

Educating Bilingual and Multilingual Librarians: A Case of Library and Information Science Education in Rwanda

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The importance and need for bilingual librarians is steadily being felt, but most library and information science (LIS) schools do not incorporate bilingualism in instruction. Rwanda is in a unique and complex setting in which bilingualism is being used in its LIS program. Such an education is ideal if our libraries are to have bilingual or multilingual librarians. However, this approach has many challenges when it comes to implementation, especially when the two languages of instruction do not happen to be the first language (L1) of the learner. This paper sets out to show how the bilingualism policy in Rwanda is affecting the LIS program and how it is being implemented in the program.

Introduction

There has been a need for bilingual and multilingual librarians as a result of the growth of library collections in foreign languages. The need was expressed as early as 1890 in the United States of America. Not only have these librarians been critical in cataloging information resources, they were also greatly needed as international and regional networks in the scientific community developed. Britain highlighted the need for bilingual librarians in the 1940s because they could save scientists' time in knowing the gist of articles published in foreign languages.¹ In addition, more countries are now needing bilingual librarians than ever before because populations in these countries are continuously becoming diversified as a result of globalization and immigration.²

These librarians have thus become instrumental in offering effective reference service to users with limited language proficiency in addition to playing a critical role in enhancing reader's advisory service, and collection development.³ They are instrumental in helping users with low proficiency in the language spoken because such users tend to be fearful of using library services. In order to better serve these kind of users and to be effective, librarians who are to work in the public services section of the library ought to take classes in foreign languages.⁴

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By 2005, there were 192 million international migrants worldwide.⁵ This led some individuals and organizations strongly advocate incorporating diversity among the library staff by recruiting multicultural librarians because the benefits are immense.⁶ From 1971 to 2001, there has been an increase in vacancies for youth services librarians in the United States, many requiring one to be at least bilingual.⁷ A similar situation is found in Canada where in 1998, 46% of the library vacancies that had been advertised in Quebec required the applicant to be bilingual.⁸

However, hiring bilingual or multilingual librarians can be a challenge. Establishing new positions requires sufficient finances; current library staff may resent reallocation of positions; and advertising for an ethnic-specific position may be in violation of labor and union rules or simply given low priority.⁹ In spite of these challenges, for the most part, libraries in the United States that employ bilingual librarians tend to employ native speakers of those languages.¹⁰ Some Hispanic/Latino librarians have felt discriminated against and libraries in some communities in the United States have cut services to Latinos in an emotionally charged context of illegal immigration.¹¹

In spite of the constant discussion about the importance of having bilingual and multilingual librarians, there seems to be no study addressing intricacies involved in educating library and Information science (LIS) students in instances where neither of the two languages of instruction are the students' first language (L1). The purpose of this paper is to provide insight into how bilingualism and multilingual policy in Rwanda affects the LIS education program and how this policy is being implemented in the program.

Definition of Bilingual and Multilingual

Bilingual education has variously been defined.¹² In this paper, we are going to use the term bilingual as the use of two languages in instruction such as where learners are taught approximately 50% of the courses in one language while the rest are taught in another. It is hoped that students are bilingual when they are able to master the two languages very well and should be able to switch from one language to another and communicate in the two

languages with ease. Multilingual will refer to the ability to effectively communicate in more than two languages.

Foreign Language in LIS Schools

By 1915, 12 of the 15 LIS schools in the U.S. recognized the need for a foreign language and 6 of them had an entrance examination to gauge students' knowledge in French, German, Spanish or Scandinavian.¹ In 1968–1969, 42 accredited graduate schools in the U.S. required that the students either pass proficiency tests or take coursework credit in a foreign language.¹³ In the 1970s, LIS programs in the U.S. had topics on linguistics in the curriculum.¹⁴

Relevance of this requirement soon started to be questioned because these topics did not have much practical utility. They were about language patterns and structures and did not inculcate the required reading, writing and speaking skills that could enable one to be proficient in a given language. Graduate schools also required doctoral students to be proficient in some foreign language although it was found that this requirement was a waste of time because there was very little use of foreign language literature by these students, either due to reluctance or inability to use the foreign language.¹⁵ Decline of foreign languages in LIS programs became inevitable and led schools to start focusing on statistics and research methods.

