

# Transition from Setswana to English: A Policy Dilemma

Eureka Mokibelo  
University of Botswana, Botswana

**Abstract**—This paper examines learners' transition from Setswana in Standard One to English at Standard Two in line with the implementation of the language-in-education policy in selected Botswana primary schools. Using data from classroom observations, open ended questionnaires and interviews, this paper scrutinizes the effectiveness of such transition especially where learners do not speak both languages of instruction. The transitional education model is used as a theoretical framework for this paper to better understand how transition could be done from one language to another. The findings of this study indicate that transition from Setswana medium of instruction to English medium is taken for granted and is overlooked by key agents of the policy and supervisors and therefore it is not monitored and supervised. The conclusion is that the period of transition is critical and sensitive. As a result, teachers and supervisors; both internal and external should have the necessary delivery skills and support to enable them to go through that critical period with less anxiety.

**Index Terms**—transition, micro planning, language-in-education policy, implementation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the global world's linguistic diversity, language-in-education policies remain limited to using one national language as a language of instruction especially in Africa. Therefore, decisions about language-in-education policies in the classrooms usually attract informal, unstructured and unplanned practices by policy agents. These internal decisions (micro language planning) are often initiated and driven from bottom-up in response to concerns about local indigenous languages; it addresses the language needs of the displaced learners in the classrooms (Jones, 2012). Micro language planning is undertaken by teachers in the classrooms as a vehicle for teaching and it focuses on what is happening on the ground. In most cases, it takes place as teachers make decisions in an attempt to translate policy to practice (Baldauf, 2008). While in some primary schools in Botswana teachers conform to the policy by using the national language others defy the policy and use English only (Jones, 2012). The latter occurs due to tensions that arise between the macro-level policy and the micro situation and thus teachers conform or resist the policy by doing what best suits their learners (Baldauf, 2006). Scholars have observed that language policies especially those from top-down present a number of challenges in the classrooms thus proving that the theory conflicts with the realities of the classrooms. For example, in most African countries planners and politicians claim that national unity are some of the aims of language planning and therefore choose an indigenous language spoken by an elite minority to be used as an official language and medium of instruction (Sukumane, 2000). South Africa has eleven regional languages which have a national and official status, but English has retained its position as the language of education, government and business (Banda, 2009). In Pakistan, the Urdu medium schools are mainly for the public sector catering for the lower income and children study in poor resourced classrooms which have little or no exposure to English (Shanim, 2011). Kenya too uses Kiswili as a medium of instruction during the first four years of education. Other indigenous languages are used alongside, but Kiswili is not a first language to all Kenyans and therefore teachers impose it on the learners (Jones, 2012).

All cited cases above cause constraints in various circumstances because the languages used for instruction are not used as home languages by the other student population – especially ethnic minority groups, leading to inequalities, lack of access to information and communication breakdown in classrooms. Further, the government does not commit itself to produce materials in the national languages or in indigenous languages to enable smooth teaching and learning. Also, the government does not train enough teachers to teach the indigenous languages and they are given a low status in the country states. In some cases teachers and learners do not speak the same languages and teachers end up imposing their languages on learners. Again, the speakers of the languages look down upon their own languages and prefer English even if they do not have enough exposure to it. The critical point here is that the national languages are used under the pretext that all, if not most citizens, speak them as first languages and yet African countries are multilingual. Since transition from one language to another is about change, it involves well trained teachers in language competence and methodological skills, well organized in-service training, well-structured curriculum, suitable and motivating teaching materials and quality assurance measures (Nikolov & Curtain, 2000). The goal of such transitional programmes is to promote transitioning students with support they need to effectively move from instruction in their native language to instruction mostly in English and to adjust to a new culture (August, 2002). Therefore regardless of the nature and timing of the transition, if it is not handled with care, it can be problematic for the learners (Ramirez, 1992). These

circumstances are constructed in the image of Western countries and retain the colonial heritage which associates African languages to tradition and culture rather than socio-economic development and mobility (Banda, 2009). In this regard, the language planning becomes ill conceived and poorly informs policies thus resulting in negative impacts on ethnic minority groups (Centre for Applied Linguistics, 2016).

The issue of transition in this paper is raised as a concern because Botswana government has adopted the assimilation approach in which speakers of languages other than Setswana must assimilate into the culture of Setswana speaking groups (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2000; 2004). Hence, speakers of other languages are prohibited from using their languages in the classrooms while they are assimilated to Setswana for national unity and identity and English. This scenario springs from the view that language diversity is viewed as a problem than a resource in Botswana (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2000; 2004). In Botswana, the language-in-education policy states that, at Standard One, Setswana be used as a medium of instruction while English is taught as a subject. At Standard Two, the two subjects switch positions; English becomes the medium of instruction while Setswana is taught as a subject (Revised National Policy on Education, 1994). In the field of language education, this is transition and transition is about change or shift from one language to another especially at primary schooling. At primary school level in Botswana, children start learning in Setswana at Standard One. At Standard Two, transition takes place from Setswana medium to English medium of instruction. With such changes between languages taking place within a short period of time, such transition could be problematic especially with some learners who learn both languages of instruction for the first time at school as second or third languages. Therefore, their situation may be different from that of learners who speak Setswana as a first language and English as a second language. Such heterogeneous classrooms may need close monitoring and supervision and appropriate learning and teaching strategies that would enable them to go through a smooth transition.

