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Multilingual Zambia - Language Issues in Primary/Secondary Schools of the Eastern/Southern Provinces

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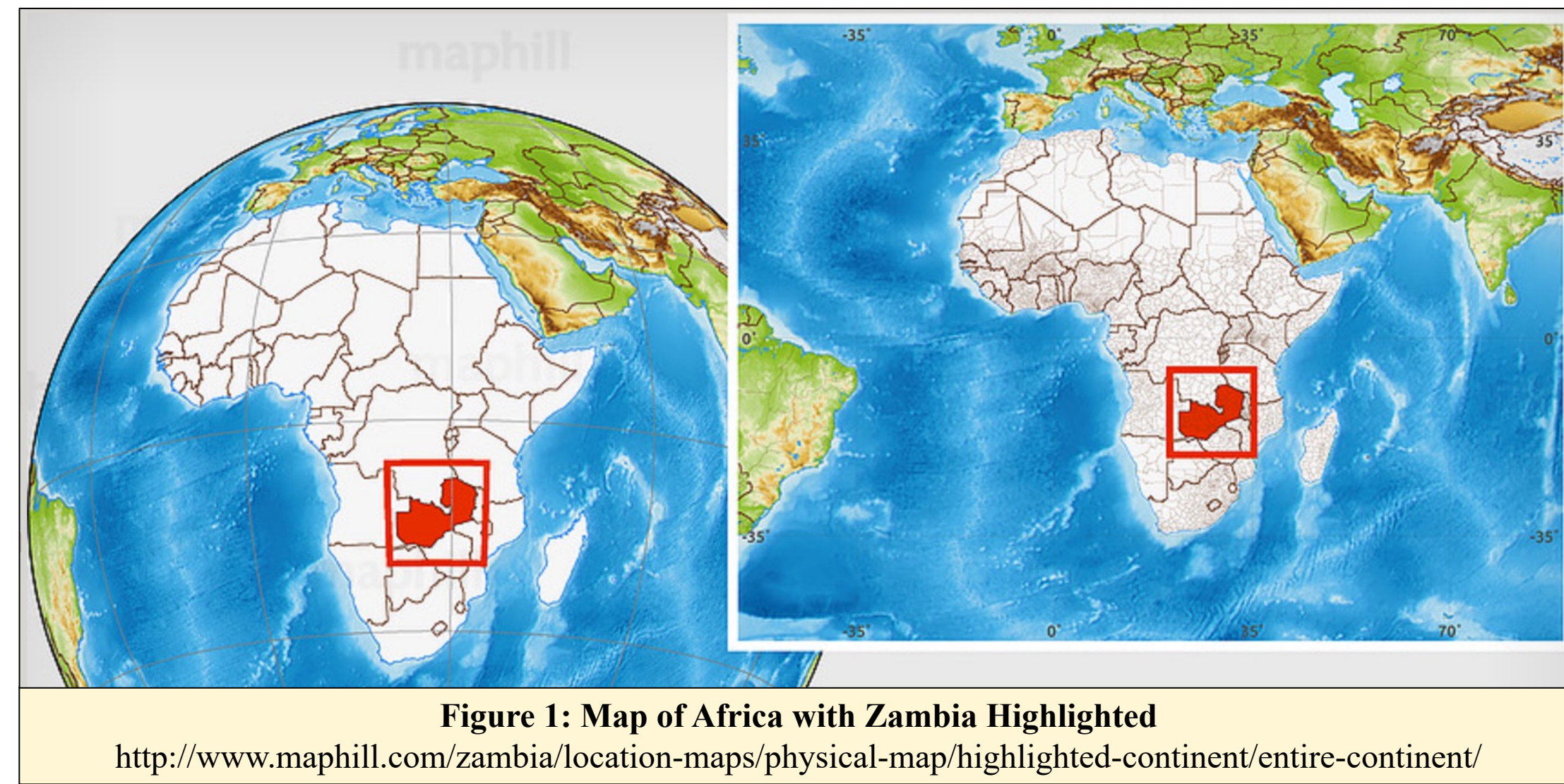
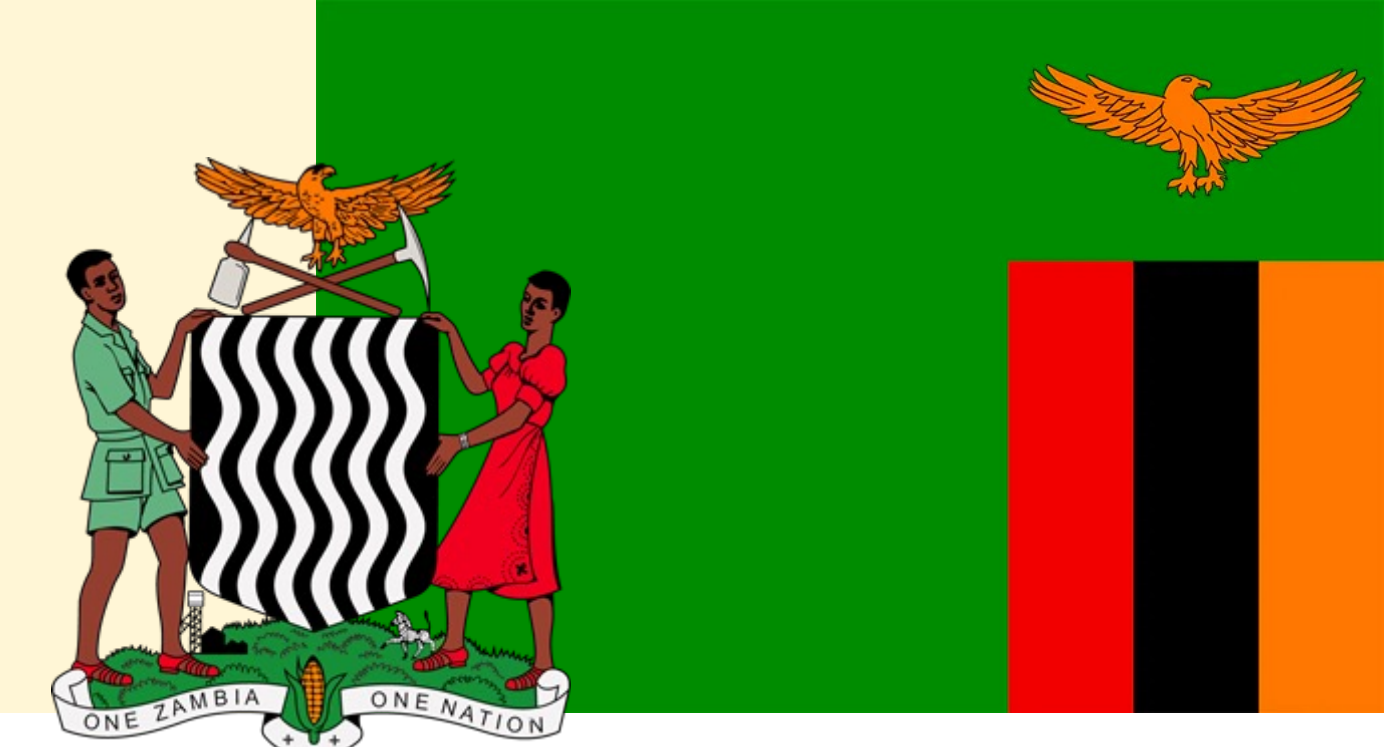


