Revisiting Bilingual Education in and for South Africa

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References


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Introduction

The history of South Africa and its approaches to education are filled with paradoxes and surprises. There has often been a mismatch between policy and practice in South Africa as well as in other countries on this continent. Apparently dramatic and democratic changes at the tail end of the 20th century have, perhaps, not unexpectedly, been accompanied by conservatism and hesitation with regard to implementation. With the advantage of hindsight, and a re-examination of the past, it is now possible to distinguish between policy and practice. In particular, it is now easier to differentiate between the preoccupation with unacceptable political ideology as it manifested itself in educational policy, and its actual implementation.

Two generations of very successful models of bilingual education have been tried out, resourced and put in place during the last hundred years. The first involved English- and Afrikaans-speaking children and the second involved children from different African language speaking backgrounds. Each, for political rather than educational reasons, was terminated. As the country attempts to build a democratic society, with equal access to quality education for all, it is necessary to make the right decisions and for the right reasons. In order for this to happen, it should be possible to revisit and re-examine those models of bilingual education which achieved successful academic objectives, and disentangle or free them from their historical associations with unacceptable policies. This is especially necessary where the policies and implementation practices were not in themselves logically linked from the start.

What might be surprising to educators beyond the borders of South Africa is that we have, in this country, a pattern of behaviour by which we tend to discard and destroy material evidence of what has worked well, when new bureaucracies replace the old. It is for this reason that the public find it difficult to recall with accuracy the results of different generations of educational practice.
In this paper, I hope to bring to attention archival evidence which debunks the negative perceptions of the role, the costs and provisioning of mother-tongue and bilingual education from a historical perspective in South Africa. Despite serious discrepancies in expenditure between white and black children, there was surprisingly significant education success for black South Africans before 1976. It is this which may suggest that the gloomy prognosis for bilingual education, where similar conditions exist, could be significantly more optimistic than many believe. Research and other evidence indicate that the public has been and continues to be far more positively disposed towards a national bilingual approach to education than many educational authorities are prepared to acknowledge.

Bilingual education in South Africa

Part 1: Dutch(Afrikaans)-English bilingual schooling

Bilingual education was the norm for Dutch-speaking children in South Africa during the nineteenth century. As the British colonial hold on the Cape Colony and Natal strengthened after the mid-nineteenth century, attempts to anglicise the education of children were resisted by Dutch-speaking parents who wanted mother-tongue instruction, although they did not object to mother-tongue plus English (i.e. bilingual education). The Cape Education Commission of 1892 collected evidence of the “origin of bilingualism” in the early part of the century (Rose & Tunmer 1975: 150-153) where provision was made for children to be taught in English or Dutch or both in the primary school. The British did, however, attempt to force English-only in secondary school and this generated resistance and exacerbated a distrust of the English, especially after 1873 (ibid.: 154).

All the same, the Dutch-speakers did not become averse to learning English. Even in the Boer Republics, whilst Dutch was used as the medium of instruction for primary education, very often both English and Dutch were used at secondary school. Many Dutch children were even taught entirely through the
Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper, "A re-take on Bilingual Education in and for South Africa" was presented at the 8th Nordic Conference on Bilingualism, November 1-3, 2001, Stockholm, Rinkeby.

2. Malherbe translated this as:
   So many languages as I can (speak)
   So many times shall I be (a) man.

3. Malherbe attributes these words originally to a Flemish writer during the French-Flemish cultural struggle.

4. Nothing was of course further from the truth; the bilingual, dual medium approach was based on six years of the mother tongue medium and followed, gradually, by the introduction of the second medium for part of the day.

5. I include this as an example of bilingual education because the system used the mother tongue for several years whilst a second and third language were added as subjects. In the ninth year there was a policy shift in medium from mother tongue to English (L2) and Afrikaans (L3) more or less equally - a type of trilingual education. In reality, though, because of problems with implementation, it meant for most pupils a shift to English medium (L2) until 1975. The practice was thus mother tongue for 8 years and later shift to L2 – i.e. a particular form of (late-exit) bilingual education.

