

## **Attitudes towards the Use of Indigenous African Languages as Languages of Instruction in Education: A Case of Zimbabwe**

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### **Abstract**

*Zimbabwe is a multilingual nation with 16 officially recognised languages in the country's constitution. The colonial dependency syndrome in Zimbabwe manifests itself in the continued use of a foreign language, English in all official business at the expense of indigenous languages spoken by over 90% of the population. The country therefore becomes a fertile ground for studies on language attitudes. It is against this background that the study sought to examine the attitudes of Zimbabweans towards the use of indigenous African languages as languages of instruction in schools, colleges and universities. A total of 1000 participants took part in the study comprising 200 teachers, 300 parents/guardians and 800 learners. Questionnaires, observations, document analysis and interviews were the main techniques used to collect data and the processing of the collected data was both qualitative and quantitative. The study revealed that English continues to be the prestige-laden language enjoying high while indigenous languages enjoy relatively low status. Study findings clearly show that the majority of the participants prefer English to be the medium of instruction in primary, secondary and tertiary education because it is a language that gives power and prestige. In conclusion, the author recommends a linguistic revolution and calls for a change in education policies so as to avoid the exclusion of the majority from public discourse, development and other issues of national significance.*

**Key terms:** mother tongue; language attitude; official language; language policy; medium of instruction

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### **Introduction**

This paper presents a summary of the findings of a research study that was carried out to assess the attitudes of Zimbabweans towards the use of African languages in education. The information contained in this paper was collected during field trips conducted by the author in all the ten administrative provinces of Zimbabwe. Data was collected by interviewing various people who included teachers, lecturers, pupils, students, parents and guardians. In addition to these interviews, questionnaires were also administered to all the above-mentioned informants.

### **Background**

It has always been felt by many African educationists that the African child's major learning problem is a linguistic problem. For a very long time, African languages have received very little attention in terms of being used as media of instruction. This is because these languages are given little validity in the educational system and consequently the knowledge that children have of these languages is ignored (Letsie, 2002). In Zimbabwe, the language policy in education is to some extent confusing. A lot of policy documents on education in Zimbabwe hardly discuss the language issue at all.

Throughout the colonial era, African languages and African culture were denigrated and it is saddening to note that in a post colonial dispensation, the only reference to language in the whole Zimbabwean Education Act of 1987 (as amended in 1990, 1996 and 2006) is section 55 Part XI which is headed “Languages to be taught in schools” (Nziramasanga, 1999:64). The language in education policy that was adopted at independence, which is enshrined in the education Act, enhances the importance of English as the language of business and education. English as a result remains in Zimbabwe the official medium of instruction in schools, a compulsory subject and also a requirement in all school certificates. A full O-Level certificate is defined in this country by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture to mean five O-Level passes at grade C or better including English.

It is also poignant to note that many African nations are in the process of self-colonization in the name of empowerment, access to education and globalization. Namibia as an example has a predominant Ovambo population and its second most frequently spoken language is Afrikaans (Moodley, 2000:109). Though the country never was an English colony, English is nevertheless the only official language. There is mental self-colonization among Africans, which leads to a dependency syndrome as illustrated in a letter to the editor of the *Cape Times* by a correspondent.

The reason people like me choose English is very simple. There is an entire world of knowledge, skills, jobs, power and influence, which is totally closed to us if we can only speak an indigenous language. How many books are there in Xhosa on physics, mathematics or history of art? What does a Sotho speaker do if they (sic) want to improve themselves and gain knowledge? How many encyclopedias are written in Zulu? What books are there on business skills in Pedi? The answer is obvious to anyone. If you do not have the language skills to access the huge store of information available in English, then you are in a prison. The door out of that prison is knowledge of English (Moodley 2000:110).

The relegation of African languages from high status to low status resulted in people thriving to learn the colonizer’s language to be able to consume Western products. In Malawi for example, the general attitude of the people towards their indigenous languages is worrying many scholars. The attitude that clearly comes out is that if one learns in the local languages, one is not capable of doing anything else, because learning anything in a language other than English is a total waste of time. One Malawian citizen boldly said:

Let’s face it. I think there is a problem here. Maybe the Ministry of Education should put emphasis on English (*The Nation*, 1996:9).

Another Malawian citizen remarked saying:

It does not require research to know that a child taught in English will learn better than a child taught in the vernacular (*The Nation*, 1996:10).

Such views are not only misguided but reflect on attitudes towards local languages. In a related incident, a Malawian Member of Parliament, Meki Mtewa, from Mangochi Central Constituency, challenged students at the Malawi College of Fisheries to take pride in speaking English while on campus. According to a story published in the *Weekend Nation*, 18 March 2000, the MP told the students that in all colleges, English should be the mode of communication and urged that nobody anywhere in the world would be interested to read a technological and research document written in ChiChewa. The local languages, he added, should be spared for letters to parents, girlfriends and boyfriends. This pronouncement epitomizes a totally linguistically colonized mind, vigorously refusing to liberate itself.