In the 1970s, the B.A. in librarianship at Leeds University in Britain had a required foreign language component in the curriculum and other universities used to offer optional language classes in order for students to be able to handle cataloging and citation data in a given language.¹⁶ Foreign language training in fifth-year library science students was sufficient to pass a test in reading competence in French, German or Spanish and some people advocated for inclusion of linguistics in the library science curriculum in as much as it was viewed to consume time that might have been allocated to other courses. At that time, people believed that knowledge in foreign languages would help graduates of these library schools work in foreign countries including those that do not speak English.¹⁷ Currently, none of the LIS schools in United States, France, Uganda, Britain, Kenya, or India incorporate a foreign language component in their curriculum and neither is it an entrance requirement.

Countries such as Cameroon, Tunisia and Canada have had a long history of bilingual education. After the demise of apartheid in South Africa, traditionally Afrikaans-speaking universities such as the University of Pretoria and Stellenbosch University had to use English and Afrikaans as media of instruction.¹⁸ The United States and Britain were some of the English-speaking countries that tried to either require or incorporate foreign languages in library science programs prior to 1980 and never recorded much success. However, the situation is changing. The University of Puerto Rico recently started offering a bilingual program.¹⁹ In September 2009, Haute École de Gestion de Geneve (HEG) in Switzerland will start educat-

ing bilingual librarians where 50 percent of the courses will be taught in French and the rest in German and this can be termed as true bilingual education. To be admitted, one is required to have mastered the two languages and foreign language courses will be offered in the first four semesters.

Rwanda's Linguistic History

As a Belgian colony until 1962 and even after independence, French was made the official language of government and instruction in schools although Kinyarwanda was the most widely spoken language.

A few years before independence, ethnic tension and conflict escalated, becoming a precursor for the 1994 genocide where approximately one million people lost their lives and as many as 2 million Rwandans became refugees in neighboring countries and another 3,093,579 became internally displaced.²⁰

After the 1994 genocide, approximately 800,000 Rwandans in the diaspora returned. They comprised mainly those who had been forced into exile in 1959 and 1973.²¹ Some came from English-speaking countries such as Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania while others came from French-speaking countries such as Burundi and The Democratic Republic of Congo. Most of those who came from English-speaking countries could not speak any French. On the other hand, most French speakers who were living in Rwanda before the genocide and those from the diaspora could hardly speak any English. The only language uniting them was Kinyarwanda.

Genocide and ethnic conflict have thus been the greatest players in the current language situation in Rwanda because they caused a large Rwandan population to interact with people from other cultures and linguistic orientation. The 1996 to 2003 wars in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo also led many French- and Kiswahili-speaking Banyamulenge, who are of Rwandan origin, and a sizeable population of Congolese to seek asylum and eventually get integrated into Rwanda society.

Geographical location necessitates Rwandan citizens to be multilingual so that they can effectively communicate in French, English, Kiswahili and Kinyarwanda. In the eastern and northern parts, Rwanda borders Tanzania and Uganda, which are anglophone countries while in the south and west, it borders Burundi and The Democratic Republic of Congo, which are francophone. All these countries have played a role in Rwanda's history and if Rwanda is to effectively move forward into a future characterized by globalization, its citizens have to be able to go to other countries and effectively communicate at least in English, Kiswahili or French.

In June 2007, Rwanda and Burundi joined the East African Community which previously comprised Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, all anglophone countries. The objective of the East African Community is to facilitate free flow of manpower, enhance trade, and eventually form a federation of states with a common currency, foreign policy, and political leader.²⁰

Rwanda is therefore aggressively promoting using bilingualism (French and English) in education as a tool that will give Rwandans a competitive advantage in this era of globalization. However, Kiswahili and Kinyarwanda are used mostly as tools for social cohesion in Rwanda while Kiswahili is the unifying language among the other members the East African Community.

Language Policy

Knowledge and use of multiple languages in African societies is a norm and Rwanda is one of those countries whose recent history has a bearing on the current languages being used. However, languages used in instruction tend to be second or third languages for learners.