Transition in this paper is problematical because the learners in rural areas do not speak Setswana as a home language and also, some of the teachers are not competent in the language to guide the learners in the sounds, syntax and morphology of the language. Therefore, both the teachers and learners may not have a common language to use for teaching and learning process thus making the process a daunting task. In such a situation learners grapple with the structure of the language as well as the content and this could delay transition if it has to take place only after one year school calendar of learning the language. In urban primary schools where there are foreigners, transition from Setswana to English may not occur because teachers prefer to use English instead of Setswana because of the presence of foreigners, immigrants and learners who have been to preschool. The circumstances described here are in order for teachers to make constant decisions of which language to use to assist learners. Both circumstances in rural and urban primary schools are determined by different reasons to do micro language planning.

## II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Botswana is a multicultural and multilingual state situated in Southern Africa. It shares borders with Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa and Namibia and therefore landlocked. The land area is 582 000 square kilometres. Botswana has a population of 2 024 904 (Population and Housing Census, 2011). The estimated number of languages is twenty eight (Batibo, 2005). With her multilingualism status, Botswana language-in-education policy has always favoured the use of Setswana while English is given a high status over Setswana. English is the official language while Setswana is the national language. Setswana is the most dominant language as it is spoken by about 80% of the population as a lingua franca (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004).

At independence in 1966, there was no clear policy on the languages of instruction. However, English was used as a medium of instruction even though most of the teachers were not proficient in it. As a result, there was a lot of code switching from Setswana to English and vice versa by the teachers in classrooms. In this regard, more attention was given to English than Setswana. Later, the general view was that Setswana as a national language was neglected and a position was taken to give it a prominent place in the education system. Under the leadership of the first president of Botswana, all ethnic minority languages used in schools were banned and Setswana was elevated to promote national unity and identity. Some ethnic groups such as Bayei and Ikalanga and Batswapong complained that their languages were not recognized as media of instruction and formed associations where they could be represented as one voice (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004).

The second president also pleaded with the nation not to spoil the peace and unity in the country. He also emphasized the use of Setswana as a national language and as a language that unifies the different ethnic groups in Botswana. In 1977, a National Commission on Education was tasked to review the previous policy. The commission recommended that Setswana be used as a medium of instruction from Standard One to Standard Four while English is taught as a subject. The two subjects changed positions at Standard Five where English became the medium of instruction and Setswana was taught as a subject (National Commission on Education, 1977). Soon there were complaints that learners started using English late despite being the language of the examinations. It was argued that starting learning English late led to poor performance by learners in examinations (Revised National Policy on Education report, 1993).

In 1993, a second commission was appointed to review the policy. The commission recommended that Setswana be used as a medium of instruction in Standard One while English is taught as a subject. In Standard Two, the two subjects switch positions; English becomes the medium of instruction while Setswana is taught as a subject (report of the Revised National Policy on Education, 1993). All these policies are silent about the use of indigenous languages as

media of instruction. In this regard, at primary school level, learners who speak different home languages from Setswana struggle to understand the concepts in Setswana and its structure and another burden is added in Standard Two when English becomes a medium of instruction. It is the switch to English from Setswana that was of interest to this paper to find out how it was done especially with learners who had not yet mastered the national language at Standard One and then change to English in Standard Two.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

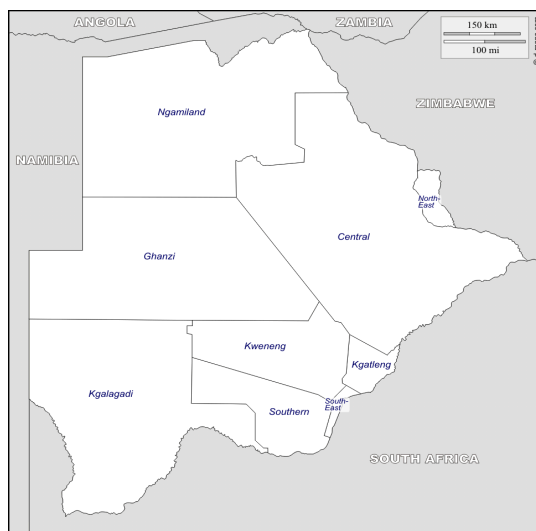
This paper uses the transitional bilingual education model as its theoretical framework. The model is committed to addressing the unique circumstances of learners from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds and to help them achieve high content and performance standards expected of all learners. The transitional bilingual education model serves as a bridge for learners, helping them move from their native language to English (Cummins, 2000). The programme helps learners to become proficient in English. The programme teaches concepts and knowledge in the primary language of a learner, while the student also acquires English language skills (Cummins, 2000)

