Welcome to this first issue of ‘ISLAND STUDIES – Indian Ocean/Océan Indien’, which happens also to be a special one, developed by the University of Seychelles and launched in the context of the 3rd International Conference on Small Island Developing States, in Samoa.

Two regular issues of the publication will be produced each year, with the possibility of special editions to be issued as the need arises and subject to the occurrence of events that warrant such initiatives. The publication is meant to be a forum that promotes the understanding of complex issues and vulnerabilities that hinder the development of islands of the Indian Ocean sub-region. It will contribute to advocate means to identify and address emerging island issues.

‘ISLAND STUDIES – Indian Ocean/Océan Indien’ aims at contributing to a knowledge-building and sharing process on development matters pertaining to islands of the Indian Ocean sub-region by establishing a platform for information exchange among relevant stakeholders and promoting awareness of the challenges and opportunities that are inherent to islands.

By seeking to explore the application of theoretical and empirical studies to island issues, ‘ISLAND STUDIES – Indian Ocean/Océan Indien’ will provide a forum where intellectual work of significance will be published. Hence, it will assist in bringing together intellectuals and professionals from the public and private sectors, NGOs, university faculty and researchers, as well as policy makers and resource persons from development agencies and international organisations to discuss and share ideas, facts, opinions and island-relevant analyses.

‘ISLAND STUDIES – Indian Ocean/Océan Indien’ will go beyond its role as a forum for scholarly discourse on island issues. Besides research-based articles, it will welcome other contributions of academic value, policy analysis, reviews, technical and opinion papers that contribute to the understanding of significant issues for islands.

The contributors to the publication as well as its target audience will be drawn from beyond the academic circle. This position is justified by the context in which the publication is being developed, a context that obviously rests on the many SIDS concerns exposed therein.

The initiative meant for knowledge and values-sharing will therefore bring on board a larger participation than what is traditionally expected in a scholastic publication enterprise. In this vein, and as mentioned above, it will enlist the participation of professionals from all stakeholders who are willing to be part of this venture.

This initiative has been made possible through funding received from the UN Resident Coordinator (Mauritius/Seychelles) Fund. It intends to shape the constructive role of a publication in the advancement of island knowledge from an Indian Ocean perspective.

I would like to seize this opportunity to thank the reading group and all those who have supported this endeavour, specially the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dennis Hardy, for his commitment, advice and relentless effort to see the project through. I acknowledge also the special contribution of Dr Pascal Nadal, Co-Lead Editor of the publication.

For this present issue, we are happy to present to our readers a selection of 15 articles from diverse disciplines. To kick-start the discussion, Hardy and Simeon take us into the realm of the academia, by looking at the challenges ahead for institutions of higher learning in SIDS. Ratsimanetrimanana then initiates a discussion of the implications of a harmonious and sustainable development for Madagascar, while Muller et al. propose insights into the phenomenon of multidimensional poverty in Seychelles. This article in its full version may be consulted on the UNDP website. Proceeding from these discussions of issues that are central to national development, we will look at one crucial economic sector for islands of the Indian Ocean region, namely tourism, via reflections by Serviable & Serviable, and by Burridge. Thereafter, we will make an incursion into the cultural domain, via an exploration of the concept of créolité, by Persaud, followed by a literary interlude by Froissart and his reflection on Mascarene poetry. Nadal & Anacoura will then undertake a comparative analysis of the status of Seychellois and Mauritian Kreol. The next strand will be the environmental one, with contributions by Cooke, Shah & Henri, Rocamora and Dogley about various ecological matters touching the Seychelles and other small island developing states. We will conclude with two papers by Valentin and Deutschmann & Zelime about ‘didactics’ and educational policy issues in the fields of mathematics and languages respectively.

I wish you a pleasant reading. Please visit our website and give us your feedback.

Dr Kris M. Valaydon
I am delighted to support this initiative of the University of Seychelles. Recognising the importance of knowledge development in the Indian Ocean, Dr Kris Valaydon and colleagues have produced the first issue of a new publication, ‘ISLAND STUDIES – Indian Ocean/Océan Indien’. It is intended to disseminate research findings and to encourage reflection, debate and discussion around key topics affecting the region.

The production of this issue is timely, as it will be available to delegates attending the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in September 2014, in Samoa. I am sure that it will help to point to how much these nations, not only in the Indian Ocean but in the various seas across the world, have in common.

As small island developing states, we currently face great challenges. Not only could we find ourselves again in the path of economic storms that are not of our making, but we are equally vulnerable to the impact of climate change in all its manifestations. Our relative isolation also makes us vulnerable to the actions of pirates who threaten our marine security, a condition upon which we cannot compromise in the interest of our trade and fisheries.

Yet, let us not forget that being a small island developing state also entails opportunities. I have personally championed the idea of the Blue Economy, pointing to the vast riches that lie beneath the sea. Because we are all, by definition, surrounded by oceans, we are in a prime position to take the lead in exploring their huge potential. Our ability to do so will be strengthened by the development of our own human capacity and the transformation of our islands into knowledge economies.

