

**Implementation of the Zimbabwe language-in-education policy in selected Masvingo rural primary schools: Challenges and opportunities**

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**Abstract**

*The Zimbabwe Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) enshrined in the 1987 Education Act (amended in 2006), allows the use of mother tongue in teaching up to Grade Seven. Contrary to the stated policy, primary school teachers continue to use English as the medium of instruction in primary schools. This qualitative case study aimed at exploring the views of teachers and school heads pertaining to challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the Zimbabwe (LiEP). Fifteen rural primary school teachers and three school heads were purposefully selected from one district in Masvingo province of Zimbabwe. Semi-structured questionnaires, focus group discussions and face-to-face individual interviews were used to collect data. The analysis of data was done using the constant comparative method for thematic coding. The findings indicated that the major challenge was that teachers and school heads had negative attitudes towards the mother language due to colonial influence. Participants were of the view that the LiEP was not relevant, hence they strongly resisted its implementation in rural primary schools. This was despite that they knew that learners struggled to understand concepts which were presented in a foreign language. The paper recommended professional development as an effective strategy which could assist educators in creating opportunities that could enable them to embrace the mother tongue based LiEP.*

**Key words**

*Language-in-education policy, mother tongue, post-colony, second language, Zimbabwe*

## Introduction

It is crucial for all schools to provide access to the analytical perspective where learners can express themselves freely by learning in a familiar language, particularly in Africa, where the second language is seldom heard or spoken outside the school premises (Brock-Utne, 2007; UNESCO Bangkok, 2008; Bamgbose, 1991, 2009; Taylor, 2009; Ferguson, 2013; Brock-Utne & Mercer, 2014). UNICEF findings from twenty-one countries in Eastern and Southern Africa Region reveal that “using the Mother Tongue as the medium of instruction enhances the child’s cognitive and learning processes, and facilitates effective learner-centred learning” (Trudell, 2016: 119).

After independence in 1980, Zimbabwe experienced a language-in-education policy change, which recognised the significance of the mother tongue in learning. This language-in-education policy (LiEP), enshrined in the 1987 Education Act, recommended the use of the mother tongue during the first three years of primary school. The policy was amended in 2006, and the revised policy extended mother tongue usage from three years to seven years. The majority of Zimbabwean learners live in the rural areas where everyday interaction is through an indigenous language. Implementation of a mother tongue-based LiEP would allow for easier comprehension of taught content by rural primary school learners. In other words, it is crucial for teachers and school heads to appreciate the role that the mother language plays in learning, particularly during the early years of schooling (Benson, 2005; Baker, 2006; Ball & Mcivor, 2013; Benson & Kosonen, 2013; Khejari, 2014; Kioko, Ndung’u, Njoroge & Mutiga, 2014; Sithole, 2021).

Since its inception in 2006, there has been growing concern over failure by schools to implement the provisions of the LiEP at primary level (Chimhundu, 2010; Magwa, 2015; Ndamba & van Wyk, 2018). This study was, therefore, guided by the postcolonial perspective which is driven by an emancipatory objective (Viruru, 2005; Rizvi, Lingard & Lavia, 2006; Benson, 2012). From a postcolonial theory perspective, participants are expected to voice their

concerns and suggest possible solutions to their problems (Arthur & Martin, 2006; Chilisa, 2012; Ndamba, 2017).

The purpose of this study was, thus, to explore the challenges and opportunities surrounding the implementation of the 2006 LiEP. In researches on bilingual language-in-education policies conducted in African countries such as Malawi (Khaphesi, 1999), Kenya (Muthwii, 2004; Khejeri, 2014; Oluoch, 2017), South Africa (Setati, 2005; Singh, 2014) and Nigeria (Salami, 2008; Mustapha, 2011), teachers and education inspectors were found to possess negative attitudes towards use of indigenous African languages, thereby hindering the implementation of the mother tongue-based policy. Not much has been documented in Zimbabwe, pertaining to rural school teachers and school heads' beliefs and their willingness to implement the mother tongue LiEP in rural set ups. Since Zimbabwe's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has, in its New Competence Based Curriculum 2015-2022, affirmed its commitment to mother tongue education at infant level beginning in 2017, this research on challenges and opportunities in implementing the LiEP becomes relevant and vital to ensure the success of the proposed policy.