6. In addition, following the Cingo Commission’s recommendations in 1962 for English medium after the 6th year of schooling in the Transkei, most of the other homeland governments followed a similar approach (i.e. transition to English medium after 6 years of mother-tongue education). One of the features of Bantu Education had been to locate most secondary schools in the rural, hence homeland, areas. Since very few were thus located in ‘South African territory’ as it was so described, the numbers of secondary school pupils who were not able to escape the 50-50 Afrikaans-English medium policy were small.

medium of English in secondary school because the school-leaving examinations were offered in English only (until 1912). Even schools following ‘Christian National Education’, as favoured by the Dutch Reformed Churches, supported bilingual education until the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 (more recently known as the South African War because it involved communities who were neither British nor Boer). Dutch-speakers in Southern Africa had held close the motto:

   Zoveel Talen als ik kan,
   Zoveel malen ben ik man

   (Malherbe 1977: 4).^2

The outbreak and aftermath of the South African War did little to improve linguistic tensions. The second most important term for agreement of the Boer surrender was: “Equal rights for Dutch and English language in education matters” (Rose & Tumner 1975: 160). Yet the British administrator, Alfred, Lord Milner, sought to secure British sovereignty by, amongst other strategies, imposing English-only education in state sponsored schools. Milner’s pursuit of Anglicisation was probably one of the greatest political errors of South African history because it set in motion a chain of events which continues to haunt educational policy a hundred years later. The immediate reaction of the Boer community was encapsulated in the words of President Steyn:

   The language of the conqueror in the mouth of the
   conquered is the language of slaves (in Malherbe
   1977: 3).^3

The heavy handed approach of the British after the war added salt to the wounds of the atrocious behaviour of the British towards Dutch women and children during the war and so began a movement which was to link language, religion and ‘national’ identity. “Responsible government” was granted to the two former Boer Republics (in 1907 to the Transvaal and in 1908 to the Orange Free State). Immediately, legislation was passed in regard to language medium. In 1907 the Smuts Education Act and in 1908 the Hertzog Education Act both made provision for initial mother-tongue education for six years of schooling. The second
language was to be introduced gradually and offered as a second medium of instruction (i.e. dual medium education) from the seventh year at school. Hertzog made dual-medium education compulsory from the seventh year onwards. The principle was that English- and Afrikaans-speaking children were to attend the same schools wherever possible and teachers had to be trained accordingly (Haarhoff 1943: 45; Malherbe 1943: 36; Malherbe 1977: 67).

An early and greatly admired Afrikaner patriot, ‘Onze Jan’ Hofmeyr wrote in 1906 in the Cape:

I prefer myself to see our children of different denominations and different languages educated in one and the same school. I think that is more in harmony with a bilingual system and I would arrange the schools accordingly... (in Malherbe 1977: 7).

The Smuts and Hertzog Acts certainly contributed towards the neutralisation of some of the anti-British/English sentiment, but they did not nullify it entirely and many continued to harbour resentment and separatisitc interests. With the establishment of the Union of South African in 1910, education became the responsibility of the provinces. Both English and Dutch were given official status. Education Ordinances were proclaimed in each of the provinces shortly thereafter. The mother-tongue principle for the first six years of education was retained and thereafter parents had the flexibility to determine whether or not the second official language could be gradually introduced as a second medium of instruction. The education of ‘coloured’ children in the Cape had been predominantly in dual medium schools and it was “used so effectively that the Coloured children attain a higher degree of bilingualism than many European children” (Haarhoff 1943: 3). It was further reported that the non-commissioned officers in an infantry unit, the Cape Coloured Corps (during World War I) were 100% bilingual (Marquard in Haarhoff 1943: 3). By 1925 it had become accepted that the language spoken by the Dutch or Boers was in

Table 1

The following question was posed to respondents over the age of 16 in the National Sociolinguistic Survey conducted by MarkData on behalf of PANSALB.