Article 5 of Rwanda's constitution stipulates Kinyarwanda is the national language and the official languages are Kinyarwanda, French and English. This means that the three languages can be used in instruction.²² At the same time, the policy states that everyone has the right to an education regardless of which language they speak. Therefore, the burden is on the school to make sure that the students can learn in the languages being stipulated. Trilingualism is therefore one of Rwanda's education policies and care was taken against discrimination based on language as this policy is important for economic, social and political reasons.²³ Due to very few natural resources and industries, Rwanda takes pride in her people as the main resource that will enhance economic development by offering services and trading with other countries, so the ability to communicate in other languages is obligatory. On the social and political front, the East African Community is likely to achieve political federation by the year 2012 and English and Kiswahili are the languages that are mainly going to be used. This forces Rwandans to learn those languages if they are to effectively integrate into the East African Community and also be effective citizens.

In tertiary education, the policy requires courses to be taught in English or French. It is mandatory that students be able to at least comprehend the language that is being used in the teaching of that particular course. However, there is a scarcity of reading materials in either of these languages that is available to the students. The few books available have tended to be in French although more English-language books and other information resources are now being acquired.

LIS Education in Rwanda

Formal LIS education did not exist in Rwanda except for a once-yearly short duration training course organized by the Ministère de la Fonction Publique et du Travail at the Centre Rwandais de Formation de Cadres (CRFC). Being a francophone country then, French was the language of in-

struction for these courses. Unfortunately, the 1994 genocide led to the demise of the center and the short training courses in LIS.

In the 2001–2002 academic year, the Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) started a one-year certificate program and was upgraded to a two-year diploma program the following academic year. After starting the diploma program, the certificate program was completely phased out because of the need for higher qualified staff to work in libraries in order for these libraries to realize greater impact.

The LIS program was developed so as to overcome the shortage of qualified staff to work in libraries, archives and documentation centers. This shortage also came about because of the lack of previous training opportunities for librarians in addition to a mushrooming of academic institutions in the late 1990s which led to an increasing number of libraries being established without sufficient qualified staff. This shortage caused collections in many libraries including those in newly established institutions to grow slowly and by accident rather than by design. Library services also tended to be ineffective because they were mainly staffed with people who had no training whatsoever in library operations and who seemed to have no vision for libraries.

At the time the program was started, fewer than five people in Rwanda had a master's degree in LIS. These librarians and a few others with bachelor's degrees worked together to teach the program in the evenings. They worked in libraries during the day and taught LIS courses from 5:30 P.M. to 8:30 P.M. Monday through Friday.

Students in the LIS Program

KIE admitted both anglophone and francophone students into the LIS school. This is because education is a right and one should not be denied education because of language. Education thus ought not to be used as a tool to oppress others as previous regimes had done. Students who were admitted had either very little knowledge or no knowledge of the other language, although all of them spoke Kinyarwanda, which is a unifying language.

The number of anglophone students has remained consistently low.

Table 1
Number of Students Who Graduated and the Language Group They Classified Themselves in at the Time of Admission.

Year	Students Graduated	Anglophone Students when Admitted	Francophone Students when Admitted	Total
2004		3	16	19
2005		3	29	32
2006		2	30	32
2007		4	23	27
2008		6	40	48

Most of them lived and learned in an anglophone country or studied in an anglophone school for most of their lives. With bilingualism being enforced early on in schools, we hope to see more students who classify themselves as bilingual being admitted in future, although that will take time.

Library and Information Science Curriculum

The LIS program was started by an anglophone. Therefore, the curriculum is written in English. Some students asked for the curriculum to be translated into French, but this idea never bore fruit.

In this curriculum, a total number of 60 hours of coursework worth 4 credits in each semester has been allocated to language and communication skills courses. In these courses, francophones are taught English and anglophones are taught French. Each year, students have to learn 120 hours (8 credits) of communication skills out of a total of 600 hours (40 credits) they earn each academic year. This is a clear manifestation of the emphasis we place on language and effective communication skills because these are tools that will enable students to easily learn the other courses in the program. It will also enhance the graduates to be effective librarians in a country where four main languages are used.

Staffing

Since its inception in 2001 and up to 2007, there have been 16 different lecturers who have taught courses in the LIS program. Nine of them were francophone and taught the class in French; four were anglophone and taught their classes using English; while three were bilingual (French and English) and they preferred to teach their classes in English.

The three bilingual lecturers were originally francophone and they happened to teach courses related to information and communication technology. The reason might be that most of the books they use to teach are written in English, and they find teaching using English easier. This is in addition to having some prestige in being able to teach in English.

