

Summary

The development of language policy in the South African educational system, from 1652 to 1961, with special reference to the Union Government period

The notion that multilingualism could be a problem took root globally in the twentieth century after the demise of colonial domination. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, multilingualism was already viewed as problematic in South Africa. This monograph researches language policy in South African schools over a period of more than three centuries (from 1652 to 1961) focusing on the Union Government period (1910-1961).

After more than a century of single-medium education, Dutch schools in the Cape were largely replaced by schools with English as the sole language of instruction when the colony was annexed by the British. As time went by, Dutch enjoyed a status and function that was forbidden in the British colonies in the two Boer republics. Cataclysmic events such as the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) influenced the decisions of the law-makers at the National Convention in 1909 and the language legislation of the Union Government.

Under the Union Government language planning in the white and black school systems, which functioned separately, centred mainly on the status of Afrikaans and English. At first English imperialism benefited the English language, especially after the War, but the recognition of Afrikaans in the next decade contributed greatly to the establishment of a new language policy with particular application to the school system. Under the Union Government, the language that benefited most was usually the one dominating the political order, to the detriment of the other language. Afrikaans fought an uphill battle for equal recognition in the school system against "English linguistic imperialism".

After the Union Education Report of 1911 and the provincial legislation of 1912, combined parallel- and dual-medium schools developed side-by-side with English-medium schools. The implementation of language policy in schools developed along different lines in each of the four provinces. With the recognition of Afrikaans as an official language, the position of mother-tongue Afrikaans-speaking pupils improved. The parental option to choose their children's language of instruction was used by both Afrikaans- and English-speaking parents to score political (ideological) points in the ensuing years. Afrikaans was patronised and advanced by various National Party governments, which implemented two principles: mother-tongue education and single-medium schools. Afrikaans thus became the dominant medium of instruction at the secondary-school level. As a result, bilingualism among both teachers and pupils decreased.

For the greater part of the Union Government period, the interests and wishes of African (black) education were subordinated to the political purposes and ideologies of white groups. The conflicts between Afrikaans- and English-speakers were to spill over into African education and find expression particularly in the language policies of the various governments. Even before the National Party came to power in 1948, there was strong opposition to Bantu Education. The implementation of the Bantu Education Act (Act no 47 of 1953) not only entrenched the two separate education

systems (white and black), but also united the black movements against the government which was taking decisions on their behalf. The emphasis placed on different ethnicities (Bantu cultures) by means of the implementation of mother-tongue education was viewed as a divide-and-rule policy rather than as an honest attempt to promote the various black cultures. Ideological resistance to Afrikaans was a strong reason for the preference blacks gave to English. Black schools were unable to produce bilingual (African language/English) pupils of the same calibre as the bilingual (Afrikaans/English) pupils of white schools.