Learners receive special assistance from teachers when they learn how to speak, listen, read and write in English. Teachers provide oral development, literacy and content area instruction based upon learners’ assessment and classroom performance (Cummins, 2000). Teachers have to integrate core curriculum with English language instruction. They modify core curriculum and instruction in order to facilitate the development of English language skills and meaningful learners’ participation in content subjects. Therefore, it is important for educators to revisit schools and identify guiding principles for such an instruction. In the cases that are used in this paper, some students, especially in rural primary schools, start school speaking different home languages, as thus, they do not start learning in their native languages as it is anticipated. Therefore, the transitional model could be a real challenge to teachers and learners because even teachers may not speak the learners’ native languages, thus making communication between learners and teachers a complex and difficult process. Furthermore, the period of transition is pivotal to subsequent levels and achievement. Also, very little literature provides evidence on the effectiveness of curriculum and pedagogy and the transitional period. Therefore, the transitional programmes are inadequate in most cases. In this regard, transitional programmes can work only if there are well articulated practices and procedures for implementation to help learners acquire critical knowledge and skills.

### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative as it sought to understand how teachers and school management attempted to understand and interpret the language-in-education policy especially transition from Setswana in Standard One to English in Standard Two classes. In this regard, the objectives of the study were to investigate the views of the teachers and school management on the implementation of the language-in-education policy in ethnically and linguistically complex classrooms, explore the implementation strategies used, examine the challenges encountered in the implementation process and establish how the challenges were addressed. The idea was to capture live experiences of teachers as agents of the policy on the transition as articulated by the language-in-education policy.

The study was conducted in six districts out of the possible nine as indicated in the map provided below: Ngamiland, North East, Kweneng, South East, Kgalagadi, and Central. The districts were chosen because of their complex linguistic and ethnic diversity. Therefore, this diversity in the regions will also reflect in the primary schools. The districts are spread across the country and this gave the researcher an idea on how transition from Setswana to English was perceived and practiced in these different districts that are wide apart.



Source: <https://www.botswana+districts+and+subdistricts&sa>  
 Figure 1. Botswana main districts

Within the six districts, six primary schools were identified for research which were heterogenous. In the primary school in the Ngamiland district, 40% of the learners spoke Otjiherero, 30% spoke different San languages such as //Ani, Buga and Kaukau (Ju |'hoasi)., 20% spoke different Shekgalagari dialects and 10% spoke Setswana. In North East district primary school, 90% of the learners spoke Ndebele while only 10% spoke Ikalanga. Learners in the Kweneng district primary school, 50% of the learners spoke different San languages such as Kua (// Gana); Khute (/ Gui); Cua (Hoan), 40% spoke different dialects of Shekgalagari, and 8% of the learners spoke a pidgin of Setswana and Shekgalagari and 2% spoke Setswana. In Gaborone district, which is the capital city of Botswana, learners came from different countries of the world and different parts of the country. Some were Tanzanian, Zimbabweans, British, Ghanaian, Zambians, Malawians, Malaysians and other different ethnic groups such as Bakalaka, Bakgalagadi, Baherero, Bayei, Bambukushu, Bazeduru whose parents were working in the city. But some of the learners spoke and understood Setswana. Important to note is that learners would speak English as a first language because parents were also elites and educated and therefore exposed their children to preschool education where the medium of instruction was English. Again, parents spoke to their children in English at home.

In the Kgalagadi district, learners spoke Afrikaans, Nama, Shengologa, Otjiherero, Setlharo, Shekgalagari and San languages such as Nama, !Xóǀ. Lastly, in the Central district, learners came from different parts of Africa; they were from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia and different parts of Botswana where Setswana is not spoken as a first language such as Bazeduru and Baherero. Again, it is important to note that the majority of Batswana in the Central district spoke Setswana as a lingua franca. Other Batswana spoke different dialects of Setswana such as Batswapong and Babirwa, Therefore, in all the six primary schools, classes were heterogeneous.

The key participants in the study were teachers because they had first-hand information which they got from the classrooms; they were in a position to state their views on transition, what their challenges were and how they addressed the challenges. Other participants were the school management because they were the immediate supervisors of the teachers and were in a position to share how they monitored and supervised the transitional period as a sensitive period. Further, the school management knew their catchment areas and the languages spoken in the different catchment areas and therefore could account for how transition was handled in a special way looking at the heterogeneity of the classrooms. Lastly, it was also important to see how learners responded to transition from Setswana to English through by examining their exercise books and observing them in classrooms.