Language attitudes which support the dominant role of English contribute towards the marginalisation of African languages in education (Dalvit et al., 2009; Sithole, 2021). These attitudes are experienced within the education system and in society as a whole. In relation to the significance of attitudes, Baker (1992, cited in Adegbija, 1994: 49) identified three components of attitude: the cognitive, affective and readiness for action. According to Baker (1992) the cognitive component relates to thoughts and beliefs, while the affective component is about feelings toward the language. The readiness for action (conative) component of attitude is considered to be a plan of action under specific circumstances. Adegbija (1994: 49) underscores the importance of knowledge of language attitudes, with particular reference to Sub-Saharan Africa by stating that:

Attempting language shift by language planning, language policy making and the provision of human and material resources can all come to nothing if attitudes are not favourable to change. Language engineering can flourish or fail according to the attitudes of the community (Adegbija, 1994: 49).

Language attitudes, therefore, can impact negatively on the implementation of a LiEP which recommends mother tongue usage such as that of Zimbabwe.

The attitudes of viewing the conqueror's language as the language of power and prestige are evident in the history of societies other than those found in Africa. Adebija (1994) expresses this view where he cites the vivid example of the French conquest of England in 1066 AD, after which the English people began to regard French as the language of power. In the African context, the colonial history and experiences contributed towards the prevailing favourable attitudes towards ex-colonial languages compared to the mother languages (Ndimande-Hlongwa & Ndebele, 2017; Oluoch, 2017). Phillipson (1992 cited in Nkomo, 2008: 352) likens colonialism to linguistic imperialism and regards colonial languages as the cornerstone of colonialism. There are some common strands in the social and political history of African countries that could provide insight into how language attitudes have evolved over the years (Adebija, 1994). According to Ngefac (2010: 149):

*Colonialism has come and gone, but its impact in postcolonial multilingual contexts continues to shape and mould people's ideologies, identity, culture, perceptions and attitudes.*

The implication of the above observation is that school heads and teachers may have language attitudes which are rooted in the colonial experiences. This is because many Africans look up to European languages as languages of power, of high position, of prestige and of status, at the expense of mother tongue, notwithstanding its educational benefits (Peresuh & Masuku, 2002; Mwamwenda, 2004; Ridge, 2004; Hungwe, 2007; Mustapha, 2011; Ndamba, Sithole & van Wyk, 2017; Sithole, 2021).

Negative attitudes towards the use of the mother language in education are exacerbated by the behaviour and beliefs of the elites, a category of postcolonial subjects to which teachers and school heads happen to belong (Adebija, 1994). The elite group would rather be associated with Western European society and values than African languages and culture (Alexander, 2004; Hornbeger & Vaish, 2009; Johnson, 2010).

Elite language attitudes continue to facilitate dominance of English in Zimbabwean education while expressing negative attitudes towards the indigenous African languages spoken by the majority of the population (Rassool, Edwards & Bloch, 2006; Orman, 2008; Salami, 2008; Prah, 2009). The depth of negative attitudes towards language-in-education policies which favour mother tongue use has led some authorities to ask questions pertaining to whether teachers and school heads would take up the policy if all the textbooks were to be translated. This view is amply demonstrated by Foley (2008:9) who proclaims that:

*Even assuming that at some point in the future the African languages have been effectively developed, that the curriculum has been efficiently translated, and that a full quota of properly trained teachers is available, there is still the question of whether schools will adopt the policy and implement it thoroughly.*

Therefore, knowledge about attitudes is crucial to the formulation of a LiEP as well as to its implementation success (Baker, 2006; Kioko et al., 2014; Trudell, 2016). In the context of this study, we argue that it is important to explore the beliefs and attitudes of primary school heads and teachers in Zimbabwe, as they are responsible for implementing the policy that calls for a shift from the use of English to the use of the mother tongue in learning and teaching at primary school level.

In Zimbabwe, failure to learn in the mother language was found to be a contributory factor to poor performance by rural primary school learners, particularly in mathematics and science (Greenhalgh & Shumba, 2014). Therefore, the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and school heads need to be investigated in order to establish their views and experiences on the implementation of the LiEP in a bilingual postcolonial context. In order to achieve this goal, the study was guided by the following research question: What challenges hinder, and what opportunities can be created for effective implementation of the LiEP in rural primary schools? The study findings are part of a larger research which focused on factors that hinder effective implementation of the 2006 LiEP for Zimbabwe.