African governments are the ones that sabotage their own languages by affording more attention to foreign languages like English. The ruling elite feel safer by simply doing nothing to promote or develop the main languages of their own country although these may be called national languages. Furthermore, English has not yet reached the masses of the indigenous population thus it remains a

minority language in most African countries. Very few rural Africans for example, are able to meaningfully make use of English in their deliberations. Herbert (1992:8) says 10% of the people of Francophone countries of Africa speak French and that only 1% or 2% can speak it fluently and can think in it. The situation is even more pronounced in countries such as Angola and Mozambique where less than one tenth of the national population is able to make use of the national official language (Portuguese). Indigenous languages, an important means of communication in African societies are not widely used in the formal educational systems. These same languages are not the languages of national government and the languages of mass communication are hardly the languages of the people. In Ghana for example, as much as 51% of the total amount of annual broadcast hours is reserved for English alone, leaving the rest for all the many Ghanaian African languages (Bodomo, 1996:57). It is this lack of an adequate linguistic communication system on the national level that has significantly contributed to the economic and technological stagnation and backwardness in most African countries.

In Kenya, English remains the dominant language of prestige in courts and elsewhere in the public domain. Ogechi in Ogutu (2006) comments on the draft constitution of Kenya saying:

The draft of the proposed constitution is silent on the language(s) to be used in law...This implies that indigenous languages including KiSwahili have not been accorded their rightful place in the law...So is justice being done to our language rights? (pp:279)

Though KiSwahili is the national language, English remains the official language and in some spheres, these languages operate at par, but in most cases, English is given priority and greater prestige. For example, KiSwahili was not a compulsory examinable subject in primary and secondary schools until 1985 but English had been for decades (WaNjogu, 2004:16). Apart from declaring KiSwahili the national language in 1969 and a language of parliament in 1974, the Kenyan government has yet to invest in developing the language. Although the language of instruction is supposed to be KiSwahili or the dominant language in a given area, many parents prefer to take their children to private schools, where instruction in English begins on the first day of formal schooling.

Bamgbose (2000) affirms clearly that the existence of widespread negative attitudes to African languages as media of instruction among Africans of all walks of life is one of the major challenges to educational language planning in Africa. These negative prejudices are deeply rooted in the colonial experience and the downgrading of status. Africa's indigenous languages rest on centuries of marginalisation and ignorance combined with previous unhappy experiences on the part of the speakers themselves. All this creates a basically negative attitude because many people have come to accept that 'real' education can only be obtained in a world language such as English. Many so-called educated parents dispute even the idea that a child will benefit if his or her initial education is given in the first language. Parents who prefer an English medium education sometimes do so because they see the products of an English medium education getting rewards in terms of lucrative jobs and upward social mobility (Bamgbose, 2000:88).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Zimbabwe is one of the many African countries that continue to use a foreign language as its primary media of communication. It is a former British colony that is situated in Southern Africa with two major languages, Shona and Ndebele being spoken as national languages. These two languages are spoken by over 90% of the population (Chimhundu, 1997:130). The Shona and Ndebele people living in Zimbabwe have been denied the advantage of utilising their indigenous languages in matters of national development since English has unceremoniously replaced their mother languages in mass media, education, business and other spheres of life. There is perpetual denial of indigenous languages to be given a chance to flourish and help promote African cultures and national identity, hence the need to urgently redress this anomaly. The country is seized with the problem of linguistic imperialism which has unfortunately distanced African people from their immediate environments and deliberately disassociated them from the language of interaction in the home and the community.

Development in Zimbabwe it should be noted; cannot be achieved without greater utilisation of the indigenous languages in pursuit of scientific economic and social change.

### **Purpose of Study**

The study aims to examine the attitudes of Zimbabweans towards the use of indigenous African languages as official media of instruction in education.

### **Rationale**

Indigenous languages serve extensively in businesses, in market transactions and in social events thus it is only through these languages that African governments can ensure maximum participation of their populace in their socio-political and economic development. This is so because indigenous languages are the languages that people use in their day-to-day interactions. African governments therefore should ensure that their people have the freedom to express themselves in languages of their choice. It is only after establishing this line of communication and freedom that a populace can be mobilized for engagement in development. Moodley (2000:105), assert that people need to be given choices as to what language they wish to have their children educated in. The 1951 UNESCO resolution asserts that the best medium for teaching a child is the child's mother tongue. Social justice in any society entails guaranteeing the rights of children to be educated in their home language (ibid). Language is therefore one of the most precious possessions of mankind, for it is the principal factor that enables individuals to become fully functioning members of the group into which they are born (Mutasa, 2004:240). As such nations are able to develop because language provides an important link between the individual and his/her environment. Language is therefore one of the indispensable features of the cultural systems of all societies and it penetrates into all aspects of social economic, political and religious spheres. Ngugi (1986:13) says language has a dual character. It is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. It is a means of interaction with society as well as a repository of a people's culture, values aspirations and beliefs. A nation cannot survive without a concurrent linguistic expression. Kishindo clearly affirms this when he says:

There is no country anywhere in the world (except in Africa) where the most important, most prestigious and the most powerful activities of the nation are conducted in what is for most of the citizens, a foreign language (Kishindo, 2000:15).