Data were collected using various instruments for triangulation. For example, the researcher used classroom observations, interviews, open ended questionnaires and field notes. The triangulation of methods painted a clear picture on how transition was done by teachers in Standard Two classrooms. Open ended questionnaires were used so that teachers could provide as much information as possible on transition. The open ended questionnaires were followed by classroom observations to confirm what teachers said in the open ended questionnaires. Classroom observations were done after issuing open ended questionnaires to observe how transition is handled and confirm the teachers' views about it. Also, the idea was to see how learners responded to transition. Interviews were used to answer the questions 'how' and 'why' that were structured in the interview. The interviews were also used to close the gaps left by open ended questionnaires and classroom observations. School management were issued with open ended questionnaires and interviewed about how they assisted the transitional period.

Classroom observations were done in the mornings before break time and immediately after break up to one o'clock to observe different subjects taught in English. Lessons were allocated a period of thirty minutes or one hour if it is a double lesson. The researcher would observe a Mathematics lesson taught in Setswana with teachers having difficulties to explain some of the mathematical concepts that were difficult to explain in Setswana in Standard One classes. In Standard Two where the medium of instruction is English, teachers would find it difficult to teach in English subjects such as Science and Creative And Performing Arts. Afternoons were used for interviews to avoid interrupting lessons during teaching time. The interviews were also done in the afternoons to follow up on what transpired during lesson time.

Data were coded, interpreted and analyzed according to primary schools and regions. Each primary school was given an alphabetical code. For example, the school and region that were studied first were given code A and the ones that followed were given B, C, D, E and F. The school that was studied first was set as a yardstick for others; the themes identified in other primary schools were plotted under similar themes identified in school A under each key research question. Data were read and reread to search for major and minor themes. Any variations, similarities and differences observed in various primary schools and regions were followed up for clarifications where necessary. The theme of transition from Setswana to English in Standard Two classes emerged as one of the major themes as it was one of the pivotal points in policy implementation. The description given on transition in Standard Two classes was detailed and painted a clear picture of the policy intentions that did not match the realities of the classrooms. All the other levels of primary school such as Standard One, Four and Seven will not be used for this discussion because transition takes place at Standard Two only which is the focus of this paper. After data collection in each primary school, a meeting was held with all staff members to share the results of the research with them. This was a way of validating the data.

## V. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### Teachers and Transition

Transition at Standard Two was reported differently in different schools by teachers. Teachers in four rural primary schools reported that they did not change the language of instruction from Setswana to English at Standard Two. The verbatim that followed were derived from their interviews with the researcher. In school A, one teacher at Standard Two said, *“English is an additional problem to what they already have from Standard One and therefore I do not use it. At Standard Two level, learners would not have mastered Setswana and therefore, English becomes another burden. In this respect, learners struggle with the structure of the two languages of instruction and the concepts.”* In school B, one teacher said, *“I use Setswana to teach other subjects that are taught in English because at term two learners are beginning to understand some Setswana words and therefore introducing English as a medium of instruction will only drive them away from school. I introduce it slowly because there are a lot of signs that they cannot follow the languages of instruction, so why use a language the learners fail to understand?”* In school C, one teacher said, *“the only learners who can understand English in my class are learners who speak Afrikaans and they are only five in my class. Afrikaans is closer to English. It will take the rest of the learners many years to construct an English sentence.”* In school D the teacher said, *“I do not use English in my class, the learners are still struggling with Setswana, talking to them in English is like I am talking to myself. I have to use three languages; I say the concepts in Setswana, Ikalanga and then ask them what it means in Ndebele. Therefore, English alone is not possible to use in this class.”* This is what was said by teachers of Standard Two regarding the introduction of English as a medium of instruction. The verbatim indicates that transition was not followed and the reasons were different from one classroom to another.

Also, during classroom observations the researcher observed that in the four rural primary schools, transition was complicated by the fact that teachers lacked appropriate vocabulary in English. Teachers could not clearly express themselves in English and therefore relied too much on code-switching and code mixing Setswana and English. Although teachers code switched between English and Setswana, it was because they spoke Setswana as either a first or a second language, not that learners understood Setswana. In this regard, the use of English was very minimal. It should be noted that the use of Setswana at Standard Two was against what the policy stipulates, the policy states that English should be the language of instruction. Again, teachers who studied English at degree level, could not come down to the level of learners in Standard Two and it was difficult for learners to follow. Consequently, in rural primary schools, learners asked for permission to go out frequently which disturbed the smooth progression of the lesson. This movement could also be an indication of boredom or lack of concentration and interest in the lessons taught because the language of transition was a problem.

