

Parents and Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Language in Early Childhood Development in Norton District

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ABSTRACT The study sought to establish the views, and preferences of parents and teachers regarding the language to be used as medium of instruction in early childhood development in Zimbabwe. A qualitative survey using semi-structured interview and questionnaire as instruments was conducted among 81 respondents comprising of 30 early childhood development teachers and 50 parents whose children were enrolled in early childhood education learning centers in Norton urban district, Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe, and an expert from the national curriculum development unit. Shona is the mother tongue predominantly spoken in the study area. The Zimbabwe education language policy also stipulates that the second language should be introduced only after Grade 3. The findings of this study contradicts this position, with 86.0% of parents preferring the use of English as medium of instruction in early childhood development, while 66.7% of teachers preferred both English and Shona together. To address the mismatch between ideological and policy ideals on one hand, and practical reality on the other, the study recommends an evidence based, participatory national language policy review and development that consults parents, teachers and children among other stakeholders.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The importance of language to life and to education is well documented. Language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education (Heugh 2006); this indicates the importance of language in the education sector. Each language is a unique expression of the human experience of the world. The knowledge of any single language may be the key to answering fundamental questions of the future (United Nations Education Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2008). UNESCO's Constitution includes the maintenance and perpetuation of language diversity as a basic principle "to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world without distinction of race, sex, language, religion, by the Charter of the United Nations" (UNESCO Constitution Article 1). Guided by this principle, UNESCO, has developed programs aimed at promoting languages as instruments of education and culture, and as significant means through which to participate in national life (Skutnabb-Kangas 2009).

In colonial Africa, Westermann (as cited in Ndamba 2008) was among the first people to note that there was danger in using a European language as a medium of instruction for African children, who even at primary school level, did not attach any importance to the mother tongue. In Tanzania, where education in primary schools is conducted in Kiswahili, studies by Roy-Campbell (2006) show that students favour the retention of English as a medium of instruction at secondary level. Roy-Campbell found that many Tanzanian students who said that English should be maintained as the medium of instruction could barely carry out a conversation in English with the researcher (Ndamba 2008). People in post-colonial countries still identify education with former colonial languages as evident in post apartheid and post colonial South Africa and Namibia respectively, where Roy-Campbell (2006) and Setati (2005) observed that Africans still resist mother tongue education in favour of English which they view as a language of knowledge.

Like most African countries, Zimbabwe is a multilingual (Chabata 2008), multicultural and multiethnic society (Phiri, Kaguda, & Mabhena 2013) with 16 official languages recognized by the country's Constitution, which prescribes that "all officially recognized languages are treated equitably" (Government of Zimbabwe 2013:17). According to the Education Act (amended 2006), "any one of the languages may be used as the medium of instruction depending upon which language is more commonly spoken and better understood by the pupils" (Government of Zimbabwe 2006:28). This is a major improvement from the pre-independence era in Zimbabwe which was characterized by a language policy that did not officially recognize indigenous languages spoken by the majority of the population (Ndamba 2008).

The Zimbabwe language policy as stated in the Education Act of 1996 (amended 2006), raised the status of indigenous language by requiring that children in preschool and infant school (3-8 years) be taught in their first language (L1) and learn English (L2) as one of the subjects in the curriculum. As a subject, English should be taught without code switching or direct translation. Under the language policy, English becomes a language of instruction from Grade four upwards. Ouane and Glanz (2011) argue that this Zimbabwean language policy can be identified as a possible model for bilingual education.

The acknowledgement and promotion of bilingualism in schools by the Zimbabwean language policy has drawn the interest and scrutiny of many researchers (Makanda 2011; Ndamba 2008; McGroarty 2010; Setati 2005) and inquiry from various professions of concern (Phiri et al. 2013). Researchers have noted that not much is being done to fully implement the policy. Despite this positive policy pronouncement in Zimbabwe, the status and use of language for educational purposes is seldom raised by policy makers (Gudhlanga 2005). In fact, since attaining independence in 1980, "there has been no language planning debate as yet" (Chivhanga & Chimhenga 2013:58), and "not much work has been done on parents and pupils' language preferences in a bilingual set up at the elementary level in Zimbabwe" (Ndamba 2008:172).

