

# **Mother Tongue Usage in Learning: An Examination of Language Preferences in Zimbabwe**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is based on findings from a study conducted to examine children and parents' language preferences in view of the Zimbabwean language policy derived from the 1987 Education Act, which requires instruction to be conducted in the mother tongue in grades 1-3. This study is thus a survey in which interviews and questionnaires were used to gather data from pupils, parents, school heads, "infant teachers and teachers-in-charge of infant departments" (TICs). The sample consisted of 60 pupils, 42 parents, 25 school heads, 152 infant teachers and 17 TICs. Respondents were purposively selected from urban, peripheral-urban, and rural schools in Masvingo district in Zimbabwe. It was found that 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. Hence, it is suggested that there is need for attitude change and thus a serious campaign for all stakeholders to appreciate the role played by the mother tongue in the early years of schooling.

## **Introduction**

The pre-independence era in Zimbabwe was characterized by a language policy that did not officially recognize indigenous languages (L1) spoken by the majority of the population. At independence in 1980, the government recognized the significant role played by the mother tongue in learning, thus an educational language policy raised the status of indigenous languages. According to the official language policy of the 1987 Education Act (revised in 2004), children in Grades 1-3 are to be instructed in their first language, and learn English (L2) as one of the subjects on the curriculum. From Grade 4 onwards, English becomes the language of instruction. According to research and literature (Borich and Tombari, 1997) this language policy can be identified as a possible model for bilingual education. Issues of the nature and purpose of bilingual education and bilingual programs have attracted the attention of researchers in other countries.

In Zimbabwe, the issue of the status and use of language for educational purposes is seldom raised by policy makers (Zimbabwe Languages Association, 1997; Gudhlanga, 2005). Not much work has been done on parents and pupils' language preferences in a bilingual set up at the elementary level in Zimbabwe. Thus this study sought to investigate unexamined early childhood bilingual education issues in Zimbabwe, where there is concern about poor performance by pupils in both L1 and L2 language arts.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical and conceptual framework, which informed and framed this study emerged first from bilingualism and its two forms, namely the additive and the subtractive models, and secondly from related models of second language teaching which are the transitional and immersion models.

One of the expectations and assumption of bilingual education is that the product becomes successful both linguistically and culturally, but it is only possible when the form of bilingualism is additive rather than subtractive (Hornby, 1977; Genesee, 1977).

Subtractive bilingualism arises out of a situation where the second language is acquired without accommodating the linguistic skills that have already been developed in the first language (Mwamwenda, 1996). Such situations are evident in societies where one language is considered as having a more prestigious socio-economically determined status than the other, which is regarded as inferior (Jeffreys, 1996; Hornby, 1977; Roy-Campbell, 1996). In this model, the learners' L1 skills are replaced by the L2, thereby placing linguistic and cultural systems in conflict instead of complementing one another (Robinson, 1996). The subtractive model thus disadvantages bilingual children (McLaughlin, 1990) since studies by Hakuta (1986) in Travers, Elliot and Kratochwill (1993) show that children with a high degree of bilingualism have a better level of cognitive development.

In the additive model, Lambert (1977) says that bilingualism arises out of a situation whereby society attributes positive values to both the individual's first language and second language. In other words, children will be adding a second language at no cost to the development of their first language. Borich and Tombari (1997) observe that the development of additive bilingualism does not have any negative effect on the children's academic, linguistic or intellectual development. A more additive process of bilingualism is when the child's first language and associated culture are nurtured and supported, then the second language is later introduced (Genesee, 1977).

Travers, et al (1993) regard transitional bilingual programs as those that use the learners' first language for the purpose of rapid development of English L2 to occur so that students can quickly move on to an English only program. The rationale behind transitional models is to use the students' first language only to compensate for their lack of proficiency in English, so as to prepare them for immersion in English as a second language (Lemlech, 1994).