For all these reasons, ‘ISLAND STUDIES – Indian Ocean/Océan Indien’ is published at the right time – to expound on what is happening as well as to look ahead; to inform as well as inspire. It will appeal not only to readers in small island developing states, but also to those in countries elsewhere, with which ever closer links are being established.

Before ending, I would like to seize this opportunity to thank all individuals and institutions, in both the public and private sectors as well as the UN Resident Coordinator for Seychelles, for their invaluable support to this present enterprise.

James Alix Michel
President of the Republic of Seychelles,
Chancellor of the University of Seychelles

A publication of the University of Seychelles
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Towards a framework for investigating
Language-in-education policies in second-language medium of instruction contexts

By Mats Deutschmann, Umeå University, Sweden & Justin Zelime, University of Seychelles

1. Introduction

The choice of medium of instruction (MoI) in education is a central language policy issue. While much evidence suggests that teaching a child in his or her first language offers the best chance of educational success, the choice of the mother tongue as MoI is not given in large parts of the world (Mohamed, 2013:185). Due to a colonial legacy and current globalization trends, many African countries, for example, are using a second language (L2) to teach other subjects across the curriculum from an early age. Such policies have an impact on the entire educational process since mastering the ex-colonial L2 (primarily English or French) becomes a prerequisite for also mastering content material in all other subjects. Current language-in-education policies have been linked to educational inequity, substandard teaching practice, low literacy skills, poor overall performance, high dropout rates, and, at times, total exclusion from education (Clegg, 2007:78; Mohamed, 2013:188). Literacy and the choice of MoI are, in other words, key factors impacting on education, and in extension on society as whole, in many parts of the post-colonial world.

The practice of using an L2 as MoI creates a number of special challenges. For example, there is great variation in the prerequisites for learning the L2, depending on the pupils’ exposure to the MoI prior to starting school (see Hungi & Thuku, 2010, for example). Gender imbalances in education may also become more pronounced in L2 MoI contexts since many boys find it more challenging to learn a foreign language (e.g. Stoet & Geary 2013; OECD 2010). In addition, the quality of teaching may be affected. Not only do teachers in all subjects need to know the subject content, but they also need to be highly proficient in the MoI. They also need to have insight into how the L2 MoI affects students’ access to subject content, and have methods for overcoming potential difficulties. Essentially, every teacher has to be a literacy teacher (Draper, 2002: 357). Finally, choosing an L2 as MoI will also have an impact on the status of local languages and culture. Learning materials in the L2, especially at higher levels, are more often than not produced abroad and do not take local contexts into account.

With the above in mind, the aim of this paper is to propose a framework for investigating issues related to the medium of instruction and education in the Seychelles, where English is used as MoI from Primary 3 onwards. We hope to contribute to a knowledge-grounded base from which to pursue educational development. Since the situation in the Seychelles bears resemblances to many...
other L2 MoI contexts, potential findings are highly relevant to other African and postcolonial countries which have adopted English as a MoI, and where literacy skills in the L2 are important for academic success.

1.1 The Seychelles context

The Seychelles has a lot in common with many African countries in the sub-Saharan region. It has a French and British colonial past with two colonial languages, French and English, occupying official positions. In schools, French was the MoI until the 1940s, when it was replaced by English (Fleischmann, 2008). Seychelles Creole (hereafter SC), the mother tongue for a large majority of Seychellois, was completely banned from schools until the 1980s (Fleischmann, 2008). However, after independence in 1976, SC became the third official language alongside the two colonial languages, and in 1981 it was introduced as MoI for the first four years of formal schooling.

Initially the introduction of SC in education was a success. Students after 1981, who were taught in SC during their first four years of education, outscored those who were previously only taught in English in almost every subject, including French and the sciences, and also performed equally well in English (Bickerton, 1990:48). In addition, literacy rates among 15-24 year olds went up from 57.3 % in 1971 to 84.2 % by 1987 (Campling, Confi ance & Purvis, 2011:51). According to Bollee (1993:88), the sole use of English as MoI prior to 1981 meant that teachers were “enseigner l’inconnu par l’inconnu” (teaching the unknown through the unknown).

The role of SC as MoI was, however, reduced to the first two years of primary education after reforms in 1996, when English became the sole MoI for most subjects other than French and SC from primary three onwards. The L1, SC, is only taught up to primary six. This is still the case today. Formally, however, the Seychelles has a trilingual policy where SC, English and French are given equal status.

2. Previous research from the region

The selected studies below address some of the key issues related to general literacy and the choice of MoI in education in the region. These include policy issues, the impact of L2 MoI on the learners and the effects on teaching. The role of the mother tongue in these educational contexts is also of interest.

2.1 Language-in-education policies and the curriculum

Language-in-education policies are influenced by a combination of pedagogical, economic and political factors (Prophet & Badee, 2006:240; Brock-Utne and Holmardsdottir, 2004:68; Laversuch, 2008:375). For the past fifty years, policy makers in postcolonial African countries have grappled with the ‘language question’ (Kamwangamalu, 2013:325). Issues include whether African nations should retain the colonial language(s) or replace them with indigenous languages or use both indigenous languages and ex-colonial languages as MoIs. These are clearly complex questions influenced by various factors, and which have great impact on the educational systems in the countries concerned.