Figure 1: Map of Africa with Zambia Highlighted

<http://www.maphill.com/zambia/location-maps/physical-map/highlighted-continent/entire-continent/>

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Zambia is a multilingual country that uses 8 different languages for instruction including English and 7 other indigenous languages.
Methods: Survey research conducted between May-June 2022 on 6-7th graders within 9 Zambian schools. Classroom observations made and teachers interviewed.
Results: In Eastern and Southern Provinces, Zambian teachers speak an average of 5 languages while students speak an average of 2. Both teachers and students say English remains the most important language followed by first languages.
Conclusion: Continued research on language-in-education policies and impacts on student performance must be conducted if “One Zambia, One Nation” is meant to promote all indigenous peoples over the English colonial past.

INTRODUCTION

Before independence, English was the predominant language throughout the British colony that would eventually be named Zambia. During this time, local languages represented the medium of education, and English was to be a subject in schools. After independence in 1964, Zambia adopted the motto, “One Zambia, One Nation.” Following the belief that “one nation equals one language,” English was declared as the country’s official language and was the language of instruction from 1930 until the Education Reform Act of 1966. After 1966, seven of Zambia’s 73 indigenous languages were to be taught as well (Kashimba, 2020; Figure 2). Once students used their first language or mother tongue in the classroom, they became less proficient in English. This gave rise to a variety of obstacles in reading and writing, resulting in lower academic performance levels (Mulikelela, 2013).

Issues relating to inadequate language instruction and associated teaching strategies are rarely considered, yet they are key factors in literacy development and one of the major causes of poor literacy skills in Zambia (Mkandawire, 2017). The Primary Reading Programme (PRP) and Primary Literacy Programme (PLP) were implemented in the early 2000’s to improve literacy levels. However, there are several factors that have prevented program success. For example, negative attitudes towards the use of local languages and a child’s movement between schools means changing from a local language to an entirely new language environment (Chileshe et al., 2018).

There remains a lack of relevant data on language learning issues in Zambian classrooms. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate the languages spoken by primary school students, teachers, and household members in the Eastern and Southern Provinces of Zambia. Topics included an individual’s preference of dialect both at home and school, the challenges presented by switching back and forth between languages, and techniques used to make these transitions more feasible for students.

