outcomes for students in grades 2 and 3. Though the programme was largely implemented in Portuguese, modifications in 2015 introduced an additional focus on reading in Mozambican languages of the provinces.

Literacy Boost

Save the Children carried out a Literacy Boost project in the Gaza province of southern Mozambique, from 2008-2010.⁵ The language used in the project was Portuguese.



4 <http://www.worlded.org/WEIInternet/international/project/display.cfm?ctid=naandcid=naandtid=40andid=12301>. Accessed 11 March, 2016

5 <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/6864.pdf>. Accessed 11 March, 2016.