In urban primary schools, teachers reported that the change from Setswana to English at Standard Two presented challenges as well. Contrary to what teachers in rural primary schools said, teachers in urban primary schools reported that they used English at Standard One even to teach Breakthrough to Setswana programme and this was also observed during classroom observations. There was an exception only in one Standard One class in school F where teachers followed Setswana language of instruction in her class due to learners who did not have preschool background. In school E, one Standard Two the teacher said, *“I use both English and Setswana because there are learners who do not understand English; these are learners who have been transferred from other schools. But most of the learners speak and understand English. The transfers are from different parts of the country and some of them who attended in rural areas, have no preschool background.”* In school F, the Standard Two teacher said, *“some learners have a problem of understanding and comprehending English. These are learners, who have not been to preschool, have been transferred from neighbouring villages and learners who lack parental care. Some of the learners did not breakthrough to either Setswana or English, so I cannot totally use English.”* In urban primary schools, during classroom observations, the researcher observed that teachers used English. English was also used in Standard One where the medium of instruction was supposed to be Setswana. In school E, there was no transition at all. Learners were taught in English from Standard One.

**Transition and the Standard Two Curriculum**

Most of the teachers in all the primary schools studied reported that Standard Two syllabus was too advanced for the age of the learners and therefore made transition difficult for them and the learners. Some of the concepts taught were ‘Compound Words’ in English, ‘Digestive System’ in Science and ‘Authority Structure’ in CAPA to name a few. A significant number of teachers in rural primary schools claimed that it was difficult to teach learners these concepts in English when it was their first time to use the language as a medium of instruction. Therefore, they used Setswana in most of the lessons and code-switched to English where they could not find appropriate vocabulary to use in Setswana. Most teachers reported that they did not finish the work planned for the day. In essence, the advanced syllabus made transition to English a difficult exercise in rural primary schools. Some of the topics from the Standard Two syllabus are summarized below.

English	Science	CAPA	Mathematics	Cultural
1.Compound words in phrases and longer sentences 2.Phonemes and graphics 3.Storytelling and conversations	1.Parts of a bird 2.Uses of plants 3.Living things and non-living things 4.Digestive system	1.Safety proportions 2.Body persecution	1.Solids as cubes, cuboids and cylinder 2.Capacity weight and mass	1.Child labour 2.Structure of authority in the ward

Figure 2. The Standard Two topics of different subjects

The topics above may be too difficult for Standard Two classes because English had just been introduced as a medium of instruction. When learners were trying to get used to the language, concepts that were advanced were also taught. This means that learners struggled with English and the concepts in all the subjects. They might experience a language shock as well as frustration of not understanding difficult concepts leading to frustration.

#### **School Management and Transition**

School management reported basically the same views as teachers that transition had proved to be difficult and in some schools close to impossible. However, this issue was viewed from different perspectives by school management depending on the location of the school and the linguistic background of learners.

In rural primary schools, school management reported that transition at Standard Two was close to impossible because teachers at this level were still struggling with initiating learners into the Breakthrough to Setswana Programme (a programme that initiates learners into learning the national language – Setswana), and when they were not yet grounded, another language was introduced. According to school management, in these schools, it was difficult to switch to English because learners were still grappling with Setswana. Furthermore, the school management in school D reported that the syllabus for Standard Two was too advanced for the learners because learners were taught concepts that were difficult to comprehend at their age. The school management in primary school D said, *“a topic such as the Digestive System may be too advanced for Standard Two learners as well as the teachers. But it is in the Standard Two syllabus.”* According to the school management, learners were not only grappling with English at Standard Two but also with advanced concepts.

In urban primary schools the school management reported that since they were teaching learners in English, transition was not a problem because in actual fact there was ‘no transition.’ This was contrary to what teachers said because of the difficult concepts in Standard Two. However, the researcher’s view regarding such contradictory views is that the school management did not take transition seriously and therefore seemed not to give it much attention. Interestingly, none of the school management reported ever going to the Standard Two classrooms to observe how transition to English was done. The school management seemed to have limited knowledge on what was going on in transitional classes at Standard Two because they were regarded just like normal classes. In school F where the researcher shared the findings with members of staff in a meeting, the school management said, *“we are not aware that transition from Setswana to English is a problem. This is our first time to hear that in this meeting, but we will sort the problem out with the teachers concerned.”* This comment was an indication that there was limited collaboration between the school management and teachers and that transition was not supervised. In school A, the school management reported that, *“I have not observed the transitional classes because I concentrate on the completing classes. Therefore, I cannot really say much about what happens in these classrooms. All I know is that the learners have difficulty in comprehending English. This is what the teachers told me.”*

In school E, the school management said that *“I am surprised that transition from Setswana to English could give such problems when our learners are already conversant in English from preschool.”* This is another surprise that the school management was not aware that teachers are struggling with the transitional stage. The school management seemed not to have enough background on what was taking place in the Standard Two classes.