Learning materials in the L2, especially at higher levels, are more often than not produced abroad and do not take local contexts into account.

According to Kamwangamalu (2013:325) policy makers grappling language-in-education issues have historically been informed by “conflicting ideologies including decolonization, development, internalization, [and] globalization.” On one side, there were those who felt that education should be available to all through the vernacular or mother tongue (UNESCO Model, 1953 and 1996; Hornberger, 2009; Hanna, 2011). On the other side there was the argument that the colonial languages should remain as the MoIs because they guaranteed educational and economic success nationally and internationally (Dewey 2007; Ferguson 2009; Jenkins, 2006).

Some African countries chose to keep English as the sole MoI, while others combined it with the local languages, using the latter for the first few years of education and the former for the rest of the schooling years (Hamid, Nguyen & Kamwangamalu 2014:1). Few have chosen to pursue a path where local vernaculars play the dominant role as MoI throughout education. This balancing act between the role of the local languages and the L2 in education has by no means been an easy one, and according to Hamid et al., “there is evidence, […] with regard to language practices in education in a number of polities in Africa, that English and French are promoted while local languages are disparaged even when they are promoted by national policies.” (2014:2). It has been widely argued (see Frey & Whitehead, 2009; Hornberger & Vaish 2009, and Hornberger, 2009, for example) that educational language policies (explicit or implicit) that promote dominant languages as the medium of instruction “jeopardize multicultural society, endanger democratic pluralism, and violate the rights of many children to have meaningful access to education in their mother tongue” (Hanna, 2011:734). “In effect, those sectors of the population who are most urgently in need of socio-economic advancement are reduced to silent objects of development who have no say regarding their future.” (Idris, Legère & Rosendal, 2007:34). Ultimately, Clegg (2007:43) argues that L2 Mol contributes to “limiting the economic performance of a country” since it results in “low school achievement.”

On the other hand, there are many good reasons and valid arguments that explain the continued dominance of L2 MoI (primarily English) teaching in the region. Firstly as Schiffman (1996:22) points out, language policies “are cultural constructs, and are rooted in and evolve from historical elements of many kinds, some explicit and overt, some implicit and covert.” In other words, the systems of education that fostered the language policy makers were most likely based on colonial structures where English, for example, was the Mol. English is thus deeply associated with education and in extension, success. Secondly, there
is also the issue of globalization. English has rapidly become the lingua franca of international business and consequently, according to Hanna (2011:745), given the clear importance of English language acquisition as a means for gaining access to global competition, it seems reasonable to conclude that the promotion of English in schooling across the macro-spheres represents a sound rationale that positions the children of these countries for economic competitiveness.

The question, however, remains if the current language policies have the desired effect.

2.1.1 Language-in-education policies and the national curriculum in the Seychelles

The National Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2013:18) states that the curriculum should enable students to “develop high levels of speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in Seychelles Creole, English and French, that are essential for further learning, work and life.” The general curriculum framework for languages further states that students should be able to develop ideas and communicate these effectively through all languages (SC, English and French) and there is a general emphasis on literacy (p.18). Communicating effectively in order to “make and express meaning” is also listed as an “essential competence” (p.27). Further, according to the curriculum, any of “the three national languages can also be used as support languages in the teaching of particular subjects.” In reality, however, English holds a special position in education.

In the 2005 SAQMEC (Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality) report, the emphasis of “English as a key language in learning and teaching” is explained by that fact “that the overriding objective of the Ministry of Education is to deliver a curriculum that will produce flexible, adaptable students, whose education is up to international standard as part of the human resource development strategies of a small state” (Leste, Valentin & Hoareau, 2005:4). The language-in-education policies of the Seychelles have been strongly influenced by a combination of economic and political factors and Laversuch, (2008:379-80), lists various economic arguments for greater emphasis being put on English in the national curriculum. Some of these are 1) the Seychelles’s economy is reliant on English speaking countries, 2) most educational textbooks are in English from English speaking countries, 3) there is a lack of grade-appropriate, standardized Creole-language teaching materials, 4) high proficiency level in English is seen as the main way of offering Seychellois graduates socioeconomic success, 5) the latter would benefit from greater employment opportunities and greater earning potentials and will eventually enjoy higher lateral and vertical professional mobility.

Clearly the Ministry of Education faces a challenging task in finding an acceptable balance between two seemingly contradictory intents. On the one hand it is advocating a trilingual language policy where all three languages have equal status, while on the other hand it is trying to meet the demands of globalization, where English is synonymous with unmatched advantages and status, especially in the educational context. Under current policies, the demands of the international market seem to be prioritized over demands of an equal trilingual policy, and a good understanding of English is a prerequisite for succeeding in education.

Further, the Curriculum Framework does not explicitly address the specific question of L2 writing literacy. The Seychelles system is highly exam oriented, with frequent written assessments, yearly written exams, which are marked centrally, and written final exams, which often are set and marked abroad (IGCSEs marked by Cambridge International). Since these examinations take place in English, advanced writing skills in the L2 are essential and a gatekeeper to educational success in all subjects. Mere reproduction and/or formulaic production in the L2 are obviously not enough to meet the goals of the curriculum (“express and make meaning”), or to meet the practical demands of communicating subject specific knowledge in writing. In reality Seychellois students have to become fairly advanced English writers at an early age if they want to communicate their knowledge, and there is little acknowledgement of this challenge in the Curriculum Framework.