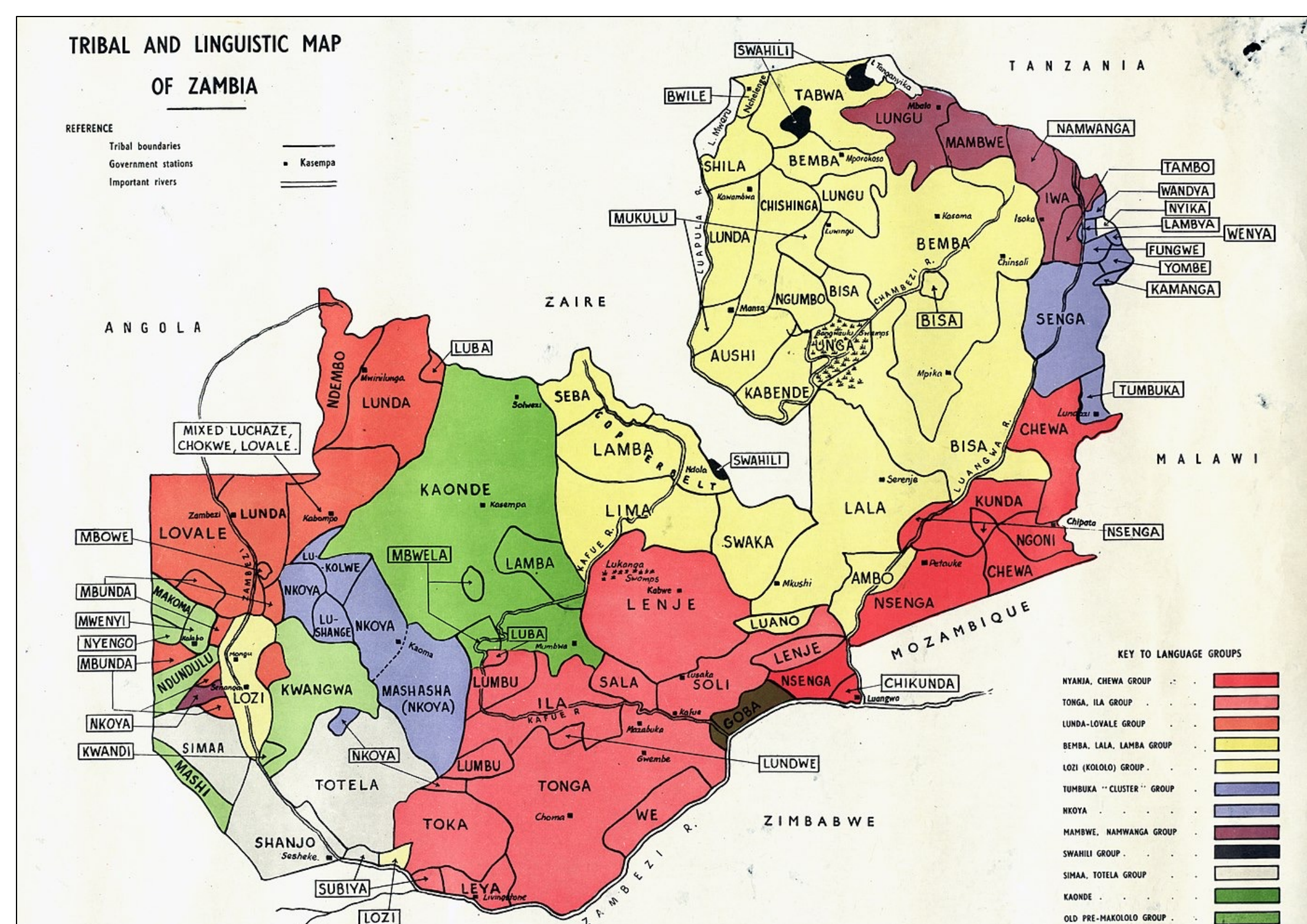


Figure 2: Language and Ethnic Group Map of Zambia

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/41/Tribal_Linguistic_map_Zambia.jpg

METHODS

Subjects:
6-7th grade students ranging from ages 8-18

Environment:
Eastern Province, 1 hour radius of Chipata: 2 Primary Schools and 2 Secondary Schools (Figure 1)
Southern Province, 1 hour radius of Livingstone: 4 Primary Schools and 2 Secondary Schools (Figure 1)



Figures 3-4: Interviewing Primary School Children in Chipata and Livingstone, Zambia

Experimental Design:
→ Research conducted under IRB #20150515251EP; permission to participate obtained and students could opt out at any time
→ Data collected as part of a larger Food Security, Health & Nutrition project in May-June 2022 (Figure 5)
→ Observations and interviews with teachers in language departments/classrooms (Figures 6 & 11)
→ Interviews with 781 Zambian students (Figures 3 & 4)

Statistical Analysis:
→ Data hand-written in composition notebooks; descriptive and correlational analyses conducted
→ Entered in an Excel spreadsheet and uploaded to Statistica



