Implementing the Transitional Bilingual Education Policy in Botswana: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract
The Botswana education system follows a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) programme at primary school level. However, there are problems that impede the smooth implementation of this programme. In the light of this, this paper interrogates the implementation of the TBE programme through the exploration, identification and discussion of inherent challenges and problems faced by children who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of this programme and by teachers who are supposed to be its implementers. Through the use of open ended questionnaires, structured interviews and classroom observation methods, this study involved visitations of various primary schools in different regions to investigate how the TBE programme was implemented. The findings indicate that teachers fail to promote bilingualism in learners because they are not qualified to do so. The study also unearthed a mismatch between teachers training and practices in schools. This paper recommends a review of the TBE programme to make it commensurate with linguistic needs of all Botswana children and the orientations of teachers and their training.

Keywords: Transitional, Multilingual Education, Policy, Teachers, Learners

Introduction
Botswana is a multilingual country with 29 languages spoken in the country. Amongst these languages, English is the official language and Setswana is the national language. English is used in government, administration, commerce, media and education. In education, it is used as a medium of instruction from the second year of Primary education, Standard Two, onwards. In addition, students are expected to pass English to gain admission to secondary and tertiary institutions. English has continued to dominate the education system partly due to the fact that it is more developed and richer than local languages in literature and scientific/technical vocabulary. The second most important language in Botswana is Setswana because it is studied as a subject at primary and secondary levels, and is also an official medium of instruction at Standard One. Other local or indigenous languages are used in classrooms for code-switching and as unofficial mediums of instruction, especially at pre-school and primary school. This applies to Setswana too. Botswana is one of the countries that were formally governed by Britain.

Given this multilingual situation in Botswana, the challenges of implementing the language-in-education policy are still daunting. In particular, implementing the Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) programme still remains a challenge in the second decade of the 21st century that is about to end. Botswana follows a TBE programme whereby the students are taught in Setswana, a national language at Standard One and transit to English in Standard Two.
According to Cummins (2000), in a TBE programme the teacher is supposed to teach in the learners’ ‘native’ language and gradually switch over to English. However, this is still a challenge in Botswana because, as indicated above, some students use other local languages other than Setswana. This means that the TBE programme as explained above does not suit the students. This is a missing link that continues to affect the quality of education in Botswana despite the evidence from research that children should be taught in their mother tongue in the early years of education. The situation is even more lamentable in rural areas where some students have not even had the opportunity to be taught in their mother tongue. Worse more, indigenous languages remain underdeveloped and lack resources unlike English and to some extent Setswana. This study, therefore, examined: i) Progress made in implementing the TBE programme at primary school; ii) Challenges of implementing the TBE programme as perceived by teachers who are its implementers; iii) Strategies for effectively implementing the TBE. This paper argues that the TBE policy is implementable provided all the necessary tools for implementing it are provided, as captured under the recommendations section, and that all the stakeholders should be fully committed to overcoming the challenges. This paper specifically asks the following questions:

1. Is the TBE policy being effectively implemented in Botswana primary schools?
2. What challenges do primary school teachers encounter when implementing the TBE programme?
3. What can be done to effectively implement the TBE programme in Botswana primary schools?

**Language Use in the Botswana Education System**

Currently, there are four layers of education in Botswana: Early childhood education; primary education, secondary education and tertiary education. Only recently, the Botswana government introduced early childhood education in public schools whereby before children begin primary education, they should attend pre-primary classes offered in primary schools. Private pre-schools have existed in Botswana for a long time. In public pre-schools, many children in the rural areas are taught mainly in their mother tongues by local teachers, and may be taught in English in some situations. Those in urban areas, by contrast, are more exposed to English due mainly to better economic conditions found in urban environments. They may also be using English at home because of its high status or because some parents simply believe that there some academic advantages to using English, especially at an early age.

