

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR WRITTEN REPLY QUESTION 20

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Mr. GG Boinamo to ask the Minister of Education

(1) With reference to her proposal to make mother-tongue education compulsory for the first six years of schooling, (a) when does she intend to introduce this policy and (b) what are the obstacles standing in the way of implementing it;

(2) whether an investigation has been conducted to determine whether sufficient teachers are available to implement this policy; if not, why not; if so, (a) what were the findings and (b) what actions does she intend taking to increase the number of teachers qualified to teach in the range of languages required?

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REPLY:

(1)(a) The proposal to make mother-tongue education compulsory for the first six years is recommended by some researchers as the key to successful learning. I referred to this research in a speech I gave at UNISA on 5 October 2006. The SABC erroneously reported that I had signaled a change in language policy in schools. The 1997 language policy remains in place. This policy is based on the educational principle of ensuring proficiency in home language while providing access to additional languages. It does not prescribe the number of years children must be taught in their home language, but is intended to allow for a progressive realisation of the principle of teaching children in their home language for as long as possible while building their proficiency in the language of instruction.

(b) The primary challenge in the implementation of this policy is parental choice. Many parents prefer to introduce children to learning in either English or Afrikaans, in the belief that this will lead to better cognitive development and academic achievement. We will continue to make it possible for our parents to do what is best for their children by creating an enabling environment for all children to be taught in their home language for as long as possible.

(2) My Department has not as yet undertaken any study to determine the number of teachers qualified in indigenous languages. There has been a decline in student enrolments in this area in the different higher education Institutions. We

have engaged the various higher education institutions on the matter and as part of our teacher-recruitment campaign, beginning this year, we are awarding full-cost service-linked bursaries to student teachers who choose to major in an indigenous language.