Figure 5: Household Experience in Livingstone

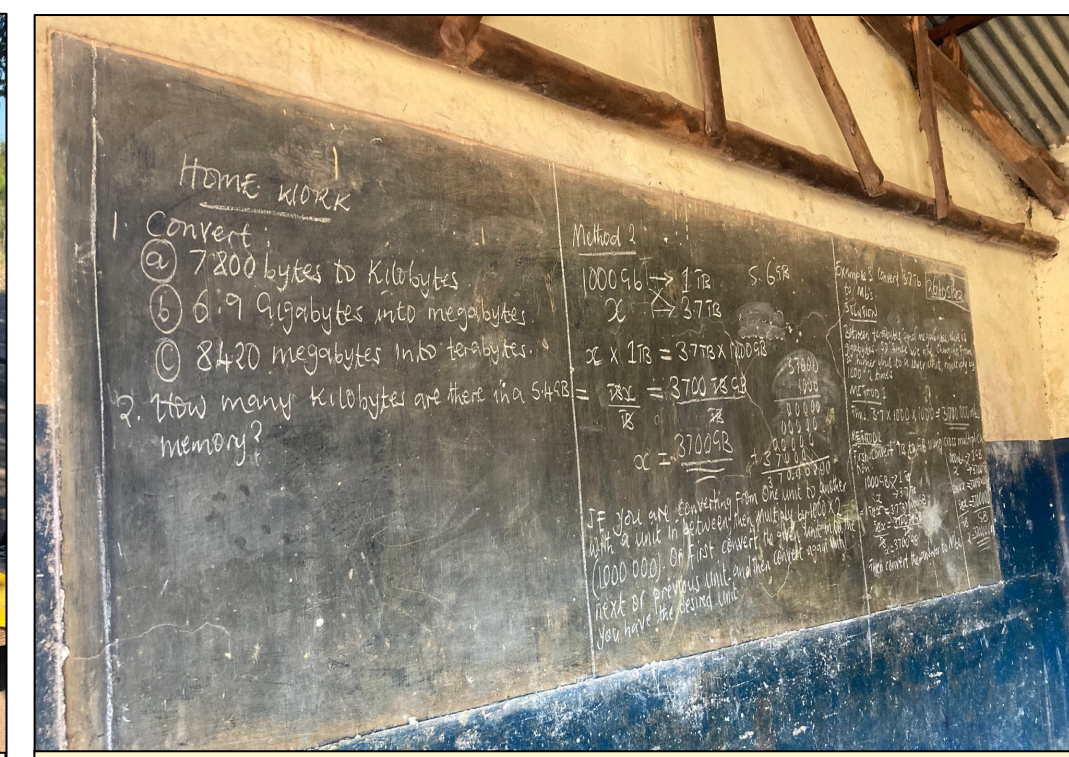


Figure 6: Classroom Observation in Chipata

RESULTS

Primary school students in Zambia speak from 1 to 3 or more languages between home and school (Table 1). Although 70.0% of teachers speak 3+ languages, 39.1% of students speak 2 and 29.5% speak 3 (Table 1). All teachers speak at least 2 languages, while 15.6% of students speak a single language (Table 1).

Table 1: How many languages do you speak?

Number of Languages	1	2	3	3+	Other/ Missing
Students	15.6%	39.1%	29.5%	12.7%	3.0%
Teachers	0.0%	10.0%	20.0%	70.0%	0.0%