“Think about the situation of language of instruction in government-funded schools and universities. Which of the following would come closest to the way you feel, but you may choose more than one item if you wish?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother-tongue instruction and good teaching of another official language should be available.</th>
<th>1st answer</th>
<th>With more than 1 answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners should have the opportunity to learn both their mother tongue and English equally well.</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners should learn through both English and their mother tongue.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is more important that learners learn in English than in other languages.</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Tables extrapolated from MarkData 2000: 164 for figures in first column; and PANSALB 2000: Table 25 for figures in second column.)
Just as the data from the 1938 survey of bilingual pupils were destroyed before the 1948 elections which brought the National Party to power, the Department of Education's own archival collection of African-language textbooks and terminology has apparently disappeared. Closer to the heart of the matter now is that politicians and government bureaucrats in senior positions in South Africa behave as if they believe that to support mother-tongue education will bring about their political suicide. Whereas bilingual education was refuted as detrimental to mother-tongue education by the National Party sixty years ago, now bilingual education is suspected of being a way of reintroducing Bantu Education and 'moedertaalonderwys'. Just as the National Party sacrificed political unity and paid scant attention to the signs favouring bilingual schools in the past, the new government is similarly deaf to the voices of the 93% of people who do not have English as a mother tongue and who feel linguistically left on the fringe. The National Party's pursuit of separatism (and attempt to control the hegemony of English) ultimately, like Ancient Greece before it, cost it its entire power base. A new government, reacting to apartheid's limiting of access to English, blindly pursues the language. In so doing it is not paying sufficient attention to its own constituency whose tongues are other than English. Haarhoff, as early as 1938, warned of the consequences of nationalist and separatist myopia. He advocated, then, the advantages of a bilingual education system which would accommodate citizens from different language groups, and his advice is equally pertinent today. The reality is that people are again requesting mother tongue plus English i.e. bilingual education; it is a minority who do not. If the English-only or -mainly educational route continues to fail the youth, as it is bound to do, the disaffected will take action as they have done before.

fact Afrikaans and it was this language rather than Dutch which then became the second official language. Malherbe identifies this moment as one of the important events which contributed to the emergence of 'Afrikaner identity', its attendant 'separateness', and in the prophetic words of a parliamentarian, P B Bekker, as "a nationalism that lives in a house without windows but full of mirrors, and there dwells self-adulation" (in Malherbe 1977: 19).

Discontented separatists, including politicians, the clergy and teachers, found a home in a secretive organisation, the Broederbond. General Hertzog exposed this organisation and criticised its interference in education in 1935, but probably by this time its influence was unstoppable. Its aim was to disrupt the unifying process of integrated schooling for English and Afrikaans-speaking pupils by agitating for segregated schooling so that the political and religious influence over Afrikaans-speaking children (about 57% of the population at that time) and teachers (about 70% of the teachers were Afrikaans speaking then) would ensure electoral victory over the United Party. The ascendancy of Hitler and fascism in Europe were to deepen divisions. The Broederbond sent selected students to Germany to study education there (Malherbe 1977: 23). General Smuts' support of Britain and the Allied forces exacerbated anti-British sentiment.

In the meantime, according to Census figures, levels of bilingualism for 'white' South Africans in English and Dutch (later Afrikaans) were increasing from 42% in 1918 to 64% in 1936, and to 73% in 1951. Notably, the highest percentage of bilingualism was to be found in the Orange Free State where Hertzog had made dual-medium education compulsory in 1908. In 1936, 69% of the white population in this province were bilingual. Whilst the Cape Province favoured dual-medium/bilingual teacher-training, the other provinces moved increasingly in the direction of single-medium training. Complaints about decreasing standards of second language proficiency started to become evident. The irony was that although more people were conversant in two languages, the degree of proficiency began to decrease after the 1930s. Malherbe
ascrives this to the divisive political forces at the time which interfered with integrated schooling. In 1938 a large-scale survey was conducted on bilingualism in the homes and schools of over 18 000 pupils in South Africa by the National Bureau of Educational and Social Research. The outbreak of World War II slowed down the data analysis as many of the staff at the Bureau joined the armed forces or were redeployed. Nevertheless, astounding preliminary findings were published in *The Bilingual School* (Malherbe 1943 and also in a volume of the same title in 1946) and can be summarised thus:

- Pupils in dual-medium schools from the sixth to the tenth year of schooling (some of their subjects in one language and some in the other) achieved higher scores in both their L1 and L2 than did pupils in L1 (single) medium schools who also learned the L2 as a subject.
- Pupils in dual-medium schools achieved higher scores in Geography and Mathematics than did their peers in single medium schools.
- The percentage increase in the scores of children with lower than average intelligence levels in the dual-medium schools was even higher than the percentage increase in scores for children of average or above average intelligence levels.
- Pupils in bilingual schools, whether parallel medium or dual medium, demonstrated greater levels of social tolerance/lower levels of prejudice against the other group.
- The majority of students in teacher-training institutions preferred the concept of bilingual schools to single medium schools and supported integrated schools.

(Malherbe 1943: 40-127; Malherbe 1977: 56-65)

These findings were not warmly received by those bent on political and social segregation. According to Malherbe the 1943 provincial elections were fought on the language medium issue. The United Party advocated mother-tongue instruction for six years, after which the second language medium should be gradually introduced. The National Party stood for mother-tongue and separate education up to university level.

Finally, the time has come to dispel the myths regarding the provisioning of mother-tongue education. There is allegedly no terminology for teaching mathematics and science, for example. This is not true. It was there. It was used until 1975 throughout the primary school. What appears to be true, however, is that the Department no longer has records of the terminology or archival copies of textbooks in African languages previously in use. Enquiries about the archival holdings have drawn a blank. Two senior officials of the Department have conceded that the Department has no records or archival holding of such materials. One said that these had been "mopped up". Neither was able to provide an official reason for why this should have transpired. Terminology and textbooks would, however, require modernisation and updating. Some of the terminology may be ideologically unacceptable. This is not, however, a major problem to resolve. The work of language committees prior to the 1950s is available in university archives and the National Library of South Africa. That which is usable can be retained, that which is unsuitable can be set aside. The PANSALB has recently established lexicography units for each of the official languages. The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DAST) has a terminology section which is anxious to work with the Department of Education. The structural resources are in place. Developments with information technology have revolutionised the speed with which comparisons across languages, translations, synchronisation of terminology development, collating and evaluating critical responses and dissemination of information can be facilitated. It is thus a far easier task now to engage in this kind of activity than it was during the first half of the last century. Costs additional to existing infrastructures would be minimal. Had the Department of Education intended to implement its own policy it would have initiated a review of terminology and a costing of textbook production itself. A starting point would have been to examine the archival collection of textbooks in African languages it inherited in 1994.
Bilingual education, it was argued then, was antithetical to mother-tongue education. “Both parties wanted to use the education system to achieve their political ends – the one to unite, the other to divide” (Malherbe 1977: 40).

The opinions of 7 000 South African soldiers who had joined the Allied Forces were surveyed in 1943. 93% of these favoured integrated schools for Afrikaans- and English-speaking children and 81% favoured dual-medium schooling. It had been intended that further analysis was to be conducted on the data from the Bureau’s 1938 survey of more than 18 000 pupils; however this was not possible.

Unfortunately, the sheets containing all the statistical tables of the data gathered from each of the 18 000 pupils were destroyed when the Bureau was moved from the Union Buildings to another building in Pretoria after the 1939-45 War. Thus was lost the most valuable data ... (Malherbe 1977: 50).

Between 1945 and 1946 further investigation into bilingual education and academic performance at schools was begun in the Cape Province by a team of researchers from the Universities of Stellenbosch and Cape Town in liaison with the Cape Education Department. The findings revealed significant gains in the second language proficiency where this language was used as a second medium of instruction for part of the day/school curriculum (Malherbe 1977: 98-100). The research was terminated immediately after the 1948 elections, which were won by the National Party, and Professor Reyburn, who had designed the study, died shortly thereafter. It is not clear whether or not there was political intent in the destruction of the earlier 1938 Bureau data, but it was nevertheless convenient for the National Party that it was no longer in evidence. Following the termination of the research in the Cape Province, the bilingual school system was systematically phased out wherever possible.