English appears to continue to be the preferred medium of instruction in schools and in early childhood development. Chabata (2008) observed that in the post colonial era, Zimbabwe has an unbalanced bicultural and bilingual situation in which the H or high status language (English) is the official language of the former colonial power, while the indigenous languages are of L or Low status languages. This means that African languages such as Shona and Ndebele are looked

down upon as less important, socially and culturally in most Zimbabwean schools. Mutasa (2003:304) supports the notion that "Parents perceive English as the answer for them and their children's problems in that at present, unquestionably English is the gateway to success socially, politically and economically".

The preference of English as a medium of instruction in schools against indigenous languages is also common in other parts of Africa. For example, other studies have noted that in general, "language policies in African countries are characterised by one or more of the following problems: avoidance, vagueness, arbitrariness, fluctuations and declaration without implementation" (Bamgbose 1991:111). In fact, globally there are concerns that many languages are endangered (UNESCO, 2008). The minority groups constitute approximately 10% of the total Zimbabwean population (Canagarajah 2007).

Mkandawire (2005) asserts that, The New Approach to teaching and learning in English in early childhood development was founded by Joana Moyo's new approach experiment in 1975 at Hope Fountain Mission in Matabeleland, which was influenced by the colonial era policies. In the experiment, children were taught in English from the first day they entered school. Due to political and colonial reasons, the experiment did not place value on the importance of indigenous languages (Shona and Ndebele) spoken by the majority of people in Zimbabwe. The new language policy formulated in post colonial Zimbabwe in 1987 and revised 2006 seek to correct this bias, realizing the value of the mother tongue in teaching and learning.

Different socio-economic circumstances and factors can influence oral language development (Snow et al. 2007). There is a considerable body of academic research which shows that children from lower socio-demographic backgrounds tend to have poorer language skills when they start school. We know less about what it is in their early environment which leads to this (Edwards 2008). In particular, the use of English as the preferred mode of instruction presents many challenges to young learners. For example, children in homes where English is not spoken often lack exposure to critical oral language skills such as English vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics and discourse. Without these skills being modeled and reinforced in the home, these students enter school already significantly behind their peers (Baroody & Diamond 2012). Research has shown that there is a strong relationship between a parent's education levels; in particular, the mother's education and a child's oral language skills or vocabulary upon entering school (Edwards 2008). The academic gap associated with socioeconomic status (SES) and the

significant relationship between SES and reading achievement have been well documented in research (Snipes et al. 2008; Snow et al. 2007).

In Zimbabwe, research carried out by Moyo (as cited in Mugweni & Ganga 2010) revealed that negative attitudes by parents towards the African languages are passed on to children and are further enhanced by the fact that parents are ignorant of the role of mother tongue in learning, particularly for bilingual children during the early years of schooling (Ouane & Glanz 2011). It was further revealed in the study that both parents and of children regarded Ndebele (L2) as being of no value as it did not render a person employable. Therefore, these parents had no objection to their children learning English which they felt was more important for the future of their children.

The researcher's observation as a practicing educator is that parents expect English to be taught to pupils in early childhood development. In a study on language preference conducted by Ndamba (2008) in urban, peri-urban and rural schools in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, pupils and parents preferred English as the language of instruction at infant level, despite challenges faced in accessing the curriculum through the use of the second language.