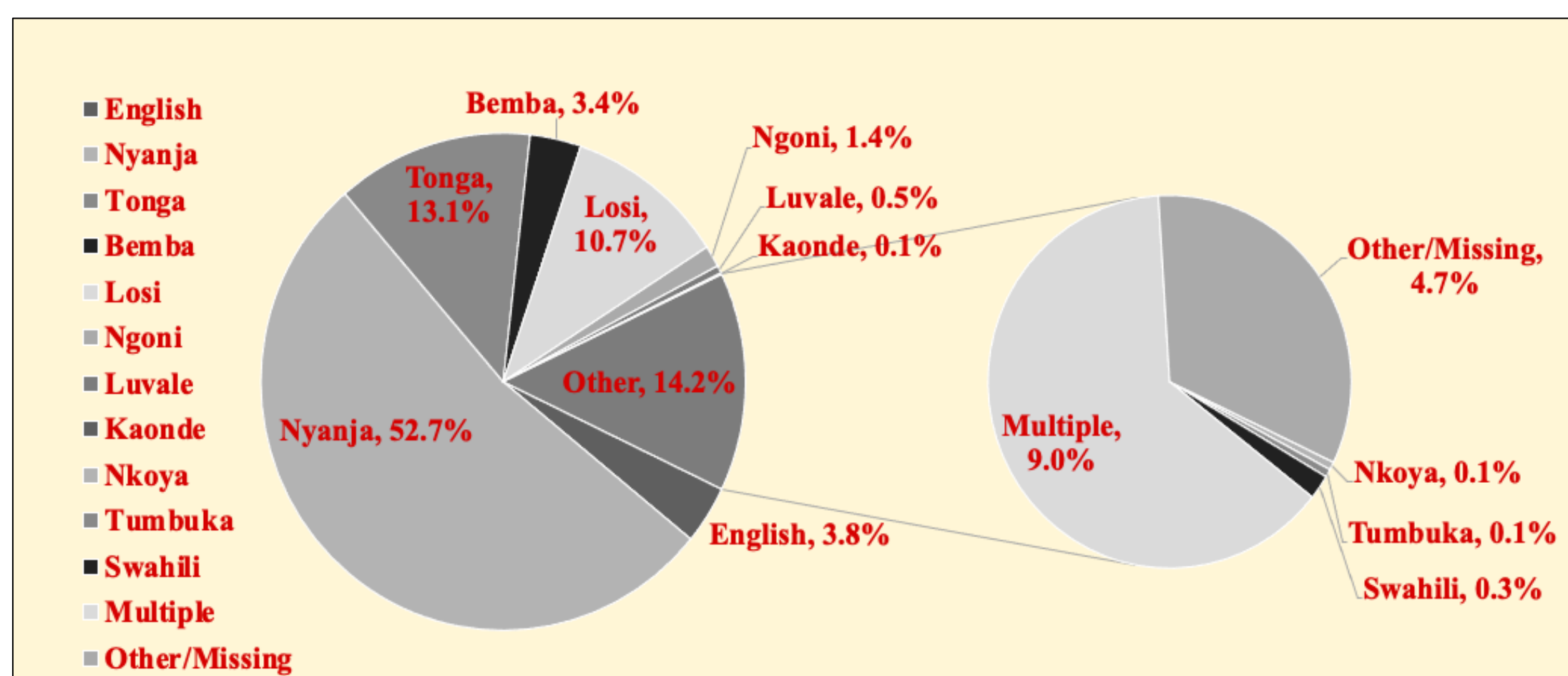


Figure 7: Primary Languages Spoken by Students at Home

RESULTS CONTINUED

When asked which language they primarily speak at home, 52.7% of primary school students in Zambia answered Nyanja, which is the common lingua franca in Zambia and Malawi (Figure 7). Nyanja was more common in the east, while Tonga and Losi were more common in the south (Figure 7). However, 11 different languages were listed by students as their primary home language (Figure 2 & 7).