Mazrui (2002:198) argues further saying an indigenised approach to national development cannot be complete without great usage of African languages in the pursuit of scientific, artistic and cultural change. He further asserts that Korea, Japan and Malaysia have developed mainly because of the advantage of their own languages.

Furthermore, it should be noted that much of our thinking is facilitated by language. The thinking, which seems to involve language, is the reasoned thinking, which takes place as we work out our problems, tell stories and plan strategies. Language is not only used for purposes of communication but also to facilitate thinking (Ogutu, 2006:41). This demonstrates the need to have our own languages as the languages of media broadcasting, education and literature to mention just a few. If we use indigenous languages, it naturally follows that our thinking patterns will be such that they conjure home grown solutions that will be relevant to our context.

### **Research Questions**

- (i) What is the attitude of Zimbabweans towards the use of indigenous languages as official media of instruction in education?
- (ii) To what extent can African languages be used as media of instruction in education?
- (iii) What are the socio-economic advantages of using indigenous languages as official media of instruction in education?

### **Methodology**

This section focuses on research design, population sample, research instruments and data collection procedures. The descriptive survey method was used to collect primary data required in the study. It was found to be the most appropriate design for a study of this nature because Leedy (1993:67) says the design involves looking at phenomena of the moment with intense accuracy. It is sometimes referred to as the normative survey method since it regards what is observed within a given time and space as normal especially when the event occurs under the same conditions. It also affords the researcher the opportunity to participate as he or she observes phenomena. The study was basically qualitative in nature and the researcher had to carefully record what was observed and discussed during interviews. Results obtained were quantified and finally described.

According to Chiromo (2006), population refers to all the individuals, units, objects or events that will be considered in a research project. In this study, the population comprised teachers, lecturers, pupils, students, parents and guardians. Representative samples from each target group were selected in all the ten administrative provinces of Zimbabwe to participate in the study. The provinces from which the samples were selected are; Masvingo, Manicaland, Midlands, Harare, Bulawayo, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Matebeleland North and Matebeleland South. A sample size of 1 000 people (100 from each province) participated in the study. From each province, data was collected from school pupils, teachers, college students, university students, lecturers, and parents.

In an effort to cover as much of the country as possible, the researcher engaged student research assistants who collected information on behalf of the researcher during the University semester breaks. The researcher also spent a significant portion of the research time observing how indigenous languages were being used in educational institutions of Zimbabwe. These observations were carried out in schools, colleges and Universities with a view to assess the extent to which indigenous African languages were being used as languages of instruction in education. The researcher also took advantage of the information and help, which was given freely by officials from the two Ministries of Education; Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture and Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development who showed a lot of interest in the language in education policies of Zimbabwe. In some instances, lively discussions with language experts were held and the study profited much from these informal and semi-formal debates.

The data used in this study was also gathered through the use of questionnaires and analysis of curriculum documents. The interviews allowed the researcher to probe deeper into some of the questions. Analysis of curriculum documents such as syllabi, schemes and teaching notes was done to establish the official policy positions with regards the use of indigenous languages in Zimbabwe's education system.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is premised on the language as a right theoretical and philosophical framework which takes into account the existence and recognition of language rights in the language planning setting. In this approach, different social groups claim certain rights, which need to be reflected by language planning e.g. minority groups in a community, may demand certain linguistic rights to protect themselves from domination by majority groups. This approach to language planning focuses on the sentimental aspects of language which deal with the individual and group emotions, beliefs, convictions and values for their language (Mutasa, 2004:30). In this framework, language is seen as the right of an individual and this is in line with the 1996 Barcelona Universal Declaration on linguistic rights, which emphasised non-discrimination, pluralism and community initiatives in language use. Mother tongue medium education, according to Mackey (1979) is viewed as an inalienable right. When people's linguistic rights are acknowledged, the full participation of minority groups in all national activities such as judicial and administrative proceedings, civil service, examinations, voting and public employment is guaranteed.

### **Findings and Discussion**



Results that are going to be presented in this section are findings that were collected by the data gathering tools that were presented in the afore-mentioned paragraphs. First there is background information about the informants in the study followed by detailed presentation of responses to the research questions.

***Demography of the Participants***

The table below shows the distribution of participants by sex.

**Table 1: Distribution of informants by sex**

N=1000

Category	Male	Female	Number
Learners	321	179	500
Parents	140	160	300
Teachers/lecturers	88	112	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>549 (54,9%)</b>	<b>451 (45,1%)</b>	<b>1 000 (100%)</b>

Figures in the above table show that a total of 549(54,9%) males and 451(45,1%) females participated as informants in the study. There was a conscious effort on the part of the researcher to strive for gender equity and balance throughout the whole study. Furthermore, participants' level of education was distributed as shown in the tables that follow.