2.2 A foreign MoI and its impact on learning

Much of the research that has been carried out in postcolonial African countries on the impact of a foreign MoI on the learners suggests that the current state of affairs may have a negative influence on the general literacy development of learners. Based on studies from South Africa, Janks (2011:29) argues that “the reader is so caught up in understanding the meaning of each new word, that he or she loses the thread of the sentence as a whole.” She continues to note that “children in the throes of a language/literacy switch cannot be expected to perform as well as children who are reading in their home language exclusively,” and that children in Grade Four were not ready for English as the MoI as “they simply did not have the vocabulary, language and literacy skills for Seychellois students have to become fairly advanced English writers at an early age if they want to communicate their knowledge, and there is little acknowledgement of this challenge in the Curriculum Framework.
learning in English across the curriculum.” (Janks 2011:29). Similarly, in the case of Botswana, Prophet and Badede, (2006) claim that “students who are not proficient in the language of instruction are hindered in their thinking skills, their exploratory skills and their explanatory skills.” They point out that the second language learner faces two major learning difficulties: “learning to use the language of instruction, commonly English, at the level required for learning academic content, and learning to use the language of science in order to decipher what is being said.” (Prophet & Badede, 2006:239). Ultimately, they maintain that the cognitive development of a majority of students risks being stunted and their academic achievement hindered (Prophet & Badede, 2006:241).

Overall, research indicates that literacy skills in the MoI impact on the general learning situation. Garrouste (2011), using hierarchical linear modeling of various factors impacting on scores in mathematics in secondary schools in Namibia, was able to show language proficiency to be one of the most important impact variables. Since there seems to be a general tendency for girls to outperform boys in language subjects (Stoet & Geary 2013; OECD, 2010), this indirectly means that girls are advantaged in other subjects too in contexts where foreign Mols are used. Such tendencies are not evident in countries where the L1 are used as MoI. In the 2009 PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) report, for example, girls significantly outscored boys in reading abilities, while boys tended to outscore the girls in the Sciences and especially in Mathematics (OECD, 2010:7). This is not the case in many African L2 MoI contexts (see Hungi & Thuku, 2010).

Literacy development in the L2 MoI has shown to be dependent on a number of factors. In an extensive study on variations in reading achievements across 14 Southern African school systems, which included the Seychelles, it was found that pupils who spoke the MoI at home more often were estimated to achieve better when compared with pupils who rarely or never spoke the MoI at home. This was found to be the case in all school systems investigated except in Lesotho (Hungi and Thuku, 2010:81). In this context it is important to note that the use of the MoI, such as English, in the home setting is related to socioeconomic factors; the well-educated middle classes are likely to use English, while the less privileged are less likely to do so. Further, Janks (2011) points to the importance of the orthographic systems of the mother tongue and the L2 in the literacy learning process. She makes the distinction between the generally phonemic African language orthographies and the non-phonemic English orthography, concluding that for a learner to move from literacy in a phonemic language to literacy in a non-phonemic language like English (or French) is “difficult and confusing.” This process is further complicated by English’s many vowel distinctions, which may be difficult to pronounce and hear, especially if the learner’s home language does not have these distinctions (Janks, 2011:29).

2.2.1 A foreign MoI and its impact on Seychellois learners

There has been limited research investigating L2 MoI effects on teaching, learning and examination in our schools to date. There are, however, indications that the MoI may be linked to problems in the education system: based on their SAQMEC study of English reading achievements in 14 African nations, for example, Hungi & Thuki (2010:63) conclude that Seychelles had among the greatest within-school inequity of the investigated nations. Since English is the MoI, this inequity is likely to impact on other subjects. A number of factors contribute this general indication of inequity.

For instance, Hungi & Thuki’s study shows that the Seychelles had one of the largest differences in reading scores between rich and poor pupils of the 14 nations investigated. These results may in turn be directly related to revealed differences in reading achievement between pupils who spoke English more frequently at home and those that rarely did so. Here, the Seychelles results displayed the greatest differences of all the nations in the study (Hungi & Thuki, 2010:81). In the same SAQMEC study, Hungi & Thuki, (2010:85) conclude that the Seychelles had the greatest gender differences in reading abilities of all the investigated nations and girls greatly outperformed boys. They link this result to possible cultural differences, especially in the roles that boys and girls as supposed to play within the school system. These findings correlate with results from the African Development Bank Report on Seychelles (African Development Bank, 2009:8), which show that girls outperformed boys in all subjects across the curriculum in the national primary and secondary exams from 2000-2008, with a mean difference of more than 10 per cent. This may be also directly be related to the L2 MoI since, as mentioned above, it is generally acknowledged that boys have a harder time learning languages. Gender and social class related differences in MoI proficiency will have an immediate impact on students’ overall performance since limited knowledge of English means limited access to the teaching and learning materials in all the other subjects.