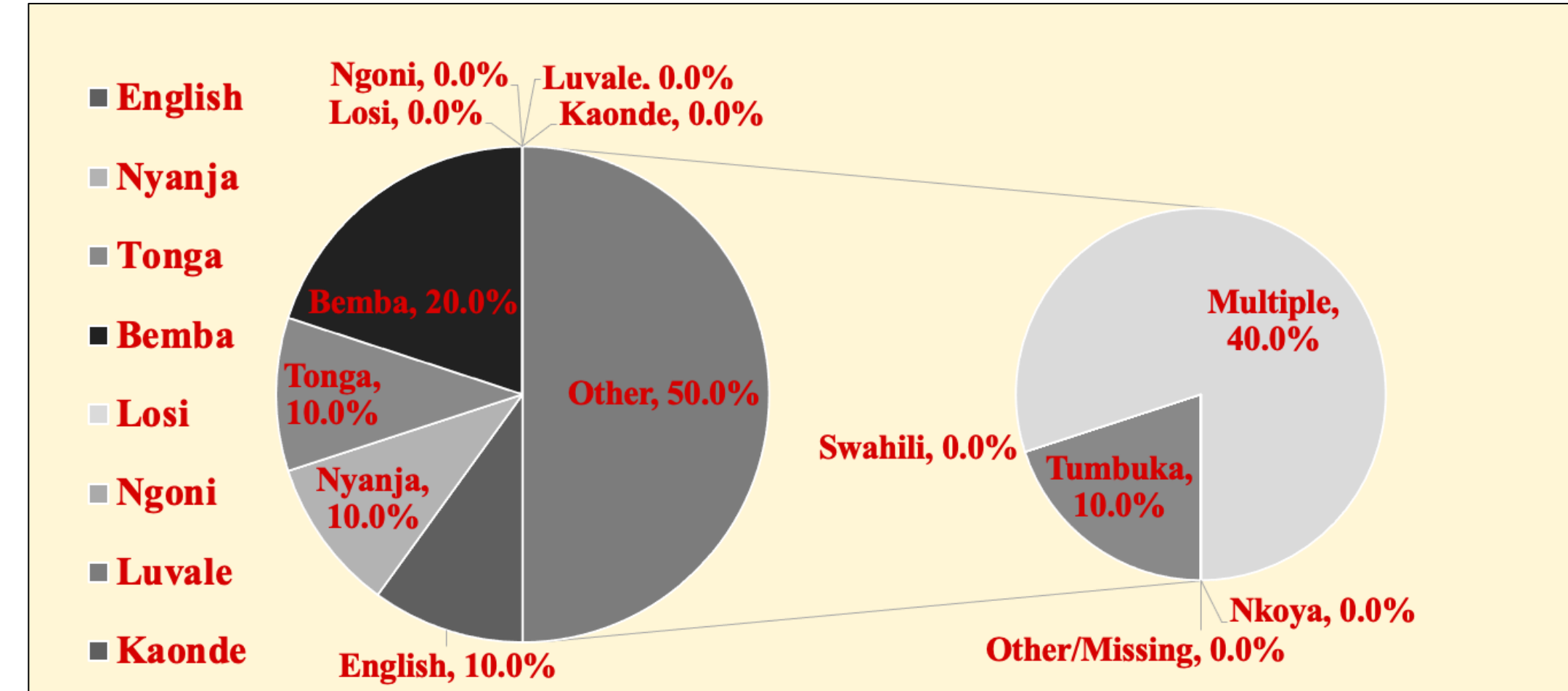


Figure 8: Primary Languages Spoken by Teachers at Home

Teachers indicated that 5 out of 11 languages were spoken at home, with Bemba at 20.0%, and Tonga, Nyanja, Tumbuka, and English at 10.0% each (Figure 8). Both Bemba and English were common languages for teachers but not so for students (Figure 7 & 8).

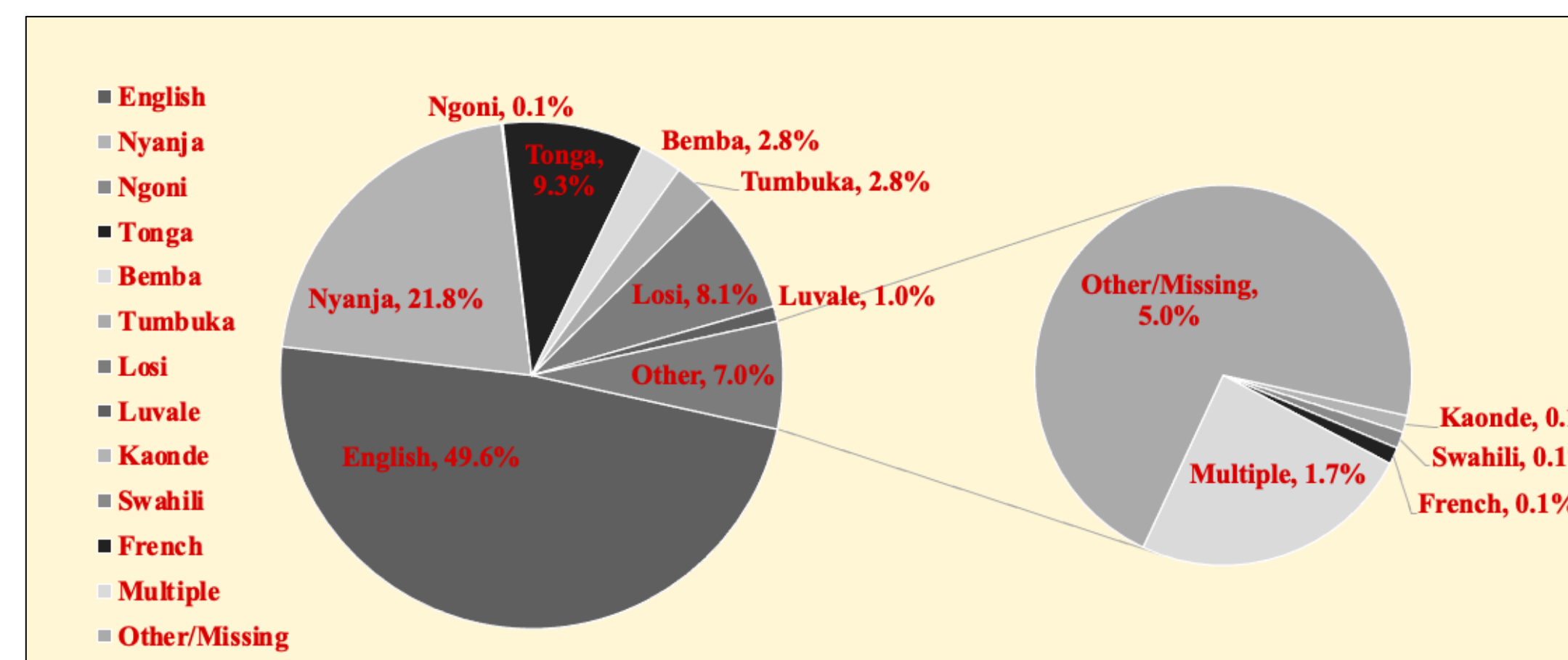


Figure 9: Most Important Language(s) Identified by Students

In contrast to which languages they use at home, 49.6% of students identified English as the most important language (Figure 9). Nyanja was the other language considered important by 21.8% of students (Figure 9).