Although considerable material evidence of the educational success of bilingual education conveniently disappeared, there were other indicators, mentioned above, that civil society found...
favour with the system. A classical scholar drawing on the history of the fall of the separatist-driven Ancient Greek empire and its replacement by an inclusive Roman Empire, encouraging of bilingualism, had earlier cautioned against the folly of following the example of Ancient Greece (Haarhoff 1938). Political motive, nevertheless, drove the system asunder.

Part 2: Bantu Education – the mother tongue, Afrikaans and English

Separate schools would achieve a number of objectives. First and foremost they would facilitate the advancement of Afrikaans-speaking pupils as part of a strategy to break the anglophone monopoly of power in the upper echelons of business and education. Quality education for Afrikaans-speaking children in their mother tongue, for twelve years, was the primary objective. Immediately after the National Party came to power in 1948, it followed the principle of separate mother-tongue schools for Afrikaans- and English-speaking pupils (for the white, coloured and Indian communities) and applied this principle to African education. The Eisleben Commission, which ignored the representations of African parents and teachers, presented its report on Bantu Education to the government in 1951. The 1953 Bantu Education Act followed and took effect from 1955. A thirteen-year school system was established for African-language speaking pupils (reduced to 12 years after 1975 in line with that for other groups) with an extended period of mother tongue instruction. Previously and depending on the province, mother tongue had been used in African education for between four and six years followed by transition to English medium. Now primary school had been extended by a year from seven to eight years and the period of mother-tongue education had been extended by at least two years. This meant that it took longer for children to have access to English medium; and very few children would ever reach secondary school. Pressure was placed on mission schools to close and few secondary schools were built before 1966. The syllabuses for the last two years of school for black students

them. The curriculum planners have viewed languages other than English as subjects rather than as languages of learning and there is an underlying assumption that English will be the main medium of instruction from the fourth year of school. To illustrate this, the Department’s latest language policy implementation plan foregrounds mother-tongue instruction to the end of the foundation phase (Grade 3), and then focuses attention on teaching through English. To illustrate this point, a strategy devised to improve the teaching of Science, namely the improved teaching of English, as the medium, rather than the languages through which the pupils will best understand Science, is included in the plan (Department of Education 2001). Unless such contradictions are resolved, and unless languages other than English are maintained in the system as languages through which learning takes place, the inequities which existed in education at the change of power in 1994 will remain in place.

The arguments offered as obstacles to the extended use of African languages, now, as media of instruction boil down to:

- Residual prejudice against the mother-tongue system from the apartheid period as recollected by the political elite rather than by civil society.
- A belief/claim that the majority of parents support English-only or –mainly education, despite early evidence which contradicts this – Malherbe 1943; the servicemen of 1943; the Cingo Commission of 1962; and more recent evidence of the DET results of 1993 and the PANSALB-MarkData survey of 2000 (details below).
- Flawed advice from ‘experts’, who ignore South African research (e.g. Malherbe, Reyburn and Macdonald discussed above) and the international research on bilingual education (as presented in Taylor & Vinjevold 1999, and NCCRD 2000).
- An ahistorical claim that there is no/insufficient terminology in African languages to support mother-tongue education?
- An argument that it is too expensive now to provide bilingual or mother-tongue education for all pupils.
recent years – i.e. since English was restored as medium of instruction from Std. 3 [fifth grade] - was the drastic decrease in passes in English in the Senior Certificate examination, from 78.2% in 1978 to 38.5% in 1984, which was the last year in which these statistics were published in the department's annual reports (Hartshorne 1992: 206).

Mother-tongue education throughout school and into higher education continues uninterrupted for speakers of English and Afrikaans. The difference in approach to medium of education is one of the critical reasons why education for the majority of South Africans remains disastrously inequitable, even after the official end of the policy of apartheid.