Since English is a second language in Zimbabwe, this study investigates the factors that motivate its preference as a language of instruction in schools, and the implications on teaching and learning outcomes. Literature and theories on bilingualism and learning provide an epistemological foundation for this investigation.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research paradigm

The research study applied the qualitative interpretivist paradigm which is an approach to social science that emphasizes the importance of insiders' viewpoints to understanding social reality (Brink, van der Walt & van Rensburg 2012). The study also took a constructivist (Smith, Thorpe & Jackson 2008) explorative perspective, seeking to establish the perceptions of parents and teachers as the primary basis for drawing different conclusions and constructing meaning on language and learning; it does not pre-empt a particular hypothesis. The researchers collected

information from participants through the use of the interview, which yielded authentic and qualitative data that was interpreted to explain participants' views (Marshall and Rossman 2006), facts, opinions and attitudes (McDaniel and Gates 2001). Documentary analysis was also used to support the field survey. Data was obtained from parents, teachers and the curriculum development expert using guided semi-structured interview instruments. The sample size in this study was eighty one respondents consisting of thirty teachers, fifty parents and one curriculum development expert. Parents and teachers were the primary respondents, while the curriculum development expert served to provide a general understanding of the policy situation relating to language in Zimbabwe

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Views of parents and teachers on language to be used in early childhood development

Mother tongue for parents and teachers

Teachers and parents were asked to indicate their mother tongue (referred as the first language a person usually learns or speaks during early childhood. Information about the mother tongue is important in this study since according to the Zimbabwe Education Act (1996, p. 628 amended 2006) it is the stipulated language for use in early childhood development. But as demonstrated later in this study, what is stipulated in the Education Act is not necessarily practiced or enforced.

Table 1 Distribution of all respondents by their mother tongue variable (N=80).

Mother tongue	Number	Percentage (%)
Shona	77	96.3
Ndebele	3	3.7
Total	80	100.0

Table 1, shows that nearly all (97.3%) of the respondents used Shona as their mother tongue while 3.7% used Ndebele. The three respondents whose mother tongue was Ndebele were all teachers from Matabeleland region who had moved to the study area for employment.

Language preferences by parents and teachers

Table 2: Total respondents by language preference (N=80).

Preferred Languages	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
English	50	62.5
Shona	6	7.5
English & Shona	24	30.0
Total	80	100.0

Teachers and parents were asked to indicate the language they thought should be used for teaching and learning in early childhood development. The combined responses indicate that 62.5% preferred English, 30.0% preferred a combination of Shona and English, while 7.5% preferred Shona as shown in Table 2.

Table 3: Distribution of parents by language preference N=50.

Preferred Languages	Distribution of parents	
	Number	Percentage (%)
English	43	86.0
Shona	3	6.0
English & Shona	4	8.0
Total	50	100.0

However, further analysis indicates that the language preferences of teachers were different from those of parents. Table 3 indicates that the majority (86.0%) of parents preferred English while very few preferred Shona (6.0%) or English and Shona together (8.0%).

The reasons given by parents for preferring English as the language to be used for teaching and learning in early childhood development were as follows:

- It was important for children to grow up having the knowledge of English which was also used in higher learning institutions, job interviews, and by most employers.

- Some parents argued that English should be taught as first language to reverse the colonial era practice during which it was used as a second language among the blacks.
- Parents felt that children already knew or spoke their mother tongue before going to school or preschool; therefore it was better for them to be taught in a different language – English. These parents believed that with much English practice children’s vocabulary would also improve.
- Most of the subjects at school were being taught in English, therefore teaching English at an early age helped learners to understand what was being taught much better.
- Interviews for enrolling learners in schools or preschools were conducted in English; therefore it would make it easy for learners to understand the language.
- Learners can fit in any English speaking environment for example, outside the country without feeling inferior.
- Most of the television programs, for example, cartoons were in English, hence, learners would understand better, and become fluent speakers of the language, which would help them to do better in most subjects taught in English.

However, the few (6%) of parents who did not prefer English cited the following as their reasons:

- It was difficult for some learners to understand concepts being taught in English.
- Mother tongue made it easy when learners want to translate into English.

Most teachers (66.7%) preferred the use of English and Shona simultaneously as shown in Table 4, while 23.3% preferred English. A paltry 10.0% of teachers preferred the use of Shona only.