Immersion programs are described by Borich and Tombari (1997) as those that place non-English speaking learners in an English only classroom with a teacher who speaks the students' native language. The principle is that the second language is used as the medium of instruction and the children's mother tongue is only used when students fail to understand a concept. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) consider immersion programs as consisting of full and partial models. Full immersion happens when programs begin in kindergarten and extend to upper grades. In partial immersion, there is early immersion which includes some subjects in L2 and others in L1, while late or delayed immersion involves subject matter in L2, starting at upper elementary or high school. The official education language policy for Grades 1-3 in Zimbabwe falls under the transitional model, and the delayed immersion program. This model of bilingualism in Zimbabwe is also used by countries which share the same historical background of colonialism such as Kenya (Cleghorn, 1992).

Many linguists as well as experienced and successful bilinguals argue that it is highly desirable for multi-cultural societies to support the use of a first language in the learning of young bilinguals in schools (Scarcella, 1990 in Tompkins and Hoskisson, 1995). Hence, mother tongue education in the primary years offers the best introduction to literacy that eventually becomes useful in the acquisition of English as a second language (Westley, 1992 in Mwamwenda, 1996; Hawes, 1979; Hakuta, 1986, in Travers et al, 1993).

Research on L2 acquisition shows that if a child masters the first language, then learning another language becomes less problematic in that habits of speech, listening, reading and writing which can be transferred to the learning of the second language (Cummins, 1981; Hawes, 1979; Obanya, 1985; Dawes, 1988; Krashen, 1985 in MacLaughlin, 1987). Cummins (1981) in Kroll (1990:95) claims that there is an "underlying cognitive/academic proficiency" common to languages and this enables transfers of literacy related skills across languages.

The findings that L2 acquisition is closely related to the proficiency level of the first language is important for bilingual education teachers and parents of children in bilingual education programs in Zimbabwe. If taken seriously, this literature can contribute to change of attitudes by teachers and parents who neglect the L1 in learning for fear that the first language negatively interferes with the learning of a second language.

However, it must be noted that there are some research findings which show that transfer of skills across languages is not automatic (McLaughlin, 1987). For this reason, Sprosty (1995) is of the opinion that second language learning can be aided by effective teaching of the language arts in the first language. Sprosty goes further to say that knowledge about the transfer of skills between languages is important since teachers who are sensitive to the role played by the first language in developing second language literacy skills are in a better position to use those relationships in preparing learners to become proficient in the L2.

In Zimbabwe, the view that the skills transfer from the L1 to the L2 is expressed in the *Primary English Syllabus for Grade One* (1984:1-32) currently in use, where teachers are strongly discouraged from introducing English reading very early in the year, since children who speak English as a second language need to first have sufficient understanding of spoken English on which to base the early reading vocabulary, and second, an elementary reading ability in Shona/Ndebele. Thus, some of this will transfer to English, and the two languages can function as separate reading media without confusing the child, but to present both codes at the same time results in uncertainty and confusion for some children.

As indicated by the grade one syllabus, additive bilingualism allows infant teachers to emphasise the acquisition of oral language which is necessary in reading and writing in English as a second language (Sprosty, 1995). This view is supported by experts on language teaching cited by Sharp in Ngara (1982), who generally agreed that in the early stages of second language learning, oral language development is crucial. Learning to read before the spoken word is mastered is to invite “pseudo-literacy” which is a problem predominant in many African nations where children fail to become competent in both the L1 and the L2 (Hawes, 1979; Duminy 1975; Bamgbose, 1991). With reference to Zambia, where English has been introduced and taught side by side with the L1 at the beginning of grade one, Miti (1995:3) asserts that “... we have produced thousands upon thousands of children who are unable to read either L1 or L2”.

A growing body of research also suggests that bilingualism promotes overall cognitive development (Borich and Tombari, 1997). These authors observed that studies by Hakuta, Friedman and Diaz (1987) indicate that bilingual children perform better on tests of analytical reasoning, concept formation and cognitive flexibility. Travers et al (1993), however, state that the findings that the higher the degree of bilingualism the better the level of cognitive attainment is only possible when the first language is maintained, the social climate is positive, and when the non-English speakers are not negatively judged. Experimental work carried out by Peal and Lambert (1962) in Jeffrey's (1996) also suggests that those bilinguals who loved and respected both of their languages showed positive effects in the areas of creativity and mental flexibility as compared with monolinguals and those who believe that one of the languages is better than the other.