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Table 1: Percentage Mean Scores in Primary 6 by Subject for the Past Eight Years
other words, the current system risks unintentionally preserving and even accentuating structural inequities. The wish to provide exclusive international education inadvertently excludes large parts of the population. A closer examination of recent reports from the primary six national exams from 2009 to 2013 confirms the above trends. Girls are still outperforming boys in all the subjects, especially in the three national languages and Mathematics, where the mean difference is still above ten per cent. This gender distribution diverges from the findings from the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), where the boys tend to outperform girls in Mathematics (OECD, 2010:7). The results from reports indeed suggest that the general level of proficiency in English is problematic. In 2012, the national mean for English stood at 39.7 per cent, which showed a significant drop from the previous year’s results. Approximately 16 per cent of the candidates were ungraded. 2013s results were equally alarming and the means in Mathematics and Science show similar decreases, raising the issue further as to whether or not it is the L2 MoI situation that may be partly to blame. The comparatively poor results in English compared to the other two national languages in the national exams since 2006 are clearly of concern (see Table 1).

With specific reference to writing, the National 2012 Primary Six Exam Report (Ministry of Education, 2012) describes this component as an exercise that continues to present the greatest challenge for many candidates. In 2013, the situation did not improve much. According to the examination report the results for both the English Reading and Writing papers “do not look good” (Ministry of Education, 2013:15). For instance, most candidates chose narrative compositions instead of the more challenging argumentative ones, and a majority of students are described as lacking the required vocabulary and analytical skills to complete the tasks. Undeveloped ideas and poor language accuracy are noted in the report, and sentences were often incomplete and lacked adjectives and adverbs. Weaknesses of this type have been reported repeatedly over the past eight years in the writing component. The report points to a close relationship between the children’s performance in reading and writing, and concludes that “if there is no reading taking place in a pupil’s studious life then it is hard to imagine how that pupil can perform to expected standard in his/her writing at all, and in all three languages” (Ministry of Education, 2013:17).

The problems identified in the national primary exams seem to persist in the system onto secondary levels. The 2013 Secondary Five National Examination Report (Ministry of Education, 2014) reveals poor performance in English and especially in writing at a crucial period in their educational pathway that decides what kind of institutions or work places that the students will eventually be associated with. For their writing exams the students had to write a short composition in English of 120 to 150 words choosing from descriptive, narrative or argumentative topics. Only 1 candidate out of 181 scored 8 out of 10 for the composition. Alarmingly more than 50 per cent of the candidates did not score any mark for content and only 12 per cent of the candidates managed to score satisfactory marks this component of the composition. According to the report, only 8 per cent had a good command of the language, and the majority of compositions were marred by mistakes such as spelling, inappropriate expressions, improper use of tenses and syntax. There were even instances where the mother tongue was used, an interesting phenomenon meriting further investigation. In summary, only 13 per cent of the candidates managed to score satisfactory marks for the writing exercise.

Given the particularly alarming results in the writing papers both at P6 and S5 levels, this aspect of literacy is of particular interest when investigating L2 MoI issues in the Seychelles. Research has shown that the degree of proficiency in the L2 is an important factor deciding whether writers can draw on these skills or not (Fumihiko 2009; Yigzaw 2013), and also that writing skills are transferred from the L1 to the L2 (Lindgren, Spelman & Sullivan 2008; Yigzaw 2013). This poses special challenges in the Seychelles where: a) L1 writing skills rarely are fully developed since they are only taught over a limited time in primary school, and b) proficiency in English varies greatly. Are Seychellois children really equipped to communicate their knowledge in written English? As Clegg (2007:42) puts it: “if we assess children in a second language it may not tell us what they know”.

2.3 A foreign MoI and its impact on teaching

At the centre of the ‘language-in-education’ debate lies the educator. According to Benson (2010:204), teaching in a multilingual context is more challenging than mono-lingual teaching. Teachers in multilingual contexts have to master several professional roles: pedagogue, linguist, intercultural communicator, and a multilingual speaker (Benson 2010:209). They “must navigate unique pedagogical, social and cultural situations” (Kibler & Roman 2013:188). Clearly this is tall order, especially in Sub-Saharan African contexts where there are great shortages of physical and human resources.

Many authors accentuate the absence of necessary support from educational bodies causing unplanned and unsupported bilingual education without any theoretical basis in many parts of Africa. Clegg & Afitska (2011:61), for example, point to the relative absence in teacher training “of the specialist pedagogy which learners with low ability in the medium of instruction require,” while other researchers emphasize the absence of in-service training resulting in a lack of professional development (Kibler & Roman 2013:188; Benson, 2010). Instead, they rely heavily on their personal knowledge, beliefs and previous experiences (Kibler & Roman 2013:190), which, if not founded on sound pedagogical and theoretical grounds,
simply may involve the transmission of past errors to their learners.