#### **The Learners and Transition**

During classroom observation, the researcher observed that the Standard Two classes in rural primary schools were characterized by silence and lack of participation. Some learners refused to write tasks and the suspicion was that they had no language (English) to express themselves in writing. There was also evidence of wrong spellings and serious grammatical errors in their exercise books. Some of the answers provided in their exercise books were wild and did not match the instruction at all. This was an indication that they did not understand English and yet data were collected in the second term of the school calendar. In two rural primary schools, some of the learners cried when they were asked to answer. The crying could be an indication that they had no language to express themselves or they were frustrated.

In urban primary schools, most of the learners had a preschool background where they were taught in English. However, there were still some learners who had difficulties in understanding English. For example, there were few learners from Mozambique and Tanzania who did not speak English but only their home languages. These learners had difficulty in understanding English just like learners in rural primary schools. Other learners who had a problem were those who were transferred from other schools where they had little exposure to English language.

## **VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **An unresponsive policy in both rural and urban primary schools**

It is evident from the findings that teachers were grappling with an unresponsive language-in-education policy in both rural and urban primary schools and hence, it was problematic in both situations. For example, in rural primary schools, it would be logical to believe that teachers were not adhering to the policy; that is, transition was not observed. The transitional model could present itself differently in multiple realities. In cases of this study, the micro language planning decision teachers made not to fully adhere to the policy could be based on various reasons: a) teachers had the interests of the learners at heart and instead of introducing English they used Setswana for better understanding. The reason being that Setswana was the language the learners had learnt for a few months. According to teachers, they could not expect learners to have mastered Setswana in such a short period of time when they only learned it at school; b) the

continuous use of Setswana from Standard One to Standard Two classes contradicted what policy makers planned for initially. This could contribute towards the decline of learners' achievement. However, teachers decided and claimed to use a language that would bring life to their classes and yet some of the learners only heard Setswana for the first time at school and therefore struggled to understand it.

Again, the researcher could not rule out low tolerance for change. It is important to note that even though teachers preferred to use Setswana, it was because it was the language they were comfortable with – their own mother tongue or a second language they were comfortable with, not that learners were proficient in Setswana. Again, it would still be reasonable to point out that teachers at Standard Two were not proficient in English and hid their inadequacy behind learners' lack of understanding English as this was also observed by one of the school heads and also noted during class observations (see also Bamgbose, 1991; Kyeyune, 2003; Sure & Ogechi, 2009). If this practice continued, change or policy outcomes would forever remain partially met or totally neglected.

#### **The negative impact of imposing unfamiliar languages on learners**

It was also evident from the findings that some learners experienced anxiety, fear and confusion due to imposing unfamiliar languages of instruction. Such experiences during transition-to-school time can have longer term impacts on children's resilience and a negative image of themselves as learners. For example, learners performed below expected academic standards and this affects subsequent levels. In rural primary schools, Standard Two had high school dropouts of learners. For example, the number of dropouts was between 20 – 25 each academic year. It was probable that transition could have affected them negatively. Transition was not successful and it frustrated the learners. When difficulties were experienced during transition to another language they can persist throughout school life. This could also explain why students' performance was low especially in rural primary schools.

Transition was solely neglected and left to new and inexperienced teachers to use their own devices because it was not well understood. In an attempt to strike a compromise between what the policy specifies and at the same time taking into consideration the needs of learners, some teachers code-switched between English and Setswana. This was a rather confusing and tricky situation. The situation at Standard Two was two-fold; the learners on one hand who were not coping with the language that was introduced earlier – Setswana. Also, English as a language of instruction was introduced in the second year of primary schooling and it was not possible for the learners to have mastered Setswana in one year school calendar. Further, teachers also struggled with English. In school D, one Standard Two teacher admitted that she had been teaching in Setswana for two decades and therefore teaching in English was difficult for her. This diagnosis put teachers in a dilemma by trying to address classroom realities and satisfying the requirements of the policy.

The researcher's view is that the introduction of English at Standard Two was not given a thorough thought by policy makers in situations that were ethnically and linguistically complex. The reasons for such was because of the home languages that were different from the school languages, the teachers who did not speak the same languages as learners and therefore transfer of skills became minimal, appropriate implementation strategies to use in such complex linguistic situations were necessary and the time allocated to learning the target languages under such difficult situations should be more (see also Bamgbose, 1997; Hays, 2002; Lam, 2002; le Roux, 1999; May, 2004; Prah, 2009; Saugestad, 2001). The realities in such linguistically complex classrooms could lead to lowered expectations and as indicated by classroom practices such as lack of participation, communication breakdown and the poor academic results (see Grace, 2007:1). In summation, transition is a crucial period during which many English learners are especially vulnerable to academic underachievement (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1998).