## Method

### *Research design*

This research was a qualitative case study. The case study design was considered appropriate to gain “a rich and vivid description of events” (Cohen et al., 2011: 289) relating to school heads and teachers’ views on challenges and opportunities in implementing the Zimbabwe LiEP as well as their experiences in their natural contexts of rural primary school settings. Cohen et al. (2011: 292) consider case studies to be ‘a step to action’ because their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use for the purpose of staff or individual self-development, for within institutional feedback, for formative education, and in educational policy making, a situation compatible with the postcolonial theory which aims at individual and societal transformation.

#### *Sample*

A sample of 18 participants comprising 15 primary school teachers and 3 school heads was purposefully selected. The main criteria for selection were teachers who had taught in the primary school for ten years and above, while school heads were involved by virtue of their being the top leaders of selected schools. Teachers and school heads were chosen because they are key figures in policy implementation at primary school level.

#### *Research instruments*

Data were collected through the use of in-depth semi-structured questionnaires, focus group discussions and individual interviews. Teachers responded to questionnaires at a time and place that suited them, hence there was little scope for data to be affected by interpersonal data (Gray, 2009). Teachers were also involved in focus group discussions which aimed at yielding a collective instead of an individual view (Cohen et al., 2011). The choice of these instruments was influenced by the postcolonial theory which encourages participants to speak out what affects their lives in their own voices and allows them to come up with possible solutions to their problems (Mfum-Mensah, 2005; Ratele, 2006; Phillips, 2011). The research instruments that were used enabled the researchers to get rich thick data (Creswell, 2007; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) pertaining to teachers’ and school heads’ experiences on challenges and opportunities towards the implementation of the 2006 LiEP.

#### *Data collection procedures*

Teachers completed semi-structured questionnaires which yielded open answers and attended focus group discussions. School heads participated in the individual face-to-face interviews. Both questionnaires and interviews were administered personally by the principal researcher. Focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews lasted for about one hour in each case and these were conducted at the relevant schools during the lunch hour in order to avoid disruption of lessons. Proceedings were recorded using a digital voice recorder for each individual interview and each of the three focus group discussions. Transcriptions were done verbatim.

#### *Data analysis*

Data from the semi-structured questionnaires, focus group interviews and individual interviews were analysed using the constant comparative method for thematic coding (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Nyawaranda, 2014). The constant comparative approach is the analytic technique of qualitatively comparing and contrasting data from various data sources in order to develop categories and to find patterns among the categories (Silverman, 2010).

#### **Ethical considerations**

Written permission to conduct the study was granted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Participants were given verbal assurance that the information they provided would be kept as confidential data (Gray, 2009; De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2011). The interviewees were asked to read and sign an informed consent form which clearly stated the purpose of the study, that their participation was voluntary, and that they were free to discontinue participation if they felt like.

#### **Findings**

The major objective of the study was to explore and gain insight into teachers' and school heads' experiences on challenges and opportunities towards implementation of the 2006 LiEP, which allows learners to access the curriculum in their home language up to the end of the primary school. Three themes and their categories were established through the process of open and axial coding and categorising. The identified themes and categories all show a pattern that seems to suggest that the negative attitudes are related to colonial influence.

**Theme one: Low status of the mother language**

Both groups of participants were of the opinion that the 2006 policy was not relevant, and as a result they were not willing to implement it. The argument that came out prominently was that if they used the mother tongue, standards of education would decline, culminating in the production of graduates who would not compete in the global community where English is regarded as the language of prestige. Three categories were distinguished, namely; failure by learners to communicate, production of uncompetitive individuals and high failure rate at Grade Seven level if the mother tongue was used as per requirements of the LiEP.

*Failure to communicate*

Almost all the teacher participants demonstrated their unwillingness to teach in the mother tongue as per requirements of the LiEP, mainly because it was not a universal language used for wider communication. Hence, they believed that the standards of education would be negatively affected. These communication challenges are demonstrated in the following statements from the teachers' questionnaires:

*Use of ChiShona betrays the nation. Our children will be backward and will not be suitable to expose themselves to other nations. (Teacher, school 1)*

*I wouldn't like that (policy) because later in life the pupils whom we teach might find themselves working outside the country where the vernacular language would not be spoken. They will find difficulties in communication. (Teacher, School 2)*

*It will lower the standards of education since one will be confined to one place, unable to communicate within and outside the country. (Teacher, school 3)*

*Uncompetitive learners*

The majority of teacher participants in this study indicated that they were not willing to implement the LiEP as that would contribute towards producing uncompetitive individuals since learning in the mother tongue was considered equivalent to lowering the standards of education in today's world where English is highly valued. These ideas were expressed during focus group discussions as follows:



*I fear that schools that follow the policy may end up producing uncompetitive pupils who are less privileged in the society. (Teacher, School 1)*

*I think teaching in Shona maybe will sideline the pupils we will be teaching because the industry side will say we want English, we want Science, we want Mathematics whereas you taught them in Shona and they are able to communicate in Shona. Whatever they are doing will be in Shona so they will not go anywhere, they will be marginalised. (Teacher, School 2)*

### *High failure rate*

Many of the teachers who participated in this study indicated that they were not prepared to support the 2006 LiEP since its implementation would contribute to high failure rate at Grade Seven level. Their argument was that all materials are written in English and if learners were taught in the mother tongue, then they would fail examinations which must be answered in English in all other subjects except for ChiShona as a subject. During the focus group discussions, teacher participants expressed the view that the 2006 LiEP is not relevant as reflected in the following responses:

*How will they imitate the teacher? You teach in Shona and examine them in English, how will they imitate? They are exposed to mother language at home, they are exposed to mother language at school and then you examine them in English [...]. If you use Shona in teaching, right you teach all the concepts in Shona, are they going to change the Shona that you will be teaching to English when they are being examined? Are they going to be able to do that? (Teacher, School 2)*

*They (learners) won't benefit from the mother tongue (policy) just because you find out u-m-m without English, the gates or the avenues are closed for the child for the whole life. You may pass any other subjects but you find out if you fail English, the future is very difficult for the child. (Teacher, School 3)*

Out of all the teachers who participated in the focus group discussions, only one participant was positive on the relevance of the LiEP which encourages mother tongue usage in education when he said:

*The policy is very relevant. In fact, it's only Zimbabwe and a few other countries that are shunning their indigenous languages following the dictates and prescriptions of their so-called colonial masters. It's high time we take pride in our culture. (Teacher, School 2)*

Thus, the majority of teachers in this study viewed the 2006 LiEP as irrelevant as it would contribute towards the lowering of standards whereas nothing was being done to uplift the status of the mother language.

### **Theme two: Colonial effects**

Under this theme, two categories emerged, namely unwillingness to implement a LiEP using materials translated into an African language, and realisation of English hegemony.

#### *Unwillingness to implement a LiEP using mother tongue materials*

The gravity of negative attitudes towards use of the mother language was made clear when fourteen out of the fifteen teacher participants indicated that even if textbooks and syllabi were translated into the mother language, they were still not prepared to implement the LiEP by teaching in the mother tongue as the sole language of education. The sentiments which were expressed by many teacher participants, concerning their unwillingness to teach in the mother tongue, are represented in the following excerpts from focus group discussions:

*As I have already said, it will be monotonous. I will not be willing because teaching all subjects in just one language from morning up to evening ah! I don't think I would be willing. (Teacher, School 1)*

*I won't be willing to teach all subjects in Shona since it will be difficult to carry out experiments, name ingredients in Shona and explain most of the concepts. Other English words cannot be explained in Shona. (Teacher, School 2)*

*I will not be willing. Perhaps those people who will be there some time would be willing. I am a person of my time, let's not forget that we are people of our time and we don't know about the next generation. [...] At this present moment we are using English and if we say abruptly we start to adjust to something, you see, a hot iron if you just throw it into the water, in cold water, you know what happens, you see bubbles that means disaster will occur, due to that sudden change [Laughter]. (Teacher, School 3)*

Similar views were held by two of the school heads who expressed their reservations concerning implementation of a mother tongue LiEP up to Grade Seven. During the face-to-face interviews, one of them emphatically declared:

*That may take long and a lot of debate, a lot of arguments and u-m-m a lot of indifference. People really may not be prepared in a short time to accept that (policy) or to use that Shona as the sole medium of instruction because of the points I mentioned that it will take a very long time, maybe decades, to change to that. For now no, no.* **(Head, School 2)**

However, one school head indicated that as an individual he would willingly implement a LiEP which allows the mother language to be used in education up to Grade Seven, if books and syllabi were translated, as that would be an advantage to learners. He presented his thoughts as follows:

*I would advocate for that (use of the mother tongue in learning) if I had the powers to do so because like I said I take my role model in the world as China, where learners are taught in Chinese and you can see that the level of their development even at primary schools is quite unique. So to do the same and translate all the syllabi and all the textbooks into the vernacular, I'm sure all our pupils will learn from the known to the unknown. Now they already know Shona, so if we continue teaching them in Shona, we produce very good graduates in the long run. That's my own view.* **(Head, School 1)**

The question of negative attitudes due to the low status of indigenous languages was therefore spelt out in this study where participants clearly declared that the use of the mother language was not relevant and that they were not prepared to embrace such a LiEP. According to teachers and school heads, these negative attitudes towards the mother language were viewed as postcolonial effects, a concept described in the next section.