**Table 2: Level of education - learners**

N = 500

Level	Number	Percentage(%)
Primary	136	27,2
Secondary	222	44,4
Tertiary	142	28,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3: Level of education – teachers/lecturers**

N = 200

Level	Number	Percentage(%)
Untrained	30	15
Diploma/Certificate	18	9
Bachelors degree	69	34,5
Masters degree	48	24
Doctoral degree	35	17,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Results in Table 2 show that 44,4% of the respondents were learners from secondary schools. In Table 3, a total of 170 out of 200 teachers/lecturers were trained at various levels of the teaching profession. In the trained teachers category, 152 (76%) attained a degree qualification with 35 (17,5%) being holders of doctoral degrees. This shows that informants in this study were from different levels of the academic and professional hierarchy.

**Table 4: Level of education – parents/guardians**

N = 300

Level	Number	Percentage(%)
Below 'O' Level	48	16
'O' level	88	29,3

'A' Level	22	7,3
Diploma/Certificate	79	26,3
Bachelors degree	39	13,1
Masters degree	24	8
Doctoral	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>

Only 63(31,5%) parents who participated in this study were holders of a Bachelors degree but with none having attained a doctoral degree. Those in the less educated category, 48(16%) had qualifications below the 'O' Level certificate. The demography of participants shows that all key stakeholders in Zimbabwe's education system were proportionally represented in this study.

**Key Findings**

The questionnaire, interviews, observation and document analysis are the techniques that were used to collect attitudes of Zimbabweans towards the use of indigenous languages in education. The responses were as given below.

**Question 1: What language do you think should be used as medium of instruction in (i) schools, (ii) colleges and (iii) universities?**

When the responses were put together, the distribution was as shown in the tables below.

**Table 5:** Learners' preference for language of instruction

N = 500

Language	Number	Percentage (%)
English	304	60,8
African	196	39,2
Other	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100%</b>

Figures in the above table clearly show that 304 (60,8%) of the learners who participated in this study prefer English to be the medium of instruction. Only 196 (39,2%) would want indigenous African languages to be used as languages of instruction in education.

**Table 6:** Teachers and lecturers' preference for language of instruction

N = 200

Language	Number	Percentage (%)
English	135	67,5
African	60	30
Other	5	2,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Just like the learners, the teachers and lecturers too, prefer English to be used as medium of instruction in education. A total of 135 (67,5%) teachers and lecturers indicated on the questionnaire that they would prefer English as opposed to Shona or Ndebele to be media of instruction in education. A similar pattern also emerged from the interviews where both learners and their teachers preferred English instead of the use of an African language as medium of instruction. It was 60% for teachers/lecturers and 70% for learners who indicated during the interviews that they would want to use English as the official medium of instruction.

Parents too expressed attitudes similar to those of learners, teachers and lecturers. The table below shows their preference for language of instruction.

**Table 7:** Parents' preference for language of instruction

N = 300

Language	Number	Percentage (%)
English	176	58,6
African	124	41,4
Other	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 7 above shows that 58,6% parents want their children to be taught using English as the official medium of instruction. Unlike teachers, quite a significant number of parents (41,4%) indicated that they would prefer an African language to be used as medium of instruction in education.

When asked to give reasons why English should be the official language of instruction, the majority (70%) said English is an internationally recognised language, which doubles up as the gateway to success. Others said since Zimbabwe is a mixed society with so many languages being spoken, it is only English which can be neutral when it comes to selection of the language of instruction in education. A respondent in Masvingo province had this to say, “*Unofunga iwe mwana wangu angaita dhokotera kana akadzidziswa Science neChiShona kana ChiNdevere? Hazviiti!*” (Do you think my child will ever be a doctor if he/she learns Science in Shona or Ndebele? It doesn't work!)

The few parents (30%) who preferred the use of an African language as medium of instruction were quick to say that this was the situation in all the developed countries. Mother-tongue medium of instruction is the norm. They gave examples of the Chinese, Japanese, British and Americans who have successfully developed through the use of their mother tongues as media of instruction in education. A businessman in Mashonaland Central province said, “*MaChina ari kubudirira nokuti anosevzenza rurimi rwaamai kuita dzidzo zvose nebhezimusi. Havanyari kushandisa ndimi dzavo sezvatinoita isu muno muZimbabwe.*” (The Chinese are developing fast because they use their mother tongue as the official language in both the education and the business sectors. They are not ashamed of using their mother tongue as we do here in Zimbabwe.) Some learners also expressed the views shared by these parents during interviews.

**Question 2: Which language is likely to give you power and prestige in Zimbabwe if used?**

The table below shows the distribution of responses by parents, teachers, lecturers and learners.