Unclear and changeable policies regarding MoI also cause challenges for teachers. Many African nations have adopted models whereby the L1 is the MoI during the first two or three years of education but its role after this is often less clear-cut. Policies also tend to change rapidly depending on the political climate. In the Seychelles, for example, the role of Seychelles Creole in education was strengthened up until 1996 after which it has gradually weakened (Fleischmann 2008). On the whole, there is also evidence that there is certain official resistance to bi/multilingual education in many parts of Africa, even to the extent that it is formally condemned by some authorities, who still advocate submersion-type teaching in which the L2 MoI is the sole accepted medium of communication (Clegg & Afitska, 2011:61). In the absence of clear policies and lack of directives as to how they should be implemented, “teachers in Africa tend to generate their own creative bilingual practices” according to Clegg and Afitska (2011:61). Great variation in the implementation of language policies have been reported from classrooms in the Maldives (Mohamed, 2013), Kenya and Nigeria (Abd-Kadir & Hardman 2007), Tanzania (Mwinsheikhe 2009), and Zanzibar (Clegg & Afitska 2011), and strategies range from pure L2 teaching to frequent code mixing and code switching.

The range of observed MoI strategies may not always be motivated by student needs. To most teachers, the MoI is a second or even third language and thus their linguistic reservoir may be shallow (Prophet & Badeed 2006:238). In his study of the Maldives, Mohamed (2013:198) found that the majority of investigated teachers did not teach in the language they were most comfortable with; most of the teachers’ had superior reading writing and oral skills in their L1 compared to English (L2), and there were frequent observations of teacher language errors in spoken and written English. Mohamed (2013:198) speculates that inadequate language skills may have contributed to a greater teacher focus on the end product rather than the actual learning process. Strategies to hide and overcome language shortcomings may include learning and using long stretches of pre-rehearsed talk (Clegg & Afitska 2011:63), as well as adopting patterns of translating sentences into the L1 (Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir 2003). Overall, limited language skills may well result in less flexible teaching.

In their study of teaching and learning in more than two languages in African classrooms (Clegg & Afitska, 2011), the authors concluded that L2 MoI contexts were characterized by teacher-led plenary talk, where the teacher does all the talking and pupils simply take notes or copy text from the blackboard; so-called IRF-talk, characterized by long teacher initiation turns, followed by short student responses after which teachers give long feedback, and safetalk, characterized by single word or short phrase chorus responses (Chick, 1996). In all of these forms of teacher-talk, the main output focus is on the teacher, while the cognitive and linguistic demands on the learners are reduced to a minimum. Typically teachers use low-challenge questions where the students can respond briefly without having to think too much about how and what to respond. In contrast, the authors found that so-called exploratory talk, often less formal and more dialogic in nature, is relatively rare. Clegg & Afitska speculate that limited L2 proficiency among the learners may be one key factor leading to this state of affairs, and since L1 usage, in many cases a prerequisite for fruitful exploratory talk, is “frowned upon” (2011:70) this option is not used.

### 2.3.1 English MoI and its Impact on teaching in the Seychelles

Seychellois teachers, especially those at primary level, face a mammoth task of delivering in a multilingual context. Almost all of them are second language speakers of the MoI, with a limited number having received their training in an English speaking country like England or Australia. The SACMEQ research from 2005 (Leste et al., 2005) shows that there were relatively few graduate teachers in primary schools. Only 6.3 per cent of the pupils benefitted from an English teacher who had graduate degree qualifications and there were several regions where there were no graduate English teachers at all (Leste et al. 2005:151). Although things have improved slightly in recent years, this state of affairs is particularly alarming given that teachers are expected to play the role of pedagogue, linguist, intercultural communicator, and a multilingual speaker, clearly very qualified work. Analysing the results of tests in Maths and Reading performed by the teachers, the same study (SACMEQ 2005:192) reveals that while mathematics teachers performed much above average in their vocational specialty (i.e. in Maths), the same was not true for language teachers (i.e. in Reading). The report concludes that it might be because the mathematics teachers are seen as specialists whereas language teachers tend to be generalists, and have to teach other subjects as well. This is worrying given that the English MoI context requires skilled language teachers.

Moumou’s (2004) study of critical literacy in the Seychelles classroom arguably, gives an indication that the teaching skills of language teachers is an area that needs special attention. According to Moumou (2004:47) text analysis in the English classrooms generally centers on a very controlled teacher initiation-student response-evaluation procedure, similar to the IRF pattern discussed in section 2.3. Students’ responses were limited to mere factual reproduction and they were not encouraged to apply higher order language skills such as evaluating, discussion and critical analysis. Our own classroom observations (Deutschmann forthcoming) supports Moumou’s findings.
Exploratory talk was virtually absent in primary school teaching, where there was a clear teacher focus with long stretches of plenary talk, IRF patterns and several examples of safetalk. Code switching, i.e. the use of SC as a support language in teaching at primary level, was also very rare.

2.4 Alternative models of integrating foreign Mols in teaching

The traditional transition model, where the mother tongue is replaced quite abruptly as Mol and is then totally excluded from the educational context, has been widely challenged (see Benson 2010). Siegel (2005:149) argues that this practice downgrades the importance of literacy in the first language, which merely becomes “a means of acquiring literacy in the European official language(s)”. Various models for approaching challenges regarding Mol in education have been suggested.

Hungi & Thuku (2010:92), in their study of reading achievements in 14 African nations, propose models that comprise involving parents and older siblings to increase exposure to the L2. At the same time they recognize an inherent conflict in the model since “the schools are expected to maintain pupils’ interest in other national languages.” Various models for approaching challenges regarding Mol in education have been suggested.