#### **English only policy in urban primary schools**

Micro language planning in urban primary schools led to English only policy from Standard One to Two for various reasons. The urban primary schools had clear criteria to prepare learners for subsequent levels and preferred to initiate learners into the primary school programme using English medium. For example, in one urban primary school learners started schooling in English because of the linguistic diversity and the presence of foreign learners and immigrants in the classrooms. Therefore, English was the medium of instruction throughout. However, this did not mean that there were no problems. One would expect that since there was 'no transition' because learners had been taught in English in Standard One due to linguistic diversity that existed in their classes and also had a preschool background, this was not the case. Learners still struggled with English. One Standard Two teacher said, *'learners strongly experience difficulties, when you ask them to read, they struggle to read difficult concepts, even when trying to explain in English, they need clarification in Setswana.'* The other Standard Two teacher in another urban school said, *"I am not satisfied with the outcome of English, learners grasp concepts slowly. It takes time for them to cope with English if it is used as a medium of instruction throughout."*

The question is why did transition pose a problem because learners had background knowledge of English from preschool as teachers stated? Again, learners were taught in English at Standard One as stated by the teachers. Another critical issue was whether teachers at Standard Two were proficient in English to help learners go through transition. Therefore, it was not easy to interpret such a situation. However, the impression the researcher got was that not all learners had been to preschool, these could be the ones struggling with English because they were still lagging behind with basic language skills their counterparts gained at preschool. The mere fact that learners who had not been to preschool had an advantage at Standard One of being taught in English and also interacting with other learners who

spoke English did not necessarily mean they could easily understand the target language. Other factors come into play such as the amount of input in the classroom, the teachers' proficiency in English and enough practice in the target language.

#### **Lack of competence in English by teachers**

The lack of positive impact of the language-in-education policy in both situations was that teachers' lack of competence in English contributed to the failure of the policy. Micro language planning activities were devised to address this problem. The researcher observed in all the Standard Two classes in urban primary schools was that teachers had a problem with English, they code-switched to Setswana unnecessarily, therefore, their code-switching to Setswana in their case could be seen as a drawback. After all, most of the learners understood and spoke English already. In one of the classes the researcher observed that in an urban school, an elderly teacher had difficulty in explaining the concepts to learners in English in different subjects taught. This could mean that the teachers themselves were not proficient in English. Consistent with the latter, Nguyen (2011) points out that there has been an urgent need to keep proficiency in English high and this has had a considerable impact on language planning policy in many non-English speaking countries. Kyeyune (2003) acknowledged that in Africa there is a growing concern of poor standards of English among teachers and learners that is brought about by the implementation process of the target language. The transition problem identified in Standard Two classes in rural primary schools could be a result of poor standards of English from the teachers and then the teachers would transfer the poor standards of English to the learners. In this regard, it could be reasonable to conclude that transition in Standard Two classrooms of urban primary schools could be partly due to teachers' lack of proficiency in the target languages.

The researcher's impression about the use of Setswana to teach subjects that are supposed to be taught in English was that, it delayed learners' progress. The researcher's view on the transitional classes could be given to teachers who were proficient in English to address learners' inadequacies in English. According to Brown (2010:299) the situation made teachers to play a conflictual role. Standard Two should be considered a critical stage to the introduction of another language and therefore could be carefully considered and should not be treated as any other class. Teachers who are not proficient in English but teaching transitional classes may destroy the learners' motivation to learn. Since the school management has the teachers' profiles, they could consider teachers who have the highest level of education because of the sensitivity of transitional classes.

#### **Transition and Relevant Pedagogy**

Teachers seem to be uncertain about the appropriate teaching pedagogy to use during transition and therefore transition was often a conundrum (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1998). Further, it requires that strategies must be in place to accelerate the shift to the target language. When a language programme is introduced, learners may need special assistance in strengthening their reading and writing skills as well as their grammar. Specialized academic vocabulary instruction and other strategic measures need to be provided. However, in rural primary schools there were common teaching pedagogy observed: parroting, lecturing, repetition of sounds and phrases and the lecture method dominated the teaching and learning process. This means that there was no specialized assistance provided for the learners to go through transition with minimal problems. Transition programmes have categories such as awareness and orientation activities, counseling and referral services, and comprehensive programmes (Alamprese, 2004). Also, materials for independent study with reading and writing assignments are necessary (Lombardo, 2004), however, these were not available during the time of research. A strong cooperation and support for teachers and learners to handle transition were essential.

#### **The non-use of learners' indigenous languages**

The bilingual education programme in Botswana education system delays learners' development of English language skills in all schools in various ways. From the classroom observations there were too many challenges observed in rural primary schools and few of them in the urban ones. Firstly, the reason for such disparity could be that in rural primary schools most learners hear the target languages for the first time at school where as in urban primary schools most learners have a preschool background where they are taught in English and also some of the learners use English as a home language. Secondly, the parents of learners in rural primary schools are not educated or have attempted lower levels of education and therefore do not speak the target languages with children at home and they may not be in a position to support the learners to go through transition. Parents of learners in urban primary schools are mostly educated and speak the target languages with their children. The children go to school already speaking English fluently.