Primary education is seven years and it begins from the age of six. Officially, all public schools should use English as the medium of instruction from Standard Two onwards, and teach it as a subject too. Private schools might, on the other hand, use English from the onset. Setswana too is used as a medium of instruction at Standard One in public schools, and is also taught as a subject even in some private schools. However, other indigenous languages are neither taught as subjects nor officially used as mediums of instruction, unless when the teacher code-switches. Children and teachers in public schools come from different linguistic and economic backgrounds. As a result, there is no uniformity in the use of the medium of instruction. Some children cannot speak English at all and some teachers cannot fluently express themselves in English and therefore code-switch most of the time. However, the situation is now better than before because most teachers now have Diploma in Primary Education qualification, unlike in the not so distant past when some of them did not even possess any teaching qualifications. In rural areas, the tendency to unofficially use mother tongue as a medium of instruction is high.
Secondary school education consists of junior certificate level (Form 1 to 3) and senior certificate (Form 4 and 5). However, some private schools students automatically proceed to the senior level without having to write junior certificate examinations. In both public and private senior secondary schools English is the medium of instruction at both junior and senior levels, and is taught as two subjects (language and literature). English Literature is optional (especially at senior level) while English Language is compulsory. A credit in English Language is mandatory for admissions into tertiary institutions. Like at the lower levels, indigenous languages are neither taught as a subject nor officially used as mediums of instruction, except for Setswana, the national language, which is taught as a subject at both junior and senior levels. At the tertiary level of education, English is the medium of instruction for all subjects, except for foreign languages such as Chinese and African languages such as Ikalanga (One of the Botswana indigenous languages) that are offered as optional short courses. English is also studied as a course of study at teacher colleges and local Universities. At tertiary level students are expected to have a high level of proficiency in English.

Implementation of the TBE Programme in Botswana

a) Implementers

A teacher’s agency and corresponding appropriation of policy stems from their bilingual status and quality of literacy (Gee, 2000). Based on the pronouncements that bilingual education is beneficial, it requires effective teachers who can make learners achieve their educational goals. The role of a bilingual education programme is grounded on two knowledge-based principles: that all children are capable of engaging in complex thinking tasks and also that developing and maintaining a student’s native language will not interfere with their English language acquisition (Bilingual Education Programme, Part 1). The problem that is often disregarded is that implementing a bilingual education programme lies in the teaching and not the curriculum (Bilingual Education Programme, Part 1). Therefore, a bilingual teacher who is well prepared in instructional delivery and resources is vital for the successful implementation of the policy. According to Bryant and White (1982) teachers are closest to students and are very influential in the success of the policy implementation, as well as the performance of the school. The issue of teachers as implementers of the TBE programme in Botswana primary schools is problematized in this paper. This is due to the fact that teachers are capable of cracking the implementation process or making it successful. This will depend on whether the teacher speaks the learners’ native language, creates materials in the native language, has strong communication with families, has valuable language skills that would help them engage in discovery, nurturing, playing and learning with children using their own language (Nemeth, 2015).

Central to the implementation of the bilingual programme is that teachers should pay attention to their learners’ background and find out whether or not they are balanced bilinguals who are proficient in both their first and second languages or whether they are pseudo-bilinguals who for one reason or another have not yet attained age appropriate abilities in their second language (Hakuta, 1985). According to Hakuta (1985: 320) pseudo-bilinguals know one language much better than the other, and do not use the second language in communication. This is not a one man’s show. The demands of the bilingual education programme task the teacher with enormous responsibility which is also multifaceted. For example, the Ministry of Basic Education needs to gear the training of teachers towards the bilingual education programme and produce qualified bilingual educators. The Ministry has to avail appropriate measures to enable teachers to implement the programme with fewer risks, challenges, reduced anxiety and supervise the implementation process.
b) Teacher Training

The government of Botswana has made efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning at primary school level. The efforts are evidenced by the change in the training of teachers which has shifted from Primary Teachers’ Certificate to Diploma in Primary Education. In the past, teachers were trained as generalists where they were trained in all subjects. While this was convenient for the Ministry of Education, the public raised a concern about the quality of teaching and learning which resulted in poor academic performance by learners. The concern led to the then Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MOESD) considering subject specialization in teacher training programmes. This move was effected in Colleges of Education. Thus, the current position is that teachers specialize in two subjects. As a way of embracing the specialization of subjects, graduates from the specialist Diploma programme reported that the training prepared them adequately in the subjects that they selected as their majors and that the training improved overall classroom instruction (Nthobatsang, 2000). Sharpe (2001) supports the specialization programme regarding the languages of instruction. Sharpe (2001) argues that the production of language experts, the introduction of linguistic role models in schools, and the correct teaching of intonation and pronunciation could be advantageous for language teaching and learning. Therefore, language specialist teachers are thus able to use the target language spontaneously as they have the knowledge of the linguistic and cultural contexts and plan lessons from the knowledge of the target language. In Brief, subject specialization in the training of teachers has been seen as a step in the right direction.