Table 4: Distribution of teachers by language preference (N=30)

Preferred Languages	Distribution of parents
	Percentage (%)
English	23.3
Shona	10.0
English & Shona	66.7

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The reasons given by teachers for preferring English and Shona to be used together for teaching and learning in early childhood development were as follows:

- (a) In a multilingual country such as Zimbabwe, it is possible that some learners might not understand either of the languages; there is a possibility that some children may not understand when teachers use only either English or Shona. Therefore, using both languages would help teachers to clarify concepts and communicate effectively for the benefit of all learners.
- (b) Learners would be comfortable and free to communicate with others in the language they knew best.
- (c) The concepts were understood best if mother tongue was used together with English because the teacher would be able to clarify concepts.
- (d) Learners got used to both languages making it easy for them to communicate in English while at the same time using Shona with people who could not speak in English.

The main disadvantage of using both languages as reported by teachers was that most learners spoke in their mother tongue at home and would forget English vocabulary when they come to school.

A few teachers preferred use of English only arguing that:

- A) This enabled the foundation for English language to be set at an early age making it easy for learners to fit into the society as they could communicate with anyone, even in cases where they visited other countries.
- b) This boosted Learners' self-esteem as they would view themselves as unique with a special language; they could also tackle any questions asked in English because they knew the language.
- C) Teaching in English made it easier for non-Shona speaking teachers to communicate easily with children and to teach effectively as expressed by one teacher,

"As a Ndebele speaker, it's easy to communicate with Shona speaking people in English"

The main reasons against the use of English only cited by teachers were that:

- (a) Learners who were weak in English might not understand and grasp concepts, making teaching and learning in the class difficult.

(b) Since English was not the first language some learners were not used to it and this created communication breakdown between teachers and learners.

(c) Those parents who could not speak in English were not able to help their children improve English vocabulary or do their homework since they could not speak the language.

(d) Mother tongue was a social tool for the learner to address his or her needs, interest, feelings and made the learner fit into his/her culture. Therefore, English was not good for intellectual development.

(e) Poor grades in Shona spoilt learners Grade 7 or Ordinary Level results certificates given that it is their mother tongue which they are expected to know and pass. Thus Shona should be used as a medium of instruction to improve learners' performance and results in the subject.

According to teachers, learners who spoke and understood English well, often found it difficult to speak and write in Shona; consequently, they ended up shunning Shona. In the words of one Teacher:

"Some learners are not comfortable with their mother tongue. They can even report that the teacher was speaking in Shona, often implying that the teacher does not know English".

Code switching

Respondents were asked if they thought the language used at home should be the same as the language used for teaching and learning in early childhood development. This question was asked to measure the extent to which parents and teachers preferred code switching or moving from one language to another.

As depicted in Table 5, the majority (77.5%) of teachers and parents indicated that the language used at home should not be the same, as the one used for teaching and learning, while (22.5%) of the respondents thought the language should be the same. Further analysis as shown in Table 6 revealed that majority (86.0%) of parents (as shown earlier, all parents had Shona as their mother tongue) preferred their children to be taught in English which was different from the language spoken at home.

Table 5 Distribution of all respondents by preference for code switching (N=80).

Prefer code switching?	Distribution of respondents	
	Number	%

Yes	62	77.5
No	18	22.5
Total	80	100.0

Table 6 Distribution of parents by preference for code switching (N=50).

Prefer code switching?	Distribution of parents	
	number	%
Yes	43	86.0
No	7	14.0
Total	50	100.0

The reasons cited by parents why they preferred the language used at home not be the same as the language used at school were as follows:

- (a) It allowed children to learn two languages simultaneously.
- (b) Parents were impressed when children spoke in English.
- (c) Ability to speak in English demonstrated evidence that children were going to school.
- (d) Most subjects at school except Shona, were prepared or written in English, therefore the mother tongue was not supposed to dominate in teaching and learning.

Few parents argued that the languages should be the same for the following reasons:

- (a) They believed that Shona is easily understandable than English.
- (b) To avoid confusing the child.