Further, non-use of learners' indigenous languages brings about double transition. For example, learners in rural primary schools did not only experience transition in Standard Two from Setswana to English. At Standard One, they went through transition from their home languages to Setswana. When they started school they were spoken to in a language they did not understand, they were told that they would not use their languages in schools, they got confused because all of a sudden they did not have a language to express themselves in at school and this led to shock, confusion and loss of confidence (Spolsky, 2009). This was often overlooked by teachers and school management. There seemed to be no appropriate plans in place to assist in smooth transition from home languages to the first language used in school. Therefore, it was essential for teachers to assist the learners with appropriate strategies to overcome the language shock in Standard One and another language shock in Standard Two.



Based on teachers' narrations, the switch to English as a medium of instruction was difficult to adhere to with learners of different backgrounds against what the policy stipulates. Considering the introduction of English at Standard Two, the researcher's impression was that teachers were required to implement policies or make curricular changes that had already been set by policy makers and deep collaborative and effective communication procedures were often overlooked. Hence, the decisions teachers of Standard Two made in the implementation process to effect the change from Setswana to English could affect learners' performance because they lacked appropriate skills and strategies to implement the changes required (Hu & Alsagoff, 2010; Johnson, 2010; Lin, 2006; Opoku-Amankwa, 2009). The situation is left fluid with minimal accountability on the risks and challenges teachers encounter regarding transition.

#### **Limited knowledge and delivery skills by School Management**

School management did not supervise transition because they were either not knowledgeable or unaware of its significance. The researcher's impression was that; a) school management detached themselves from the teachers and focused on administrative activities; b) there were no clearly identified roles regarding the transition that school management were responsible for; c) school management took transition from Setswana to English in Standard Two as any other class and were unaware of any challenges that might arise; d) there appeared to be a gap between implementers as teachers and implementers as supervisors; e) it was likely that the policy was dumped in schools with no sense of ownership by the school management. Strong collaboration between teachers and school management was necessary (Lombardo, 2004).

It was clear in this regard that school management was not aware that they were supposed to assist with transition from Setswana to English and this was left entirely to teachers to deal with it. If teachers are left alone to deal with transition as it seems to be case, there can be reluctance and resistance to change (House, 1981). This means that teachers might change the use of languages of instruction and the expected methodologies to suit them and their students without the school management knowing what exactly is going on in the teachers' transitional classes.

### VII. IMPLICATIONS OF THE POLICY

Classroom practices on transition from Setswana to English in Standard Two have implications for teachers. While teachers plan to address the policy problems on their own, they have become victims of an unresponsive policy. The different settings of rural and urban primary schools on transition provide insights into evolving policies and practices. Policy agents are confronted by complex issues that are imposed by the policy. For example, for teachers to transit learners from an unfamiliar language to another unfamiliar becomes a serious challenge as well teaching learners in Setswana in a classroom of foreigners and immigrants. The policy raises a debate on whether ethnic minority groups have the right to education. This needs reflection by policy makers to make an intersection of macro and micro language planning.

For policy makers, the review of the policy is long overdue. With tangible evidence that some learners are not benefitting from the current policy and its transitions in different environments imply that there are problems, challenges and risks that need to be reviewed and reflected upon to accommodate disadvantaged ethnic minority groups. The voices from the classrooms are loud enough to draw the educational authorities, policy makers and other stakeholders' attention that learning is impeded by the very instrument that is supposed to promote learning.

The classroom practices have implications for the theoretical framework - the transitional bilingual education model. In rural primary schools, the policy does not allow the use of learners' indigenous languages and therefore education is started on an unfamiliar language. In urban primary school, the practices lead to monolingualism where teachers use English only policy. These factors serve to illustrate the consequences of the macro language planning as attempts are made to put policy into practice.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

While micro language planning occurs in the studied primary schools, it implicates less systematic strategic measures regarding transition especially in rural primary schools. Transition in Standard Two is problematic and not adhered to for different reasons. It was left entirely to teachers to deal with the challenges and gaps that the policy presented in the classrooms. Therefore, teachers did what they thought was best for the learners. There seemed to be no effective communication, collaboration and networking on transition in Standard Two amongst teachers and school management. The challenges identified in rural primary schools were an indication of risks that occurred when the change from Setswana to English medium took place. There seemed to be no appropriate strategies in place to address transition by school management. Again, there was no monitoring and supervision of transition by school management. The transitional matters were not reported to higher educational authorities because they were not regarded as pertinent. The current policy could lead to massive waste where learners are left behind by the policy due to transitional problems.

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**Eureka Mokibelo** (PhD) is a lecturer in Language Education at the University of Botswana, in the Communication and Study Skills Unit. Through a careful blend of theories, research and practice, Eureka Mokibelo's publications focus on issues in language education, language-in-education policy, educational and social issues affecting ethnic minorities at both primary and secondary schools of Botswana.