**Table 8:** Language that gives power and prestige in Zimbabwe

N = 1000

Language	Number	Percentage (%)
English	656	65,6
African	344	34,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>100%</b>

It is evident from the above figures that English is the language that gives power and prestige in Zimbabwe. Most of the respondents (65,6%) said English was indeed the language of power in Zimbabwe. Out of a total of 500 learners, 327 indicated on the questionnaire that English gives them power and prestige. Parents too believe that English is more powerful than African languages. A total of 188 out of 300 parents admitted the dominance of English over African languages. Teachers and lecturers too expressed the same attitudes as given by the learners and their parents. A total of 70,5% of the teachers and lecturers showed that English was associated with power and prestige.

During lesson observations, the researcher observed that most teachers and lecturers used English to teach indigenous languages. At most of the Universities and Teachers' Colleges, instruction in the departments of African languages is in English. Ironically, when teachers and lecturers were interviewed, they gave their responses in English despite being asked in Shona or Ndebele. Learners



also told the researcher during focused group discussions that it was easier for them to communicate their ideas in English than to use African languages, which they allege, “fail to express ideas explicitly”.

The researcher, in an effort to establish a link between English and socio-economic development asked the questions below:

**Question 3: Is there a relationship between language and the social, economic and scientific development of a country?**

In response 92% of the learners, 52% of the teachers/lecturers and 87% of the parents answered ‘Yes’. The following were then given as the reasons, which they thought that there was a relationship between language and socio-economic development.

- Language forms the basis of communication.
- Ability to use a language helps an individual to develop intellectual skills.
- Participation in economic and scientific development can only be meaningful through language.
- Some languages have got limited vocabulary, which prevent them from being used to express scientific concepts.

These reasons show that the research informants were very clear about the positive relationship between language and development.

**Question 4: Can an African language express educational and scientific concepts?**

This question was asked to all the three categories of informants and the results are as shown in Table 9 below.

**Table 9:** Can an African language express educational and scientific concepts?

N = 1000

Category	Agree	Disagree	Total
Learners	205	295	500
Teachers/Lecturers	84	116	200
Parents	112	188	300
<b>Total</b>	<b>401 (40,1%)</b>	<b>599 (59,9%)</b>	<b>1000 (100%)</b>

Results in the above table show that 59, 9% of the informants do not agree that an African language can express educational and scientific concepts. When asked to give reasons why they disagreed most of them indicated during interviews that African languages do not have enough vocabulary to express modern scientific concepts hence they rendered themselves unsuitable for use as media of instruction in education.

**Question 5: Would you be happy if all subjects from primary to university level were taught in African languages while offering English as a subject?**

**Table 10:** Respondents’ attitudes towards the use of African languages in all levels of the education system

N = 1000

Category	Happy	Not Happy	Total
Learners	187	313	500
Teachers/Lecturers	123	77	200
Parents	117	183	300

<b>Total</b>	<b>427 (42,7%)</b>	<b>573 (57,3%)</b>	<b>1000 (100%)</b>
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Figures in Table 10 above show that the majority of the informants (57,3%) will not be happy if all subjects from primary to University level were studied using indigenous languages as media of instruction. The highest percentage in the **not happy** category (62,6%) was from the learners themselves. The following were the reasons, which made learners and their teachers refuse to use African languages as languages of instruction in education.

- Use of African languages would create communication problems for those who might want to study outside the African continent.
- African languages offer limited vocabulary to scientific and educational concepts.
- Many of these languages have not been developed to meet educational challenges.
- Use of African languages reduces the marketability of university graduates.
- English is a world language that is internationally recognized.

Respondents in the **happy** category (42,7%) listed the following as reasons why African languages should be used as media of instruction in all levels of Zimbabwe’s system of education.

- If other countries like Japan, China, America, Britain, Germany just to mention a few are doing it then we should also do it.
- Concepts will be easier to understand if the language used at home becomes the language of instruction at school.
- Use of indigenous languages in education will promote African culture in Zimbabwe.
- Africans should be proud of their languages.
- Learners will find it easier to learn in their mother tongues.

Interview results and observation also showed similar reactions from parents, teachers, lecturers and learners.

**Question 6: Do learners encounter problems when studying in English?**

**Table 11:** Do learners encounter problems when studying in English?

N = 1000

<b>Category</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
Learners	352	148	500
Lecturers/Teachers	150	50	200
Parents	168	132	300
<b>Total</b>	<b>670(67%)</b>	<b>330 (33%)</b>	<b>1000 (100%)</b>

\* The **Agree, Slightly Agree** and **Strongly Agree** categories of responses in all the three questionnaires were collapsed to reflect a positive response (agree) whilst the **Disagree, Slightly Disagree** and **Strongly Disagree** reflected a negative response (disagree). Findings from both the questionnaires and interviews show that learners do encounter a lot of problems where English is used as medium of instruction. Figures in Table 11 above show that 352 learners out of 500 (70,4%) agreed that they were finding it difficult to learn using English as medium of instruction. The teachers and lecturers who shared the same view were 150 out of 200 (75%) and they too confirmed that learners encounter problems when English is used as the only official medium of instruction in education. A teacher at a high school in Manicaland emphatically asserted this when she said, *“Mkwasha, rega ndikutaurire! Wana awa totowadzidzisa ngemutauro waamai kuti vanzwisise. Ukashandisa ChiRungu besi besi veshe wanofaira bvunzo.”* (My son-in-law let me tell you this. We resort to teach using the mother tongue in order for these pupils to understand concepts. If we are to use English throughout, they will all fail their examinations.)