As shown in Table 7, most teachers were also in favor of code switching (changing from one language to another) with 63.3% of them indicating that the language used at home should be different from the language used at school.

Table 7 Distribution of teachers by preference for code switching (N=30).

Prefer code switching?	Distribution of teachers
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	number	%
Yes	19	63.3
No	11	36.7
Total	30	100.0

The reasons cited by teachers why the language used at home should not be the same as the language used at school were as follows:

- (a) It improved the vocabulary of the two languages.
- (b) Most of the subjects were in English, therefore it was easy for learners to grasp and understand concepts.
- (c) For better communication when they met other people not speaking their mother tongue.
- (d) Some teachers and learners came from other areas where Shona is not dominant or not spoken and therefore it was best to communicate in English.
- (e) In addition, the mother tongue used by learners and teachers may be different. Citing herself– being a Ndebele speaker as an example, one teacher suggested that she was being compelled to speak Shona which was predominantly spoken in the study area because she happened to be working in the area. These sentiments were supported by a parent, who said, *“My nephew was born and bred in Matabeleland where they speak Ndebele and now he’s in Mashonaland. Therefore, English helps him to communicate with those who do not speak his mother tongue -Ndebele”*.

However, thirty seven percent (36.7%) of teachers indicated that the language used at home should be the same as the language used at school, arguing that teaching in the mother tongue- Shona which was also mainly spoken at home, helped learners to clearly grasp and understand concepts better than if they were taught in a second language - English. To support this, one teacher said:

“Cognition is more influenced by daily language”.

In addition, these teachers suggested that switching between languages confused learners. There was a possibility of learners failing one of the languages more than the other and consequently losing interest in it.

A major weakness resulting from switching between languages underscored by both teachers and parents is that, it led to code mixing or using two languages to complete one phrase or sentence

such as saying “*ndipewo firewood*” (with 'ndipeiwo' being Shona for "please give me") to be similar to learning two languages at the same time, and according to one respondent:

“Children get confused, and fail to use one language to complete a phrase or sentence”.

Learners' influence on the choice of language

Teachers were asked if they were influenced to communicate or teach in the language that learners found easy to communicate with or not. This question was asked to measure the extent to which teachers were influenced to use Shona (the mother language for most people in the study area) as the choice of language to communicate with learners.

Table 8 Distribution of teachers by influence on choice of language (N=30).

Influenced by learners on choice of language?	Distribution of teachers	
	number	%
Yes	13	43.3
No	17	56.7
Total	30	100.0

Table 8 depicts that 56.7% reported that they were not influenced by the learners, while 43.3% reported that they were influenced to use Shona, the language learners found easy to communicate with.

The reasons given by teachers who were not influenced by their learners were that they preferred to abide by the school language policy which prescribed use of English, even if they knew that mother tongue was easy for learners to understand than English. These teachers were often motivated by the observation that once the learners had mastered English words, they got excited and enjoyed speaking the language.

However, teachers who were influenced to use Shona, the language learners found easy to communicate with, explained that they used it to clarify some concepts that learners often had difficulties understanding if English only was used. Learners also tended to participate in class more when communicated to in Shona than when English only was used. Teachers also noted that, since English was not the learners' first language, learners needed to practice it more, both at home and school before they could speak and understand it well.

DISCUSSION

The study focused on a population whose mother tongue was homogenous, with 96.3% of all respondents being Shona speaking. This could be argued to have controlled for differences in responses that could have emanated from a mixed population with different languages as mother tongue.

Parents (86.0%) strongly preferred the use of English as medium of instruction in early childhood development, while teachers (66.7%) preferred the use of both English and Shona simultaneously. These findings are consistent with those revealed in the study conducted in Mwenezi (sub section 2.2.4 paragraph 2) where the use of mother tongue, Shona was found to be shunned by most people. These findings contradict some of the strong Afro-centric positions that consider African mother tongue languages as critical to the development of Africans, for example, Mavesera (2009) observed that African emancipation cannot be cultivated, expanded or developed where the language of instruction is different from the home language or the language people normally speak in their everyday lives.