On a more general level, they also propose “special home intervention projects [...] whereby the teachers are trained how to change the parental and older siblings behaviors in the home so that the children receive more encouragement and support for studying.” (92).

Other researchers have proposed that a less monolingual approaches to Mol may be a way forward to improve the learning situation. In the case of Mauritius, Sauzier-Uchida (2009) has shown that when the Mol was a mixture of English, French and Creole, all of the respondents were satisfied, owing to the fact that they understood the subjects better using all their linguistic resources at hand. This model also meant that teachers could choose the language they were most fluent in, which will have made their teaching more efficient (Sauzier-Uchida 2009:116). Benson (2010:215) advocates a move away from the “one teacher–one classroom model”, and proposes coordination between subject teachers and language teachers in so-called team teaching. An example given is the work teams (arbetslag) as used in Sweden, for example, where subject teachers, mother-tongue teachers and second-language teachers coordinate their efforts to teach theme-based units, where each teacher provides part of the knowledge and skills base (Baker, 2001). The use of classroom language aides and pair teaching are other alternatives. This would allow students to identify certain teachers with certain languages, and make maximum use of their various competences.

Prophet and Bedede (2006:237) propose a so-called “maintenance model” in which the child’s first language is used initially for instruction, where the L2 is then added gradually as the medium of instruction parallel to the first language, and where both languages serve as instructional tools throughout education. This provides an alternative to the transition model, where the mother tongue is replaced quite abruptly as Mol, and is then totally excluded from the educational context.

Some models have suggested a more content related approach to literacy. Draper (2002:382), for example, proposes cross-disciplinary projects that seek to consider content-specific literacy issues related to the differences in discourses, texts, language, and so forth across subject areas. Prophet & Bedede (2006) argue that the language in tests in subjects such as mathematics and science should be adapted to learners’ proficiency levels, and claim that “simplifying various linguistic factors in questions does improve performance, sometimes quite significantly.” (Prophet & Bedede 2006:248).

Overall, many researchers call for a pedagogy which more “closely calibrated to the conditions in African classrooms” (Clegg & Afitska 2011:74), where the emphasis lies in preparing teachers to support their learners working in two or more languages. Since language is an integral part of teaching in all subjects in this context, Benson (2010:215-216) proposes an effective bilingual teacher training, which includes multilingualism, interculturalism, biliteracy and “a strong foundation in theories and methodologies of language development (L1, L2, and beyond).” (216).

3. A framework for investigating L2 Mol contexts

Based on the empirical evidence presented in Section 2 above, we propose a framework for more systematic queries into L2 Mol issues, which focuses on what we perceive to be key issues of concern.
3.1 Theoretical base

The proposed framework takes a general sociocultural approach to L2 Mol in education. According to Vygotsky’s view, “learning and development are socially and culturally situated,” and “are mediated by language and other symbols, and can be best understood in the context of their historical development” (Davidson 2010:249). Sociocultural approaches to learning and literacy have long played an important role in the literacy field (Perry 2012:51). These include the Social Practice (Street, 1985) approach to literacy, which is of particular interest to this framework. The approach goes beyond autonomous models of literacy that conceptualize it in strictly technical and cognitive terms. Davidson (2010:246) argues that “such a narrow cognitive perspective of literacy development risks perpetuating social inequalities that stem from social and cultural diversity.” In contrast, the Social Practice model connects to how literacy is shaped by values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships including power, and how these permeate the classroom and filtrate into speech communities in society (Perry 2012:54). In the same light, Purcell-Gates et al. (2011:247) argue that the influences of familial and cultural communities on literacy development should be considered in order to provide equality in educational access and opportunity for all students. This is particularly relevant for student populations with diverse backgrounds (Davidson 2010:247), characteristic for multilingual and culturally diverse contexts of postcolonial African. The model is summarized in figure 1.

3.2 The framework

As evident from the previous sections, L2 Mol questions are complex. There are a number of issues ranging from policy questions, student profiles, teacher attitudes and teaching strategies as well as societal issues and attitudes that combine in defining the language-in-education situation. Since all of these are interrelated the proposed framework takes a holistic approach where several factors are taken into consideration. These include curriculum and policy issues, learner aspects, teaching strategies, the role of the L1 in the classroom, the school environment and more general societal aspects (see Figure 2).

3.2.1 Curriculum and policy issues

A key area of query here is to what extent the curriculum and policy documents take the role of the of language instruction as a vehicle for learning into account when describing learning goals etc. Specific lines of queries include:

- Do the specific learning goals in English at different stages of schooling match the level needed to access and communicate knowledge in other subject areas?
- Given that students are expected to communicate their knowledge in writing, is there specific attention paid to this area of literacy in the learning goals?
- Another area of interest is the role of the mother tongue in teaching and learning. Key questions include:

References


Deutschmann, M. (forthcoming). In English please! – Teacher Talk and Code Switching in Primary and Secondary Schools in the Seychelles (manuscript not yet established).