#### *Realisation of English hegemony*

Teachers' negative sentiments were expressed during focus group discussions when many participants portrayed awareness that colonialism had influenced their way of thinking as illustrated below:

*You go to Britain today their first language is English, their examination is in English. If you go to Japan they use their vernacular to write their exams. So it is also possible for us to use our vernacular to write our exams, so perhaps because of our colonial history, we are taking English as superior to other languages you see, that is why, u-m-m it is the effects of our colonialism.* **(Teacher, School 1)**

*Those guys who are advanced in technology, the Chinese and the Japanese, they are teaching their children in the mother language, they are not teaching them in English*

*and they are so advanced. Yet here in Zimbabwe we are cocooned into using this English which is not even ours, our minds are still colonised.* [Laughter] **(Teacher, School 3)**

In a similar manner, all the school heads also expressed the views that colonialism had taken its toll on the beliefs of educators in Zimbabwe. The thinking of each of the school heads was demonstrated during the face-to-face interviews as follows:

*It will take a long time for all those people (teachers) to change because some are conservative, some u-m-m may buy the idea but how to implement it for such conservative people might become a barrier.* **(Head, School 1)**

*Being a former colony of Britain, I feel we have been using English as the medium of instruction for too long and that is the major reason why people are generally proud to be associated with the English more than any other language in Zimbabwe, including the parents.* **(Head, School 2)**

*Looking down u-m-m I think it's because we have been colonised, our language and everything due to colonialism. You find that we ended up not valuing ourselves, our languages and our culture.* **(Head, School 3)**

It is evident from the study findings that products of the colonial system took pride in being associated with the English language as compared to the mother language, thereby making it difficult for them to accept the first language as the sole medium of instruction in rural primary schools.

### **Theme three: Intervention strategies**

In keeping with the expectations of the postcolonial theory, participants were asked to come up with suggestions on what they considered to be strategies which might help them to be transformed in order to embrace the mother tongue-based LiEP for the benefit of rural learners.

Teachers and school heads who participated in this study were of the opinion that they required retraining as a way of dispelling their fears in order to prepare them for the implementation of the 2006 LiEP. This finding was revealed in the statements below:

*Lack of training plus ignorance, fear of the unknown. Even if we hear it now we don't know whether it will be successful or not.* **(Teacher, School 1: Questionnaire response)**

*The first one I think the Government could revisit the training of teachers, maybe retrain the teachers to adopt a new policy [...] Training of personnel, teachers, and heads to adopt that policy, maybe it could be an intervention strategy. (Head, School 3: Face-to-face interview)*

Therefore, study participants were of the view that professional development of both teachers and school heads was an effective intervention measure which could assist in combating their fears and subsequent resistance as well as providing requisite knowledge and skills to enable them to accept the 2006 mother tongue-based LiEP.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study clearly confirm those in literature which show that negative attitudes act as the major challenge to effective implementation of the mother tongue-based LiEP, thereby disadvantaging learners who cannot express themselves freely in a foreign language (Taylor, 2009; Desai, 2012; Brock-Utne & Mercer, 2014; Trudell, 2016; Ndamba & van Wyk, 2018). This finding can be explained in terms of the mother language which is regarded as of low status. Similar findings were yielded in other African countries where teachers and school heads held negative attitudes towards the use of indigenous languages in education (Khaphesi, 1999, Muthwii, 2004; Salami, 2008; Mustapha, 2011; Khejeri, 2014; Oluoch, 2017).

That teachers and school heads are regarded as belonging to the elite category (Adegbija, 1994) was confirmed in our study findings as the reason why they strongly rejected the use of the mother tongue in education in rural primary schools, citing the unique function played by English. The same findings were yielded in a research conducted in Malawi by Kaphesi (1999) where most teachers and school heads were found to be pessimistic about the use of the mother language in the teaching of mathematics in the primary schools. Likewise, in Nigeria it was found that teachers and education inspectors had negative attitudes which prevented the implementation of the mother tongue policy (Salami, 2008).