However, looking at the primary school set up in Botswana, such training requires that there be more language specialists because the languages of instruction are implemented at Standard One and Two respectively. Teachers are stationed in one class to teach all subjects. Teachers do not move around classes to teach language subjects only. Such an arrangement requires that all teachers take the language courses to address the initiation bilingual programme in their classes. The training demands that language specialists be bilinguals in the two target languages to be able to handle linguistic diversity and other clinical problems that could emerge in their classrooms. It leaves more questions than answers on whether we have improved the teachers such that they become bilinguals. While subject specialization could improve the teaching and learning process, it may not improve the implementation of the TBE programme as stipulated by the policy, especially if it is not language oriented. The door is still open to train bilingual teachers because in principle they do not exist.

Significance of the Study

This study is crucial because it examines the effectiveness of the TBE programme in a multilingual set-up such as that in Botswana. The findings of this study would inform policy makers on the choice of a TBE model that can suit the Botswana situation. This study also advocates for an effective TBE programme that could contribute to the good quality of education in the country. Good education can lead to good quality of life for the people. It builds for the people a strong foundation for their careers and success in life. There is a general outcry about the poor English language proficiency of Botswana students. Undoubtedly, this low language proficiency negatively contributes to the low academic performance of the students. Poor academic performance in turn affects people’s economic and social wellbeing later in life. For example, students’ poor English language performance would not qualify them for a place in tertiary institutions in Botswana except in the natural sciences. Their poor performance and poor
proficiency in English may not even enable them to get formal employment in private and government organisations where English is used for official business.

The language performance and proficiency of students also depends on the quality of the teachers’ performance in language teaching. Again, the Ministries responsible for Education in Botswana are generally concerned about the quality of teaching language in Botswana. Research on school effectiveness has also emphasized the importance of good quality teachers in the educational success of students. This study is important because it explores the challenges of implementing the TBE programme and it also highlights inherent shortcomings. Teachers, including school management, are very important players in the implementation of the TBE policy and the success of language learning in Botswana. Hopefully the findings of this research will improve the educational performance of students through proper implementation of the TBE programme in Botswana.

**Research Methodology**

This study adopted the qualitative approach for the sole reason that it demanded the participants to express and share their experiences regarding the implementation of the language-in-education policy in a linguistically and ethnically complex primary school set up in Botswana. It also demanded a face to face interaction between the researcher and the subjects to get first-hand information from the policy agents or teachers. The researchers opted to use a multi-case study technique to gather information from different primary school in different regions and to glean what is happening in each selected primary school regarding the implementation of the TBE programme.

The research areas were drawn from six different districts out of nine namely: North East, Central, Ngamiland, Kgalagadi, Kweneng, and South East. These districts were chosen on the strength of their diversity in characteristics, ethnic and linguistic orientations. In these districts six government primary schools were selected. The primary schools were purposively chosen for the following reasons: (i) Their linguistic and ethnic diversity where learners start school with different home languages from the school languages; (ii) A school where most learners speak Setswana as a first language. This was meant for comparison with learners who are non-speakers of Setswana; (iii) Their multilingual and multicultural set-up where there are foreigners and immigrants who speak different home languages and probably fluent in English; (iv) The distance between regions, hence, the closest distance between regions was about 90 kilometers whereas other regions were between 600 – 1200 kilometers apart. The distance was considered for comparison and minimal influence on the implementation of the policy from one school to another; (v) Type of settlement; rural, semi-rural, semi-urban and urban areas also influenced the selection of schools due to differences in cultural backgrounds and lifestyles. Hence, a taste of rural and urban set-up was necessary for such an evaluation. Six primary schools from six districts were chosen to make a reasonable representative sample. The names of the schools were concealed for identity and therefore letters of alphabets A, B, C, D, E and F were used for confidentiality.