The researcher further asked respondents whether the use of African languages in Zimbabwe’s education system was a national issue that required urgent attention. A total of 72% of the interviewees confirmed positively that the language in education question was indeed a national concern. A significant number of the respondents, 38% feared that the use of African languages, as official languages of instruction will have negative societal effects and they listed the following reasons:

- The process of choosing which African language to use is likely to degenerate into tribalism because Zimbabwe is a multilingual nation with more than ten African languages.
- Instruction in a selected African language will only benefit speakers of that language variety at the expense of the wider African community.
- Science subjects will be negatively affected since it is difficult to express scientific knowledge using African languages.
- African communities will be isolated and excluded from the global village, which communicates mainly in internationally recognized European languages.

Although, learners encounter problems of comprehension when they are taught using non-African languages, there will continue to be a bias towards the use of English because of its international recognition.

**Question 7: At what level of education should the medium of instruction be the vernacular?**

**Table 12:** Level at which indigenous languages should be used as media of instruction

N = 1000

Category	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total
Learners	295	123	82	500
Parents	141	93	66	300
Teachers/Lecturers	152	20	28	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>588(58,8%)</b>	<b>236 (23,6%)</b>	<b>176 (17,6%)</b>	<b>1000 (100%)</b>

Results in Table 12 above show that 588 (58,8%) of the informants think that the use of indigenous languages as media of instruction should be limited to primary schools only. Very few informants (17,6) prefer that African languages be used as media of instruction at the tertiary level of the country’s education system. It is also interesting to note that (76%) of the teachers and lecturers confirmed that indigenous languages should be used as languages of instruction only at the primary school level of education.

A follow up was made during interviews and the informants made it very clear to the researcher that no African language at present has developed enough to be used as official medium of instruction at the level above the primary sector. There is need therefore, the teachers said, to compile terminological dictionaries for the different subject disciplines and expand the vocabulary of these languages so as to cater for new developments in science and technology.

When the researcher asked the question, “**Do you think teachers and lecturers in Zimbabwe are fully equipped to teach using indigenous African languages as media of instruction?**” (Question 8) the majority of respondents responded in the negative as shown below:

Parents	<b>Yes</b>	113
	<b>No</b>	187
Learners	<b>Yes</b>	57
	<b>No</b>	443
Teachers/Lecturers	<b>Yes</b>	64

No 136

The informants, learners (88,6%), parents, (62,3%) and teachers/lecturers (68%) admitted that educators are not adequately trained and ill equipped to teach using indigenous languages as media of instruction. The respondents were further asked whether there was government will to formulate and implement language policies that favour the use of indigenous languages in education and again the answer was in the negative. The distribution of the responses is shown below:

Learners	<b>Yes</b>	142
	<b>No</b>	358
Parents	<b>Yes</b>	104
	<b>No</b>	196
Teachers/Lecturers	<b>Yes</b>	47
	<b>No</b>	153

When asked to justify why they thought there was no political will from the Government to develop African languages, the informants stated that the absence of a clear comprehensive national language policy in Zimbabwe was a covert indication that the Government is not willing to develop African languages. Those who answered positively (20,8%) made reference to the revised Education Act of 2006, which states that Shona and Ndebele may be used as media of instruction. This to them is evidence at least to show the Government's commitment towards the use of African languages as languages of instruction in Zimbabwe's education system.

In addition, the informants said the Government has decreed that Shona and Ndebele be compulsory subjects at both 'O' and 'A' level. The World Culture Day, 25 May is also an important calendar event in Zimbabwe showing the Government's total commitment to the development of African languages and culture. With regards May 25, the Zimbabwean government through the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe encourages all provinces in the country to show case African culture and talents. Study findings have shown that although the majority of Zimbabweans seem not to see efforts by the Government to promote the use of African languages, a lot is being done by the Government to uplift the status of African languages in Zimbabwe.