Instruction

The bone of contention is never the curriculum or the lecturer, but the ability of the students to be able to effectively participate in class, comprehend what the lecturer is saying and having the ability to actually take notes in class.

The moment the program commenced in 2001, we knew our biggest challenge would be implementing the bilingualism policy. This is because of the short duration students had to learn French and English. When students joined the program in the first year, instead of teaching 60 hours of language and communication skills each semester, we combined the hours and immersed them in a 120-hour intensive language program before they

could start learning the LIS courses. Anglophones learned French while francophones learned English.

Being a course that is only taught in the evening for only three hours a day, the academic year for the diploma in LIS spanned a whole calendar year with minimum breaks in the year. In contrast, regular pre-service students taking a bachelor's degree at Kigali Institute of Education have two 16-week semesters in an academic year.

It is the policy of the institute and all other public tertiary institutions in Rwanda that before students are admitted, they have to undergo a compulsory year of intensive language learning before they can start the regular university courses. Such a model was not acceptable for the students taking evening courses. Being self-sponsored, most students taking courses in the evenings would not accept learning a language for the whole year yet the LIS program was supposed to be a two-year program. An additional one year of language would mean that they study in the diploma program for three years. A whole year of learning language and communication skills would mean that the dropout rate would be too high and by the end of that year and we might end up with less than a quarter of the students who had been admitted. Such an approach would have also discouraged students taking LIS as they would opt to study in some of the private universities offering bachelor's degrees and having the classes in the evenings at the same time yet not having the language and communication skills requirement. Had we opted for the year-long language immersion program, we would have defeated the purpose the LIS program was established to achieve. Most students chose to study in the LIS program because it was a very new program in the country and the job prospects were beckoning all over.

We could not therefore adopt a one-year-long language immersion course like regular degree courses. Instead, we offered 120 hours of language before we could start teaching the library and information science courses. After the 120-hour language course, both francophone and anglophone students were put in the same class and they could either be taught a course in French or in English, depending on the lecturer who could be available.

After the 1994 genocide, a few private universities were established or revamped to fill the huge manpower gap. Among them were Université Libre de Kigali (ULK) which was opened in 1996; Université Laïque de Kigali (UNILAK) 1997; Université Adventiste D'Afrique Central reopened in 1996; and Institut Supérieur de Gitwe in 1997. Among public universities were those such as Kigali Institute of Education (KIE), National University of Rwanda (NUR); Kigali Health Institute (KHI); Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST); and Institut Supérieur D'agriculture et Elevage (ISAE). A one-year language immersion program is compulsory in addition to taking communication skills courses each semester that are basically the learning of language skills. However, private universities never had language immersion programs and they taught all their courses in French. This was working against the government's bilin-

gualism policy and was also locking out English-speaking students from joining such universities as it was a kind of subtle way to discriminate although discrimination in any form is outlawed by the constitution. In 2005, the Ministry of Education issued a directive to all private universities to start offering compulsory language classes and some of the courses in the programs they offered had to be taught in English.

Student Participation in Class

This was the most challenging aspect. If the class was being taught in English, students tried to ask questions and speak in English and vice versa. There were instances when students had to ask questions in French if the teacher was English speaking and vice versa. This meant that to teach such a class, care, patience and compassion were necessary due to the language circumstances we found ourselves in. There were moments when classes became tense and the lecturer had to resort to teaching the subject using Kinyarwanda as it was the language that was best comprehensible and best articulated by all the students and staff.

The mission was to teach LIS, and language was simply a medium of instruction. Therefore, all the three languages, English, French and Kinyarwanda ended up being used in any one class session in most of the classes.

Translation of Lecture Notes

After the 120-hour language immersion course, LIS classes commenced. Knowing that the time allocated to the language immersion course was not sufficient to effectively master the language, we put in place a mechanism to translate lecture notes for the students. If a class was taught in French, we translated that lecturer's notes into English and vice versa. We only gave students the translated notes a couple of days after that class had been taught to encourage them to make more effort to try and comprehend content being taught in the language the lecturer was using to teach.

Translating the lecture notes was a bit costly at the initial time. However, we did not need any translation when the class was to be taught the subsequent year. Because the translator had in most cases no knowledge of LIS, an anglophone and francophone lecturer had to go over the translated text so as to ensure that what was translated was exactly what was intended. It was a challenging exercise for both staff and students as it was the first time they were learning that way.