An in-depth investigation was made through a triangulation of methods of data collection such as classroom observation, open ended questionnaires, and structured interviews. Meticulous attention was paid to the primary school activities, and teaching and learning processes, classroom interaction and teachers’ experiences in the instruction and learning styles teachers provided to
the learners in different contexts. These led to a detailed descriptions and fruitful explanations of the transitional bilingual education implementation in the six primary school settings.

The population for this study consisted of 52 teachers, who are the agents of the TBE programme in the Botswana primary school classrooms. As key implementers, teachers need to have a clearer understanding of the demands of the TBE. It was therefore important to get their views on how they implemented the programme and to explore the reasons for their practices in the classrooms. The data collected from each school was coded according to the key research questions. Teacher participants at each level were given pseudo names and coded as such to track the answers they provided in open ended questionnaires, interviews and what was observed. The coding and tracking painted a vivid picture through identifying the major and minor themes emerging through all data collection instruments.

Transitional Bilingual Education Theory
In the TBE theory a subject matter is taught in the home language (L1) until students have sufficiently grasp the second language (L2) to participate successfully in a regular classroom. During the process, the home language (L1) instruction is gradually replaced by English, the L2. Cummins (1979) argues that students who have developed language proficiency in the L1 can make use of this proficiency for learning a second language. Bringing this back to our study, it could be assumed that the English language proficiency of Botswana students should ideally improve because they receive the first year of primary school instruction in Setswana (the Botswana national language). August and Shanahan (2008: 171) also supports Cummins's claim by concluding that, ‘Language minority children who are literate in their first language are likely to be advantaged in the acquisition of English literacy. Studies demonstrate that language minority students instructed in the native language (usually Spanish) and English perform, on average, better on English reading measures than language-minority students instructed only in English’. Supporters of the TBE further posit that learning first in the target language retards the academic progress of the learners because of their limited knowledge of the target language. They argue that it is easier to read in the home language than in the L2 and that the sequence of instruction in L1 before L2 is superior to an all-second-language programme.

Models of bilingual education vary a lot from country to country. Either children are schooled through two prestigious languages, as in Argentina with Spanish and English, in Alsace (France) with French and German, in Canada with English and French, or through two languages which do not have the same status, as in the United States where Spanish is considered as a minority language, or in the Basque Country in France where the Basque language is seen as a regional language. In the TBE programme teachers are supposed to be proficient in both the target language and the native language and state certified for teaching at the particular grade level and in bilingual education.

There are other types of bilingual education in which this study does not intend to delve, such as maintenance, developmental, or late-exit bilingual education where students learn literacy and content areas in their native language as they are taught ESL. However, their transition to instruction in English is more gradual than in the TBE, and they continue to receive instruction in their native language throughout elementary school. Another type is the dual language or two-way immersion bilingual education program. In this programme, instruction is presented in two languages: English and the native language of the English-language learners. The goal of the instruction is for both groups of students to become fluently bilingual. A certified bilingual
education teacher or a pair of teachers—one fluent in English and with grade-level and ESL certification, and the other fluent in the native language and English with grade-level and bilingual education certification—teach the students, making sure to use second-language techniques to introduce content and literacy to the students not fluent in the specific language of instruction. The third type is the structured English immersion programme only designed for English-language learners and does not involve any formal instruction in the native language. All of the students’ instruction is in English. To help students understand the instruction, the teacher adapts her instruction by using ESL techniques. However, in some classrooms the teacher may speak the native language and allow the students to interact with each other in the native language. Students typically are in this program for one to three years. Once exited from the program, students no longer receive any second-language services. The fourth type is the sink or swim or submersion programme where the students are not in one of the above bilingual education programmes, and they may participate in an ESL pullout programme for part of the school day, or be placed in an all-English classroom without any second-language services.

Findings
One of the concerns of this study was to find out whether the TBE programme was being effectively implemented in Botswana primary schools. The study has found that the TBE programme is not being effectively implemented for various reasons. First, the ‘one size fits all’ situation whereby Setswana is used in Standard One across all the public schools in the country does not auger well for students to whom Setswana is not a mother tongue. The Ministry of Basic Education and Skills Development cannot expect good academic results in rural primary schools where a majority of primary school students do not speak Setswana. The current situation is that immediately the students enter the school gates they are declared failures and rejected because of their home languages. A quotation by Sally Peterson could be relevant here and it has been slightly adjusted, ‘Transitional bilingual education programme teaches learners little Setswana, less English and a lot of nothing.’ These are some of the words used by Sally Peterson founder of the lobbying group for Learning English Advocates Drive (LEAD). Rather than limit the learners in the rural areas, the programme should help them to achieve and embrace educational goals. Robust and rigorous delivery services of the TBE programme are necessary from senior personnel, regional education officers and school management to handle diverse and dynamic linguistic academic settings in Botswana.