### **Discussion**

It is apparent in these research findings that the attitudes of some parents, teachers and lecturers towards the use of indigenous languages in schools pose as a very big problem to mother tongue medium education. The attitudes displayed by Zimbabweans in this case study are to a very large extent similar to Moto (2002) findings in Malawi in which it is stated that linguistic discrimination in Malawi comes as a result of negative attitudes towards indigenous languages, which manifest themselves in a number of ways listed as follows:

- Pupils cannot progress from secondary school to university if they do not obtain a credit in English.
- Aspiring and eloquent speakers of Malawian local languages cannot become representatives of the people in parliament without having attained a full Junior Certificate of Education (J.C.E). Without this, they must pass an English Proficiency test that has been administered by the University of Malawi.
- Malawians cannot contest in local government polls unless they show evidence of a given level of proficiency in English.

In many discussions pertaining to the use of indigenous languages in education in all the ten provinces of Zimbabwe, the researcher often heard comments about how educational standards have plummeted because school leavers, undergraduates and even some graduates fail to communicate effectively. Such comments according to Moto (ibid) indirectly imply that failure to construct a grammatical sentence and communicate effectively in a foreign language is symptomatic of lowered educational standards.

Because knowledge of English opens up opportunities for a lot of jobs in Zimbabwe, it becomes logical for Africans in the country to realize that knowledge of spoken and written English is more useful and economically rewarding than enhanced knowledge of the local indigenous languages. Commenting on language attitudes, Kayambazinthu (1998) asserts that it is obvious in social circles that those who know how to speak and write the white man's language have more prestige than those who can only speak African languages. The negative attitude towards the use of African languages in Zimbabwe's ten provinces is representative of many African countries. This is so because in nearly all the countries,

English, the colonial language of 'high-culture' and the language of the elite was and is still regarded as the most prestigious language used in parliament, legislature, education, government, science and technology and most academic writings and official correspondences. The colonial language is considered highly because of the historical processes that put it there and uphold it (Kayambazinthu, 2000:35).

The status of English remains what it is because most African governments do not put in place mechanisms for vigorously promoting indigenous languages.

The attitudes of the people of Zimbabwe who participated in this study, with regards the choice of language to use in the school system can be placed in two opposing factions or camps. The first camp that emerges advocates the use of a foreign European language as official medium and comes up with an argument that such languages (foreign languages) are convenient alternatives to the presumed controversy that might arise in the choice of one of the native languages as language of instruction. The camp also argues that a foreign language like English is universally economical and has been tested and found viable. In support of the above perception, 60% of the interviewees in the study admitted that African languages are inadequate for education and inapt for the dissemination of scientific information. Since most of the indigenous languages are poorly developed, Zimbabweans sometimes feel amused or even embarrassed when a native language is spoken in a very official context. To those who venture to speak African languages in offices, they are always reminded accordingly, "*Tava kumusha here?*" (Literally meaning, are we now at home?). This is to remind the speaker that he/she is in an official setting where it is the English language that should be used.

In contrast, the opposing faction or camp in this language of instruction debate questions the economic universality and viability of using foreign languages in African education. Members belonging to this camp claim that school subjects can be taught using indigenous languages because, using a foreign language is elitist and that its use alienates children from their culture. Mchazime (1999:41) who argues that the first language helps the child to establish both emotional and intellectual closeness with his or her parents also echoes these views and attitudes. Since most parents communicate their feelings in their own language, they are also able to transmit aspects of their culture to the child in that language.

This concurs very well with what the researcher was told, during a personal interview with Professor Herbert Chimhundu (Chinhoyi University of Technology), who asserted that it is educationally proven that the use of the mother tongue in lower and even higher classes enhances comprehension of concepts and ideas. If African languages are to attain realistic developmental and economical value there has to be a well thought out and carefully articulated policy on media of instruction (Moto, 2002:43). This study concurs with the above assertion because as long as the languages that empower citizens to attain any meaningful levels of education are foreign, the masses will always be victims of poverty.

Similar to findings elsewhere in SADC countries and Africa in general, the findings in this study showed that the majority of the participants (60,8%) prefer English to be the medium of instruction in post-independence Zimbabwe. When asked to justify, the majority (96%) argued that English is an internationally recognised language hence it is the gateway to success. Others said since Zimbabwe is a mixed society with so many languages being spoken, it is only English which can be neutral when it comes to selection. Findings have also shown that English is the language that gives power and



prestige in Zimbabwe. Teachers and lecturers as shown during observations, use English to teach subjects like Shona and Ndebele. This practice is rampant in universities and teachers' colleges. The 'culprits' i.e. those who teach indigenous languages in English, defended their practice arguing that it was easier for them to communicate their ideas in English than in indigenous languages which in the majority of cases fail to express ideas explicitly.

More than 80% of the respondents in this study opted for English only for all the subjects. The general assumption is that English is inherently superior and better suited for education. Kamwendo (1999:229) cited in Mutasa (2004:120) confirms this when he says "English is synonymous with sound education whilst education through African languages is given second class rating." Adegbija (1994:104) also summarises attitudes to English in Uganda in a manner similar to the Zimbabwean situation. He says "provision of education in the vernacular rather than an international language (like English) arouses resentment among students and parents" (p.104).