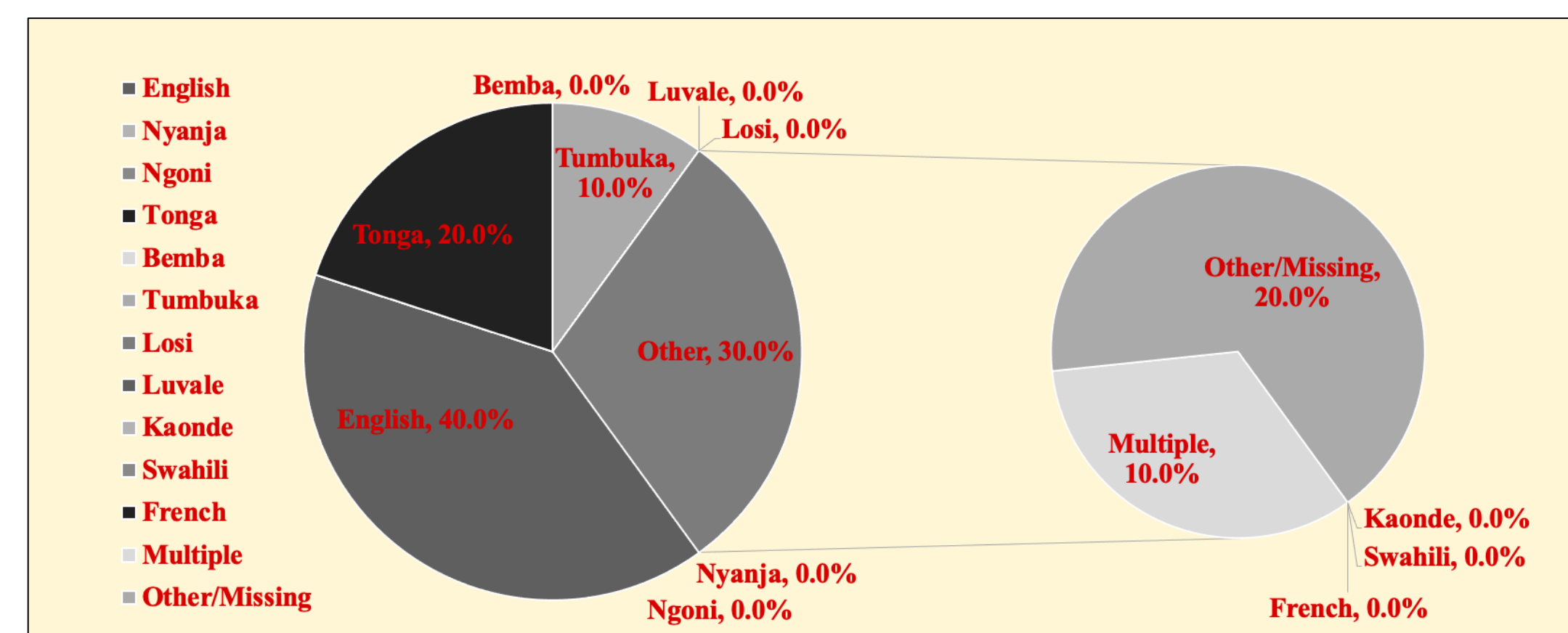


Figure 10: Most Important Language(s) Identified by Teachers

Approximately 40.0% of teachers identified English as the most important language, followed by 20.0% of teachers who referenced Tonga as the most significant (Figure 10).