• To what extent does the curriculum acknowledge SC as the L1 and its role in general literacy?
• To what extent does the curriculum framework include guidelines for the use of SC as supportive language in post-Primary 2 teaching?

It is our belief that such guidelines are necessary in order for teachers to feel confident to use Creole in the classroom, given that there generally seem to be negative attitudes towards its role in education among teachers (see Fleischmann 2008).

3.2.2 Learner issues

It is clear from previous studies (Hungi & Thuki, 2010; Leste et al. 2005; African Development bank, 2009) that different groups of learners have very different prerequisites in relation to the L2 MoI. Specific questions here include:

• How do the prerequisites for different students differ depending on family background?
• How does the system support these groups and boys’ learning in particular?
• What gaps can be identified between actual knowledge and the ability to communicate this knowledge in English (especially in writing)?
• To what extent does the current system take the individual learning needs of children into account?
• How can we support learners so that they can reach their full learning potential, and so that the medium of instruction does not become a barrier to learning?

3.2.3 Teaching issues

As highlighted in the previous sections, teaching in a foreign language is complex and requires special training and skills. Specific questions include:

• How well prepared are teachers to teach writing in an L2?
• Are they themselves fully proficient in English?
• Are they aware of special issues and methods related to bi/trilingual teaching?
• To what extent are they trained in different types of teacher-talk and do they use the L1 to its full potential to support their students?

3.2.4 The role of the L1 in teaching

The potential role of the L1 in the learning situation should arguably be further explored. As discussed above, given that Seychellois students are first taught to read and write in Creole, the L1 language skills have an enormous impact on general literacy. There are many alternative models to the current transition model (where the L1 is replaced abruptly after Primary 2) that could be explored. Note that these models do not exclude the use of English as medium of instruction, but rather that the language in which this takes place, at the center of any classroom activity. There is great scope for Action Research in this area of inquiry.

3.2.5 The school environment

Queries into how the school environment affects the L2 MoI instruction situation most obviously refer to infrastructural questions, such as the availability of learning materials, ICT, language labs etc. Equally important is the professional culture, informal rules and codes that may affect the language situation. What are the attitudes towards multilingual teaching, for example? Is there any systematic communication and collaboration between language teachers and subject teachers so that students’ potential language problems can be identified and dealt with?

3.2.6 Out-of-school factors

The exposure to English outside the school context is of great interest. Television, Internet and various social media are obvious factors that will contribute to extramural learning. In addition, tourism is a part of every-day life in the Seychelles and there is plenty of opportunity for face-to-face meetings where English is used as a lingua franca. Are these potentials fully exploited by the schools?

3.2.7 Societal issues

The status of the various languages in question in society in general will have a decisive impact on attitudes towards their use in teaching. Similarly, language-in-education policies will also affect attitudes of languages in society. Bossong (1980) presents two models, the ‘recessive’ and the ‘expansive’ cycles, which can be the ultimate outcome of different language policies. On the one hand, lack of promotion of a local language in education, the sciences, finance etc. gives fuel to those that claim that the language is unfit for formal purposes, thereby further diminishing its role, motivating added restrictions to the domains where it is used, ultimately, leaving it in a very weak position, at worst as an oral vernacular. On the other hand, language policies that recognise a local language’s role in education, the media, science etc. and fuel efforts to promote its use in official contexts will raise its status, leading to further motivation for expanding its role etc. According to Bossong, active use of a language in all domains, including education, the media, science and technology, is a prerequisite for its long-term survival and growth.

Unfortunately, there is evidence that local languages in many parts of Africa are experiencing recessive cycle development. In their study of four African nations, Idris et al. (2007) conclude that L1s share similar low status, being confined to very limited public domains such as lower primary education, religion and oral media. The same seems to be true for the Seychelles, where there is evidence that SC has yet to find its role in government administration, a result of colonial tradition, and Mahbourne (2000:n.p) points to the fact that while most Seychellois are proud of their mother tongue “they will subconsciously associate development with French and English.” Particularly noteworthy in this context is that teachers seem to be particularly negative towards its promotion in education (Fleischman 2008:130). It is obviously important to be aware of such attitudes before embarking on any language-in-education reforms.
4. Summary and conclusions

Evidence from various nations in the region, as well as the Seychelles itself, shows that current L2 Mol practice is a likely contributor to observed inequity in education and may also have a direct negative impact on the quality of education. There are several factors that have to be the considered when exploring this complex language-in-education formula. These include the policy document that steer the systems as well as how these policies are translated into daily practice; the students and their prerequisites for accessing the language of instruction, but also their ability to communicate their knowledge through this language; the teacher situation and how teachers are supported to cope with the complexities of multilingual teaching, and last but not least the general attitudes towards the languages in question that prevail in society as a whole.

There are no easy answers as how to solve problems related to Mol in the region. Totally abandoning former colonial languages such as English in education is not an option in the era of globalization, but we also need to recognize that current systems, which do not recognize the potential value of the use of local mother tongues in the class room are not working for large parts of the population – the learning potential of the population is simply not being realized. While we recognize that there are no easy answers, it is perhaps time to look at empirical evidence and to start asking the right questions; an informed framework for approaching the “language question” is thus well motivated. We hope that this will be a valuable contribution.

References

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