To many African language speakers, the advantages of using English as the language of teaching and learning outweigh the merits of employing African languages in teaching and learning. Mutasa puts it more graphically when he says, "...the world can survive without South Africa but South Africa cannot exist without the world." (Mutasa, 2004: 121). Coming back home, one can only say that the world can survive without Zimbabwe but Zimbabwe cannot exist without the world. English, according to Moyo (2002:152) has many kinds of power namely:

- Power to rule like the colonial powers did,
- Power to influence and initiate,
- Power to cause change,
- Power to free oneself from the claws of poverty, oppression, ignorance, homelessness and many more.

To demonstrate the hegemony of English over other languages, the President of South Korea vehemently urged his people to learn it saying, "Learn English or face being left behind." (Mutasa, 2004:121). For the same reason, Malaysia, Japan and China also introduced English in their schools and made it a medium of instruction for science subjects. Gill (2002: 22) says Malaysia in the year 1999, replaced mother tongue tuition with English in science and technology. This came as a result of the realisation made by the government, five years after introducing mother tongue medium education. The phasing out of English reduced the number of people who could speak English (Roy-Campbell and Gwete, undated: 174). Unfortunately, when investors came from Australia and other countries, they could only communicate with Chinese and Indians who had continued to run private schools in English (ibid). In the end, foreigners emerged as controllers in commerce and industry. Indeed this was a rude awakening, which all developing countries should try and avoid. As can be seen, mother tongue medium education policy if not properly balanced, can impact negatively on the development of the human resource potential of the indigenes. Based on Malaysia's experiences, it is therefore necessary for the Zimbabwean government to strike a balance between the use of African languages and English especially in education.

The dominance of English according to Rebecca Schwarz (2003:1) appears to be indisputable. Findings of this study also confirm this view because the majority of the informants indicated on the questionnaires that English is a tool of globalisation. English they argued dominates international politics and commerce and its privileged role is strengthened through such bodies as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and regional groups such as the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the European Union. Phillipson (2001: 187) divides the world between the English-speaking haves (80%) and the non-English speaking have-nots (20%). The teachers and lecturers who participated in this study acknowledged the hegemonising processes that tend to render the use of English 'natural' and 'normal' while marginalising indigenous languages. Through the use of English, Western lifestyles are to be admired, envied and desired at the expense of local languages and cultures.

English continues to be the dominant language in the education sector in many countries regardless of the fact that many African educators have complained that the World Bank for example, does not promote teaching in indigenous languages beyond the primary level (ibid). A condition of accepting aid from such organisations like the World Bank is the adoption of certain restructuring policies, including changes to education policy with the goal of modernization and competitiveness in the global market place. The prestige of English therefore continues to discriminate against “the vernacularly educated” (Punchi, 2001: 373).

English, according to Phillipson (1992:5), has become a lingua franca to the point that any literate educated person is in a very real sense deprived if he or she does not know English. At the present time, English, to a much greater extent than any other language is the language in which the fate of most of the world’s millions is decided. It has become the international language par excellence in the twenty first century. The language has a dominant position in science, technology, medicine, business, mass media and many more hence it becomes the most widely learnt foreign language. This non-exhaustive list of the domains in which English has a dominant place is indicative of the functional load carried by English. The spread of English is unique, both in terms of its geographical reach and as regards the depth of its penetration (Phillipson, 1992: 6).

### **Conclusion**

Study findings have shown that the attitudes of the majority of learners, parents, guardians, teachers and lecturers towards the use of indigenous languages in schools is generally negative thus it poses a very big problem to mother tongue medium education in Zimbabwe. It is evidently clear from the study findings that participants who attended colonial educational systems are the ones who strongly believe and perceive that English is the language that is capable of expressing complex and abstract ideas in science education. An additional argument in favour of English is that it is the language, which children will require when they pursue further studies. The defenders of the English medium status quo further point out that English facilitates the expression of new concepts and ideas. Some scholars even argue to support the view that learners find it very difficult to express academic and technical issues in African languages.

However, a significant number of African scholars on the contrary argue that teaching and learning cannot take place without the use of one’s mother tongue. As pointed out by Bamgbose (1991) language is the most important factor in the learning process, because the transfer of knowledge and skills is definitely through the spoken and written word. Command of a language (i.e. for both the learner and the teacher) is a prerequisite for the successful learning and teaching process. When teachers and learners cannot use language to make logical connections, to integrate and explain the relations between isolated pieces of information, what is taught cannot be understood and important concepts will not be mastered. The use of English as the medium of instruction in education disconnects the student’s experiences. What they bring from home, whether it is an ethnic language or dialect is not built upon, instead it is wiped out and pupils have to start afresh with a ‘clean plate’. It can therefore be concluded in this paper that if African countries continue to use foreign languages as media of communication in the education system, and remain languages which are synonymous with power, prestige, upward social mobility and the language of trade and commerce, then there can never be any meaningful advances in rescuing citizens from poverty.

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