Tables 3 and 4 show sharp differences between the parents' expectations regarding the language to be used for teaching and learning and the realities that the teachers experienced. For example, 86.0% of parents preferred English compared to 23.3% of teachers, while 66.7% of teachers preferred use of English and Shona interchangeably compared to 8.0% of parents.

Literature, for example Neuman & Dickinson (2011), suggests that the use of mother tongue is effective because learners understand more when they are taught in the language they know. Home language usage is argued to promote language and literacy abilities in that language. Thus one would expect that Shona, as a mother tongue in the area of focus for this study, be used in teaching and learning because it is undoubtedly the language through which the child will understand his or her environment and concepts far better (Mutasa 2004).

The researchers believes that in practice, the differences reflected in Tables 3 and 4 should be reconciled to ensure that parents and teachers have a common position and understanding that considers the best interest of the child's learning demands and environment. As long as these preferences remain different, there is potential for conflict between parents on one hand – who will always express dissatisfaction with teachers, and teachers on the other - who will think that parents make unreasonable expectations and demands on them. As a private preschool owner, the researcher observes that these findings reflect her personal experiences and the dilemma associated with preschool teaching and learning. In a bid to enroll and retain more children,

private preschools are drawn to use English to please the parents, although this may not necessarily be in the best interest of the child. Consequently, the child may suffer from an inconsistent language teaching system that may not be sensitive to their learning needs and challenges. However, as we note in Table 8, almost half (43.3%) of teachers considered it necessary to bend and use Shona from time to time to serve the best interest of the child, risking potential sanctions of going against school language policy.

As shown in Tables 6 and 7, a point of convergence however existed between parents and teachers when it comes to language used at home and school, with 86.0% of parents and 63.3% of teachers agreeing that the language used at home (mother language) should not be the one used in teaching and learning. Thus, both parents and teachers preferred English language to be used as medium of instruction at school, while mother tongue could continue to be used and developed at home. It can be argued that preference for code switching (a child speaks mainly Shona at home and English at school) as reported by the majority of both parents and teachers is positive in that it promotes additive bilingualism (Cummins 2009) where English is acquired without any loss of Shona language. When considered together with the preference by teachers to use both English and Shona in teaching and learning environments, preference for code switching strengthens this convergence between parents' and teachers' preferences, and presents opportunities for building consensus between the two camps which could inform the review, development and improvement of the language policy in Zimbabwe.

On the other hand, reasons presented by parents for preferring English, most of which are consistent with literature in Chapters 1 and 2, points to the influence of the colonial past (Ndamba 2008), the socio-economic demands and expectations for employment and success (Mutasa 2004), and globalization (Maseko and Dlamini 2014; Shizha 2012), social participation (Rory-Cambell 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas 2009), social status and acceptance in determining English as the preferred language of teaching and learning in Zimbabwe. In addition, in Zimbabwe, English language has largely been adopted as an international and universal language. Teachers appeared to take a pragmatic perspective in their reasons for preferring both English and Shona together - they considered what was best and easier for them to teach in ways that made it easy for children to learn. The position taken by teachers also ensures that no children are disadvantaged or discriminated in teaching and learning environments given the arguments by some researchers (Snipes et al. 2008; and Snow et al. 2007) that lower socio-

economic status and parents' educational levels can affect language development and skills upon entering school, and that those who cannot grasp English at the time of entering school are already disadvantaged (Benson 2009).

The observations and arguments made by some respondents, some among them 36.7% of teachers who indicated that using Shona (the language used at home) at school made it easier for learners to learn the second language (English) building on the first language that the child already knew is supported by Masuku (2002), who as noted in sub Section 2.2.4, suggested that this enabled the learner to search from the mother tongue “database” to enhance new learning.