Part 3: New multilingual education policy left on paper after 1997

The change in government in 1994 was accompanied by new educational developments intended to bring equitable education to all South African school pupils. These changes are encapsulated within the new curriculum, Curriculum 2005, and the new language-in-education policy both announced in 1997. Curriculum 2005 has been met with enormous publicity, implementation plans, extensive review processes and funding. The new language-in-education policy, in contrast, has been almost entirely ignored after a promising draft implementation plan was completed by mid-1999.

In essence the new language policy is encapsulated in the following: “the underlying principle is to maintain the home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s). Hence the Department’s position that an additive approach to bilingualism is to be seen as the normal orientation of our language-in-education policy” (Department of Education 1997). Although both curriculum and language policy should have been overhauled and transformed in an integrated process, they have been kept as separate processes. The consequence is that there are now contradictions between

remained identical to those for white students until 1975 (Hartshorne 1992: 71), probably because the small number of students who stayed in the school system did not pose a political or economic threat. It was envisaged as part of the separatist logic that African professionals such as teachers and doctors would be necessary to cater for the needs of their own communities and thus higher education at the same level as that for the privileged communities was seen as a necessary aspect of separate development. The mother-tongue principle for schooling was a convenient ploy for the National Party and it was clearly part of a divide and rule strategy. When applied to black education, it was coupled with inequality in the form of unequal financial resources, and with an attempt to limit access to English through the insistence on dual-medium Afrikaans-English in secondary school at the very time that dual-medium education for Afrikaans and English-speaking pupils was being phased out. The double standards and reverse logic would not go unnoticed. Obviously, African parents would view Bantu Education with the greatest suspicion.

It was a historical coincidence that just as the National Party passed the Bantu Education Act, UNESCO published a report, The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education in 1953. This report contained the findings of an international enquiry into the use of mother tongues in education. Later, the political leadership would invoke such international research in its defence of the mother-tongue principle in African education, as can be seen in the pages of the Bantu Education Journal from 1956 onwards.

African-language speaking parents, however, fully appreciating the intent of apartheid and Bantu Education, assumed that the mother-tongue principle would, in fact, prevent access to knowledge. From the early years of the twentieth century, black South Africans had come to believe that access to knowledge of the modern world and power was possible through English (see Alexander 1989: 35-37). The extension of mother-tongue education to eight years, even though it was coupled with the subject teaching of English (and Afrikaans), was therefore interpreted as a strategy to prevent access to English
and hence knowledge. Resistance became manifest, particularly in antipathy towards the use of the mother tongue amongst the political elite of the liberation movements and teacher organisations.

Mqotsi, at a conference of the Cape African Teachers’ Association (CATA) in 1953, argued:

In a society where personal slavery is institutionalised, education will reflect master-slave relations (Mqotsi 1953: 9).

A lengthy debate about mother-tongue education raged in the pages of *The Educational Journal*, a publication of the Teachers’ League of South Africa. Mother-tongue education, it was argued, should more appropriately be called *moedertaal-onderwys*, an education principle based on the home language but which also included a political motive:

[*It is educationally sound to use the home language of a child as medium of instruction in the lower primary school. But there is definitely a sinister political intent when so-called mother-tongue instruction sets out to exclude or retard the second official language (where it is English) during the most impressionable years...* (Bastiaanse 1956: 5).

And furthermore:

*Moedertaalonderwys* ... as applied to children in schools for ‘Bantu’... means enforcement of learning through a vernacular throughout the effective years of a child’s short school life so as to tie him to village and tribe and give him the minimum of bridges to a wider field of knowledge and a more modern culture... (Barnard 1964: 9).