IMPORTANT QUOTES

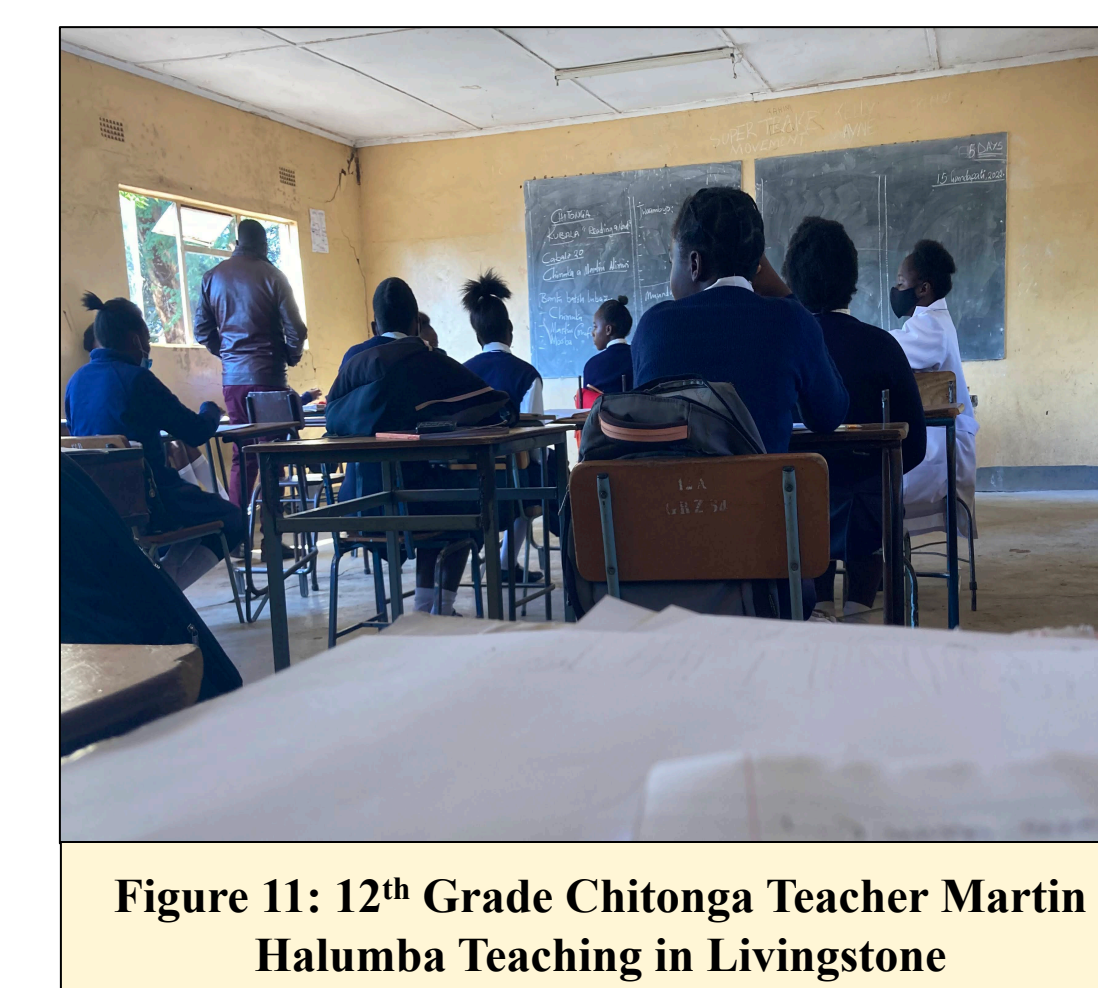


Figure 11: 12th Grade Chitonga Teacher Martin Halumba Teaching in Livingstone

- “There is no language that is more important than another” (Elizabeth Muzumara, 10th-11th Grade English Teacher).
- “Students tend to feel more free and make more noise when given the privilege to speak in their native language” (Susan Mkandawire, 9th & 11th Grade English Teacher).
- “If one language is chosen over others, some tribes may not understand or agree. Therefore, English is more advantageous” (Martin Halumba, 12th Grade Chitonga Teacher; Figure 11).

DISCUSSION

Zambia continues to teach English as well as 7 other indigenous languages in classrooms across the country. Since 1966, when instruction expanded beyond English, Zambian teachers have struggled to keep up with adequate instruction in English as well as the languages in each province and region. It may be important to note that no language is spoken by more than 50.0% of the population in Zambia (Gordon, 2014).

- On average, primary school students in Zambia speak 2 languages, while teachers speak 5 (Table 1). One teacher even mentioned speaking as many as 12 languages (Table 1). The data show that teachers have the potential to provide students with effective multilingual instruction, all depending on whether they acquire sufficient materials and resources to do so (Table 1).
 - Over half of primary school students in our sample speak Nyanja at home (Figure 7). Meanwhile, 33.5% of students reported speaking a single language of 10, including 3.8% who only speak English (Figure 7). It may be more difficult for the 86.2% of students who speak a single language at home to thrive in a multilingual classroom environment compared to the 9.0% of students who are used to using multiple languages (Figure 7).
 - Contrary to students, 40.0% of teachers in Zambia speak more than one language at home, while the remaining speak a single language (Figure 8). Once again, many teachers possess the capability to instruct students in multiple languages, but it may be more challenging for those who speak just one language at home.
 - Although most students identified speaking an indigenous language at home, almost half of students believe that English is the most important of all (Figure 9). This may be because most instruction in Zambian schools is conducted in English.
 - Similarly, 40.0% of teachers identified English as the most important language (Figure 10). Many teachers mentioned that English is the official language and most used in schools. Some added that the utilization of English is emphasized in Zambia and students are expected to respond in English at school. Their quotes reflect many of the conflicts related to language instruction in a diverse country that was once forced to adopt English.
- It is important to understand the challenging tasks facing teachers in Zambia who must teach English while trying to maintain their mother tongue and consider 10 or more student languages at the same time. The responsibilities of teachers play a significant role in the academic success of students; thus, the Ministry of Education may need to provide more structure by targeting specific regions for specific language instruction accordingly.

Several limitations were associated with this study including a non-random sample of only schools that gave permission to participate, missing interviews in each school due to absence/illness, inability to sample the entire Eastern and Southern Provinces, short duration of the study, and relying on self-report rather than conducting language assessments. Regardless of the limitations, the Zambian language-in-education policy remains difficult to implement with so many languages to consider. This short-term study in the Eastern and Southern Provinces of Zambia reflects a country with language issues that are more complex than what has been covered here. It is critical to rethink the whole process of language-in-education for all of Zambia. What children learn in classrooms today will impact the future of Zambia for years to come.

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Figure 12: UNL/Zambian Team in Chipata



Figure 13: UNL/Zambian Team in Livingstone