The review of literature revealed that UNESCO in 2004 prioritized the use of mother tongue during early childhood development. On the other hand, the findings revealed that the use of mother tongue was preferred by only 5.0% of the total respondents, regardless that most of them (97.3%) spoke Shona as their mother tongue. This implies that, as much as mother tongue is encouraged, in practice, it is not implemented. It was also revealed that even if teachers knew that mother tongue made it easy for learners to understand concepts than English, a significant proportion of them would not use it, preferring instead to follow the school language policy which promoted English. In other words, parents' preferences had a stronger bearing on choice of language used at school than that of teachers and the national language policy.

Code switching as highlighted in section 4.1.3 is moving from one language to another had a disadvantage of leading to code mixing (section 2.2.7) which is changing language over phrases or sentences such as mixing Shona and English in one sentence. For example, “ask gogo” (ask grandma) or “look at, mombe”. This brought confusion to the learner, such that, when he or she sees a cow is mostly likely to say “cow, mombe”. During interviewing one of the teachers, the researcher observed another teacher giving instructions in Shona on an English test written on the chalkboard. However, from this observation by the researcher, it became cumbersome to the teacher explaining an English test in the mother tongue, hence moving from one language to another in one lesson.

Drawing from the findings it can be concluded that English continues to dominate in and outside the classroom (Maseko and Dlamini 2014). Parents largely preferred English language as medium of instruction, largely influenced by socio-economic and political reasons, while teachers preferred both Shona and English, largely concerned with the academic aspect relating to ease of teaching and learning for both teachers and learners. Drawing on the weight of the

discussion, the researcher is of the view that Shona and English should be used together as medium of instruction to cater for all learners slow and fast in learning irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, and to avoid discrimination. This also enhances effectiveness of teaching and learning.

It maybe concluded that the language policy in the Education Act is not promoted or reinforced and thus not applied in schools by teachers. The parents and teachers' perceptions and preferences are not consistent with public policy on the language to be used in early childhood development. They did not support the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction. This may be caused by the fact that this policy is not known. Besides, in a multi-lingual country such as Zimbabwe, using one indigenous language over the other may raise problems as it means promoting a particular ethnic group and suppressing others. This is particularly true for areas such the Midlands province and Bulawayo in Zimbabwe where there is a mixture of people speaking different mother tongues particularly of Ndebele and Shona speaking people. Government should promote awareness creation of education policies among teachers, parents and communities. Education planners should consult stakeholders who are involved in teaching and learning. These can be parents, teachers, school heads or even learners.

The findings indicate that although teachers knew that the use of mother tongue helped learners to understand concepts better, they would teach in English because that's what parents expected from them. The dilemma posed by the findings is that few respondents preferred Shona to English.

CONCLUSIONS

English is the language preferred by most respondents to be used in teaching and learning. Most parents preferred their children to be taught in English, while teachers preferred the use of both Shona and English. Parents presented arguments relating to economic opportunities and social status associated with English as language of power and influence that is universally accepted and used to communicate globally. Ideologically and politically, some may argue that this shows that parents and Zimbabwean society in generally remained so linguistically colonized that they have more faith in the second language than they do in the first language, more than three decades after the end of British colonial rule. Teachers preferred Shona and English mainly for professional and practical reasons - to make it easy for teaching and learning. Teachers used the

mother tongue to clarify concepts when they identified learners who would not have mastered what has been taught in English. Considering that some learners could have been proficiency in English before they were even enrolled at preschool or school; and these would be deprived on their continuation of speaking English at school if mother tongue was used.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research study proposes the following recommendations:

- The government should promote awareness, creation of education policies among teachers, parents and communities. Educational planners should consult stakeholders who are involved in teaching and learning. These can be parents, teachers, school heads or even learners.
- Further research should be conducted in areas where different languages are spoken to find views and opinions of people on which language should be used as medium of instruction in early childhood development.
- While the benefits of the mother tongue are well argued academically, intellectually, and philosophically, they should also be demonstrated in the practical lives of an increasingly technologically and economically driven global village, and the aspirations of Zimbabwean parents for their children to fit well and competitively into this global village.

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