Another constraint bedeviling the implementation of the TBE programme in Botswana is that some of the teachers, who are supposed to effectively implement the programme, are not qualified to do so. The teachers who participated in this study were constrained by the fact that Setswana is not their mother tongue and therefore they could not teach it effectively. This is a clear case of theory conflicting with practice. Some of them were not even trained as linguists because their subject combinations included, for example, Mathematics and Science, Art and Mathematics and so on. In other words, they lacked high levels of linguistic competence in English and Setswana and therefore could not be able to promote bilingualism. This study, therefore, argues that the Ministry should reflect on the effectiveness of the TBE programme, and make sure that teachers who implement the programme are bilinguals. The Ministry should also put in place measures and strategies that could promote the TBE programme. Teacher training should be prioritized to develop effective and multifaceted ways of implementing the programme. Teacher training institutions should train teachers who can handle complex multilingual classrooms. Although teacher training has changed from being generalists to specialists, the school practices have not
changed to suit teacher training. This setup confines teachers to minimal creativity and little motivation to improve. Sharpe (2001) acknowledges the fact that teachers, who have been trained as language specialists, would be in a position to teach correct teaching of intonation and pronunciation, contextualize language, and detects language problems early. This may not be the case with teachers studied.

According to Borg (2003), teachers possess an extensive array of beliefs, pedagogical preferences, school practices and individual personalities that could influence their promotion of bilingual educational programmes. Notwithstanding this important fact, teachers, through in-service training, can be guided on the delivery skills and teaching methods that can enable them to address the complexity of language classroom practices. They should be given the opportunity to reflect on their bilingual classroom practices and enhance their professional growth (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Despite the importance of post training services, teachers in the schools studied lamented on lack of development in their career as there was no indication of in-service training, brief meetings regionally or even internally to discuss the implementation of TBE programme. Richards and Farrell (2005) also note that, ‘most successful organizations depend on people working effectively in teams, but special effort often has to be made to develop teamwork in schools because teaching is generally seen as individual work.’ In some of the open ended questionnaires teachers expressed frustration and ineffective delivery services because of lack of communication with their learners and lack of monitoring and supervision from senior personnel. The TBE programme was left entirely to them to implement without guidance.

The development of the Botswana TBE programme lacks clear linkage structures between the Ministry of Basic Education and Skills Development and its teachers. It was not clear from the results of this study on how the Ministry expected teachers to implement the TBE programme. There was no evidence from the teachers that they were checked whether they were bilinguals in the target languages or not, hence even the posting of teachers did not consider the background of the teacher. The implementation of the TBE is grounded on the assumption that every Motswana speaks Setswana and can teach it. It may not be reasonable to conclude that the Ministry does not know whether the teachers were bilinguals such that they would also promote bilingualism. The Ministry seemed not to check to what extent the teachers were bilinguals such that they would bring out the same qualities from a bilingual learner.

Training the teachers in the teaching profession seemed not enough for the teachers to handle the TBE programme as they seem to be doing their routine work that did not actually promote bilingualism. Teachers used Setswana to teach learners who could not communicate in the language, there were no specially designed programmes to foster TBE programme, there were no remedial measures in place to address language related problems. The programme was implemented by teachers who have not specialized in the target languages. Important to note is that at Standard One, there is a Breakthrough to Setswana Programme to initiate learners into the ‘native’ language. For example, Leburu-Sianga (2000) points out that the Breakthrough to Setswana; a first language programme was introduced in 1982. The project helped children to communicate in Setswana thus giving them a language to use as a medium of instruction.