The elite have a strong belief in English as expressed by Alexander (2004: 120) who asserts that “the elites are captive to the notion that there is no alternative to English“. Thus, educators who belong to the elite category can be active agents in the interpretation and implementation of a bilingual education LiEP, as revealed in the studies conducted by Johnson (2010), thereby disadvantaging learners from learning in their mother language. Teachers and school heads in our study were so much embroiled in their beliefs in the instrumental value of English to an extent that they did not consider the significant role of the home language in education. Yet, literature is clear on the incontestable role of the mother language as a key factor on the cognitive development of learners, particularly at primary school level (Brock-Utne, 2007; UNESCO Bangkok, 2008; Qorro, 2009; Taylor, 2009; Vygotsky in Donald et al., 2010; Kioko et al., 2014; Ndamba, Sithole & van Wyk, 2017).

The majority of teachers and school heads in this study clearly declared their unwillingness to implement a mother tongue-based LiEP in rural primary schools even if the Government had re-printed all the educational materials into indigenous languages. Such findings seem to confirm that teachers and school heads in this study may have been affected by the fact that they went through a British type of education from primary, secondary and subsequent teacher training institutions (Ndawi & Maravanyika, 2011). Whereas some recent studies have recommended provision of resources in African languages to enable them to become languages of education (Desai, 2012; Singh, 2014; Trudell, 2016; Sithole, 2021), to the contrary, participants in this study were not keen to make use of them. It is evident that the findings of this study confirm literature which states that the influence of colonialism appears to play a critical role in the beliefs and attitudes of educators in a bilingual education postcolonial context in Africa (Adegbija, 1994; Mfum-Mensah, 2005; Foley, 2008; Dalvit et al., 2009; Benson, 2012; Ndamba, 2017).

Accordingly, participants in the current study proposed professional development of teachers and school heads as the most effective way of combating teacher resistance to the implementation of the LiEP as suggested in literature (Fullan, 1998; Rogan & Grayson, 2003; Bitan-Friedlander et al., 2004; Matoti, Janqueira & Odora, 2011; Kioko et al., 2014).

Inadvertently, teachers and school heads in this study, therefore, all acknowledged that colonialism had negatively influenced them as postcolonial subjects who believed that English was a language of power. Thus, participants in this study may consider an Indigenous language, which is supposed to be used as the language of education in primary schools in Zimbabwe, as being inferior and an inadequate tool in matters of formal education and success in life as suggested by other studies from African countries (Alidou et al., 2006; Nkomo, 2008; Khejeri, 2014; Ndamba et al., 2017; Ndimande-Hlongwa & Ndebele, 2017; Oluoch, 2017). A possible explanation could be that the choice of English by teachers and school heads may be genuinely on the grounds of the superior role of English in enabling someone to be enrolled in tertiary institutions and to get a good job. In this regard, Hungwe (2007) concluded that in Zimbabwe, skills in the English language are regarded as a crucial requirement for global mobility. For this reason, since teachers and school heads were aware of and strongly believed in the instrumental role of English, it may be a big challenge for them to embrace the LiEP and teach in the mother language.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the views of school heads and teachers pertaining to the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the language-in-education policy at primary school level in Zimbabwe. Although they proposed some intervention strategies, participants in this study demonstrated their unwillingness to embrace the LiEP, affirming that such a policy could only be implemented by the next generations. English hegemony, imposed through colonialism in Zimbabwe and other African countries, may have contributed towards weakening the value possessed by African languages in the education of learners who have a scanty understanding of English.

### **Recommendations**

Since participants appeared unwilling to implement the LiEP which recommends mother tongue use in the education of rural primary school learners, the study recommends that:

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education may consider retraining all practising teachers through seminars and workshops where the benefits of using the mother language for pedagogical reasons are explained.
- At individual school levels, a collaborative system could be established and strengthened whereby teachers can interact with each other to discuss their experiences and share their concerns on issues pertaining to implementation of a LiEP which favours mother tongue education in a postcolonial context.
- Teachers' colleges and universities that offer programmes in primary education both at pre-service and in-service levels need to design and offer courses (modules) that deal with the pedagogic role of the mother language in a postcolonial bilingual education context and how to implement such a LiEP at primary school level.
- Universities, which are seen as nerve-centres of research, may be involved in a more serious conduct by way of investigating further on how to address the issue of attitudes as these were found to be the major barrier to the implementation of a mother tongue-based LiEP by rural primary school teachers and school heads. Zimbabwean universities could also be involved in conducting pilot studies, the success of which may convince stakeholders in education on the worth of the mother language on pedagogical grounds.

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