Assignments and Examinations

All assignments and examinations given to students were in both English and French. For each question, the translated version of the question was italicized immediately beneath that question. This was done to give each and every student an equal chance. This meant that students had the free-

dom to give their responses in the language of their choice and not necessarily the language the instructor used most while teaching that class. Students were required to answer in the language they could best articulate, except Kinyarwanda. They could also not be allowed to answer some questions in English and others in French. They had to only use one language, either French or English throughout the assignment or in all the examination questions.

Kigali Institute of Education Language of Instruction Policy

Using of Kinyarwanda to teach started to dominate most classes. However, in 2005, the institute's senate, which is the supreme academic decision making body, outlawed the use of Kinyarwanda as a medium of instruction unless it was a Kinyarwanda language course. However, the institute established a communication skills department with ten staff members so as to strengthen French and English-language immersion programs to incoming students and enhance language skills courses taught to all years of study in order to strengthen students' oral, reading, and writing skills. In as much as it might be viewed that this directive was unconstitutional, its mission was noble as it was to help learners to master both written and spoken English and French.

The use of Kinyarwanda in teaching courses was viewed as working against the government and education language policies. Apart from speaking Kinyarwanda at home, it is the language students use most when they are outside their class. Continued use of Kinyarwanda in instruction was viewed as hindering students' acquisition of French and English language skills, yet proficiency in these two languages was the only way forward for graduates from the Rwandan education system to effectively compete with graduates from other countries in this age of globalization. Using French and English was also seen as one of the ways forward to heal the country and bring about reconciliation, avoid stereotypes, and never allow language to be a tool that can be used or be a scapegoat to discriminate against people.

Use of the mother tongue is discouraged in many classrooms in Africa because it is viewed as regressive and working counter to what society had invested in the students.²⁴ This is also a subtle reason for discouraging teaching in Kinyarwanda. For the institute to maintain its elite status in society, it meant that it would be judged by how well its students spoke English and French. Thus, the institute's decision was to safeguard its image in society. In spite of all this effort, 99% of Rwandans speak Kinyarwanda, 3.7% speak French, 1.8% speak English while 3% speak Kiswahili in their homes.²⁵

Hegemony of the English Language

In as much as it was initially very difficult for students to learn LIS in a bi-

lingual setting where French and English were used, Anglophone students complained the most about learning French and being taught in French. They also seem to take longer to master the French language. This is close to what was found among university students in Lebanon where 61% of the students found learning French very difficult as opposed to 1% who found learning English to be difficult.²⁶

In the LIS program, most francophone students viewed being taught some of the courses in English as a heaven-sent opportunity to learn English. As a whole they seem to learn English faster. Many students joked that English is simplified French and that is why francophones seem to be acquiring English language skills faster than their anglophone counterparts acquiring French language skills. This is similar to what was reported in Lebanon in which 81% of university students in felt it was easier to learn French first before learning English.²⁷

There is a belief among students in Rwanda that when they acquire English and French language skills, they have a better chance to secure better jobs. This is making English to grow at a fast pace compared to French. It is mainly due to the perceived socio-economic reasons that make bilingual competencies be more acceptable in society.²⁸

Incorporating bilingual or multilingual education is always a challenge. In as much as anglophone students had been a bit reluctant to learn French, the situation in Rwanda can be viewed as smooth, compared to the transition at Stellenbosch University in South Africa which is taking a long time for total acceptance.²⁷ Reluctance to totally embrace bilingualism seems to emanate from trying to maintain an identity that is perceived to be threatened.

Conclusion

Bilingualism in LIS in Rwanda is greatly encouraged by the Rwandan constitution, education policy and KIE's language policy. However, these noble efforts are being hampered by continued reliance on the Kinyarwanda language which is the most widely spoken language in Rwanda. For bilingualism to truly take root, it will take a lot of effort and initiative from both students and staff. In as much as providing translated lecture notes was discontinued, it facilitated students to learn the program better. Despite all the challenges of teaching LIS in a bilingual setting, it is hoped that bilingualism will be more effective when most of the students admitted into the program are those who have started learning the two languages in elementary school.

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