The implication of this programme was to help teachers create conducive environments for those children who had broken through and to give them an opportunity to explore their environments and integrate learning using Setswana. However, this programme was designed for first language speakers only since it requires application of sounds and morphology that the first language
learners bring from home. It does not accommodate learners who speak a different language from Setswana. Teachers at different levels of primary schooling indicated that ‘learners did not breakthrough to Setswana and communication is still a problem in speaking, reading and writing skills’. (Teacher, Standard 4; School D). The related statements from teachers of various schools qualified this programme as a wrong remedy for initiating learners who do not speak Setswana into the Setswana language. Batibo (2006) acknowledges the fact that,

‘Setswana has a number of sounds in its inventory, which are not found in the other Botswana languages. The most conspicuous ones include the fact that while most of the indigenous languages of Botswana are-vowel languages, Setswana has a seven-vowel system… This difference posed enormous problems to non-mother tongue speakers who wish to master the language.’

The quotation above provides information that is important to a language expert. However, this could be an inhibitory process for teachers who have not been trained to teach the target language. The findings indicate that the Ministry was lacking in providing guidelines and directives on regular basis on TBE programme to school administrators and other stakeholders. Leaving the programme implementation to primary schools makes the school administration and teachers to depend on their own instincts on what they consider appropriate.

**Implications of the study**

A ‘one size fits all’ TBE programme is not relevant in a multilingual set-up such as in Botswana. The government of Botswana should come up with a clearly all en-comprising policy that would take into cognizance the socio-cultural realities of its people. As Bogonko (1992, p. 236) states, ‘culture, education and language are interrelated and no . . . one can have meaning without the other’. All children in Botswana should be accorded the privilege of learning in their mother tongue like those from the Setswana background. This paper is calling for an inclusive policy even at pre-primary school level that would ensure that all children are given the opportunity to learn in the most effective way. The Ministry of Basic Education and Skills Development should produce some clear guidelines on how the TBE programme should be implemented so that no child in Botswana is disadvantaged.

Policies should be backed by strong political will that would ensure implementation irrespective of who is in power (Oladipo, 2003). Scholars, such as Onwu and Mogari (2004), emphasize that collaboration among stakeholders is vital regarding implementing educational programmes or policies; and each stakeholder should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Like Kaschula (2004) points out, successful implementation of the policy largely depends on the structures and how they operate and collaborate.

Furthermore, resources need to be availed as well as in-service training and full time training programmes (Kaschula, 2004) to produce bilingual teachers who can implement the TBE programme. In this regard, teachers need a supportive role where they are equipped with the necessary content, skills and attitude on an ongoing basis to promote the TBE programme. This study found out that there was no proper coordination, guidance, care and measures in place from the then MOESD for teachers to deliver and implement the TBE programme appropriately. Furthermore, efforts should be made to see that languages that do not exist in writing are eventually reduced to writing. Materials should be developed in the various mother tongues and teachers trained to address the non-availability of these and improve on what exists in the languages.
While the indigenous languages are being developed, there is also the need to rethink how English is used and taught in the schools. Currently, products of the Botswana Education system do not demonstrate a competence in English, and that indicates that the teaching of English is not being handled efficiently. The quality of its teaching and learning can be improved through proper training of teachers of English and relevant materials for its learning to justify its role as an invaluable medium of instruction.

Conclusions
This study has found that the TBE programme used in a multilingual set-up such as in Botswana discriminates against children who speak indigenous languages. It seems the TBE policy implementers forget that indigenous children need to be well educated too like those from the mainstream background. The paper has argued that the TBE programme seems to score low in its role within the Botswana education system. The current situation seems to paint a gloomy picture of the future of the TBE, especially given the fact that it has been in existence since the latter part of the 20th century in Botswana. The current language policy in education also seems to be promoting the supremacy of the two dominant languages in Botswana, English and Setswana. Concerted effort and collaboration between all the socio-economic, political and academic structures will ensure that the Botswana TBE policy satisfies the needs of all Batswana irrespective of culture. Every language should be given the chance to develop. The challenge for Botswana in this regard is enormous but so are the gains.

Recommendations
This study recommends that: (a) Educational authorities should commit themselves to the implementation of the policy and use appropriate measures to implement it; (b) Teachers should be given a robust training on how implementation of a newly introduced programme/policy should be done – the hit and run strategy brings along challenges and risks that devalue teachers professionalism; (c) Transitional Bilingual Educational programme should be implemented by languages teachers who understand the demands that come along with the programme.

References