The Cingo Commission was established in 1962 to investigate the language medium issue in the Transkei (now part of the Eastern Cape). Whilst the Commission accepted much of the criticism of Bantu Education’s application of mother-tongue instruction it also rejected wholesale condemnation of the use of the mother tongue. One of the criticisms of the system was that there was

*Education Journal*. Towards the end of the second phase of Bantu Education, the late 1980s and early 1990s, it became increasingly obvious that neither learners nor teachers, in what had been renamed as the Department of Education and Training (DET), were reading very many of the textbooks prescribed and published in English. Textbooks previously published in African languages for the fifth to eighth year were no longer in print. The last cohort of students who had, despite suspicion and distrust, benefited from the eight years of mother-tongue education before switching to English medium matriculated in 1979. These students, who had learnt English and Afrikaans as subjects for seven years before having to switch medium, were able to read secondary school textbooks. The majority of high school students of the 1980s and 1990s, who had to switch medium in the fifth year, had not been able to learn sufficient English to keep up with the linguistic and academic demands in English (see also October forthcoming). Secondary school textbooks in English, previously accessible to learners until the late 1970s, became less and less accessible. The standard of English proficiency of pupils, because of the early switch to English medium, continued to diminish. There is ample evidence of this as students entered the country’s teacher training colleges and universities. The new generation of teachers, who matriculated after 1979/80, was less prepared to teach than the previous generation. A cycle of ever-decreasing educational competency has now taken root.

It is obvious to say that English-medium education can be effective only if both teachers and pupils have the capacity to use English in the classroom at a level appropriate to the learning required by the curriculum, and also have textbooks and other materials in English that have been written at a level that has taken these factors into account. Yet the effects of both policy and practice over the last thirty-five years have been to reduce this capacity seriously and to lower the standards of English throughout the system. One indicator of this in
speaking pupils at all. It marks the beginning of a serious decline in educational achievement and a reversal of the improvements which had peaked in 1976. After four years of mother-tongue education plus the teaching of English as a subject, pupils simply did not have the vocabulary to deal with the curriculum in English from the fifth year of school. Teachers who were accustomed to teaching through the mother tongue during the latter years of primary school did not have the requisite English-language proficiency for the change in medium. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that matriculation results of African pupils plummeted during this second phase of Bantu Education, from the high point in 1976 of an 83.7% pass rate to 44% in 1992. Many reasons for this, including the sharp increase in numbers of secondary school pupils, have been proffered, but very little recognition has been given to the correlation it has with the change in medium of instruction. This is despite very reputable research conducted by Carol Macdonald during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Macdonald showed, for example, that by the end of the fourth year of school, African pupils might have learnt up to 800 words in English, but that the curriculum and textbooks required them to know 5000 words in the fifth year (Macdonald 1990). Apart from problems with sentence structure in English, pupils were clearly not able to deal with subject-specific vocabulary in their second language. Linguistic development in and academic development through the first language simultaneously came to a halt.

One of the peculiarities of the first phase of Bantu Education to 1975–6 is that despite the very few financial resources ploughed into black education and the very wide gap in expenditure between black and white children, an astonishing number of school textbooks were published in African languages. A recent preliminary exploration of the scope of these texts by Mahlalela Thusi reveals a surprisingly exacting and detailed content required of pupils in Standard 6, the eighth year of primary school for black children (Mahlalela-Thusi & Heugh 2002). Lists of newly-published and prescribed books in African languages were made available in the regular issues of the Bantu

insufficient educational terminology in African languages to support the teaching through these languages across the curriculum. The Cingo Commission’s findings, however, included the following:

The Commission accepts that in the higher primary classes, especially Stds. V and VI [Grades 7 and 8], terminology would cause some difficulty. This is mostly true of subjects like Arithmetic and Nature Study. It does not, however, apply to History and Religious Instruction, for a language that is capable of being used for a very successful translation of the Bible possesses the vocabulary and powers of expression to teach History up to Std. VI and beyond. The difficulties referred to above are in any case not insurmountable and have in fact been largely overcome in other parts of South Africa. This is not surprising as even the scientific terminology required to teach subjects up to Std. VI [Grade 8] level is very elementary indeed.

The support for education through the medium of the mother tongue as a sound educational principle is overwhelming ...

Very few people entirely reject the mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The vast majority supported the mother tongue as medium up to and including Std. II [Grade 4]. (Cingo Commission as quoted in Rose & Tunmer 1975: 197–198).

In fact, language committees established in 1928 to collect and develop terminology pre-dated Bantu Education by almost thirty years. The language committees had been attempting also to standardise orthographies and to bring the written texts of related languages in each of the Nguni and Sotho clusters of languages closer together. Under apartheid, however, these clustered language committees were reconfigured into separate language committees, later language boards, whose work appeared to move in the opposite direction. In other words the
further separation or "linguistic balkanisation" (Msimang 1992) of the African languages seemed inevitable. To compound matters, the language committees were brought under the control of the Department of Native Affairs, Bantu Education section. This sent an alarming signal to the African-language speaking elite. Yet more recently, scholars such as Msimang and Satyo (in Mahalela-Thusi & Heugh 2002) argue that the work of the linguists in these committees/boards has been unfairly maligned. In hindsight it is nevertheless obvious that the relocation of the language committees to the department responsible for African education would result in further suspicion and distrust accruing to both terminology development and mother-tongue education.

It is one of the ironies of apartheid that a miscalculation of the potential benefits of mother-tongue education for all children, not only Afrikaans-speaking ones, by the policy makers, in no way thwarted the intent of apartheid. In reality, a twenty-year period of providing eight years of mother-tongue education for speakers of African languages and the fairly competent teaching of English, as a subject, resulted in a dramatic improvement in black education. Matriculation (school-leaving examination) pass rates increased from 43.5% in 1955 to 83.7% in 1976 (Heugh 2002: 187). The policy makers of the 1950s could not have known that thirty years down the line, international research would show that language-in-education policy implemented almost exactly as it was during the first two decades of Bantu Education (if one excludes the political motives behind segregation) produces excellent academic results. The research now shows that if the mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction for at least six but preferably eight years of school, and a second language is taught as a subject, it is possible to switch successfully to this second language as medium of learning after the eighth school year. By default, certainly not by design, the first phase of Bantu Education made provision for these conditions.

Pupils who progressed beyond the eight years of primary school into secondary school were expected to change medium in the ninth year to an unpopular 50:50 medium policy for secondary school. What this meant in practice for African pupils was: mother tongue, Afrikaans and English as subjects; plus three other subjects, at least one of which had to be taught through Afrikaans and one taught through English. The department was coerced into allowing many exceptions to this regulation, until 1974-5, because of the resistance to Afrikaans as a medium and the practical reality that few African teachers could teach through Afrikaans. Thus, in reality, a significant number of pupils switched medium only to English in secondary school (see Hartrshorne 1992: 197-202).

Resistance to the various manifestations of apartheid policy grew, however, particularly as it became linked to the fear of 'linguistic balkanisation' and the intended subservience of the black youth via Bantu Education. In the process, the confidence of black South Africans in the educational benefits of the mother tongue became thoroughly eroded. As the mother-tongue principle became stigmatised, so an overestimation of what an English-medium education system might deliver took root. The rebellion of school pupils in Soweto in 1976 was sparked by strong-arm tactics used by a newly-appointed official of the West Rand Bantu Affairs Department who insisted that mathematics should be taught through Afrikaans in Soweto secondary schools. At this point, the words of President Steyn, previously used to mobilise Dutch speakers against Milner's policy, were taken up and used by African students similarly proclaiming, with irony that "[t]he language of the conqueror in the mouth of the conquered is a language of slaves" (Malherbe 1977: 17).

This rebellion marks, unfortunately, the beginning of a far more debilitating phase in the under-education of black youth. Government was forced to make what it considered to be educational compromises which, it mistakenly believed, would advantage black students. Amendments to the Bantu Education Act in 1979 resulted in the reduction of mother-tongue education from what had been eight years (until 1975) to four years after 1979. Parents could choose either English or Afrikaans as the medium of education for their children from the fifth year. Obviously most chose English. In reality, however, this does not mark a period of educational advantage to African language-