The UNESCO Committee of 1953 states that the best medium for teaching a child is the mother tongue through which children understand better and express themselves freely. The basic position of the 1953 report, which shows that children learn quickly through their first language than an unfamiliar linguistic medium, is supported by research evidence from African nations (Mwamwenda, 1996). Out of many research findings, Bamgbose (1991) cites the *Six Year Primary Project* started in 1970 in Nigeria to establish the effectiveness of the first language as compared with English L2. Results of the experiment clearly showed that the indigenous languages facilitated more meaningful learning than English. In another research, Cleghorn (1992) also carried out comparative studies on the effectiveness of the L1 over English L2 in several schools in Kenya and it also found that important ideas were more easily conveyed when teachers did not stick to the requirements of the English-only language of instruction.

Whereas those who learn through their L1 are at an advantage, learners who learn through a second language are disadvantaged (Wallwork, 1985; Ngara, 1982; Macnamara, 1973; Miti, 1995). Chaudron (1988) asserts that in a learning situation where only the L2 is used as a medium of instruction, learners face problems because their task is threefold. The first is that the student has to make sense of the instructional tasks which are presented in the second language. Secondly, the learner has to attain linguistic competence which is required for effective learning to take place. Finally the student is faced with the problem of mastering the content itself. This is illustrated by Roy-Campbell's (1996:16) interview findings from a former Tanzanian student who recalled "... the feeling of incompetence and loss of confidence as a result of a poor or hardly any grasp of English. I know of classmates who stayed dumb in the classroom rather than to embarrass themselves in a language they were not even sure they understood".

In light of the findings that bilingualism has positive effects and that the mother tongue is crucial in the initial phase of the child's school life, Zimbabwe found it necessary to implement an education language policy which recognizes the child's L1. This was done through the use of the transitional or the late immersion model of bilingualism where children would learn in their mother tongue in Grades 1-3. It was hoped that this language policy for the early grades would reflect some of the expectations and assumptions of bilingualism that the pupils understand concepts better in their mother tongue; skills would transfer from the L1 to the L2; all instruction in L2 should be delayed until initial literacy in the L1, and that some oral fluency in the L2 is achieved.

McLaughlin (1985), however, noted that the major problem of the transitional model is that there is a tendency to emphasise English at the expense of the first language. Instead of using linguistic and cognitive development in the first language for later development in the second language, many programmes in this bilingual model give superficial attention to mother tongue instruction and sometimes children are exited into the L2 medium of instruction before they have mastered enough of the language to enable them to access the curriculum. Roller (1988) established that Zimbabwean pupils at Grade 5 level had achieved superficial levels of proficiency in English and found very little or no evidence of transfer of skills between L1 and L2. And Ndamba (1999) has established that infant teachers preferred to introduce Shona/Ndebele and English reading at the same time before pupils had acquired sufficient oral language in the L2. Thus, such neglect of the suggestions given in the English syllabus could be attributed to either ignorance or negative attitudes towards the role of the L1 in the learning of children in Early Childhood Development.

### **Attitudes Toward Instruction in the Mother Tongue**

The success of a mother tongue instruction policy depends on people's attitudes towards the first language and English L2. And to understand how attitudes towards a language develop, it is necessary to consider the social and political history of a nation, since such historical forces play a significant role (Bamgbose, 1991; Robinson, 1996). Thus, the colonial and the post-colonial language and educational policies obviously provide a solid basis of the explanation of attitudes towards African languages, and English L2 (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 1986; Bamgbose, 1991; Roy-Campbell, 1996; Adegbija, 1994; Robinson, 1996).

The colonial language policies either adopted the use of English from the first grade or only used indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary school. Post-colonial language policies have maintained the status quo, thus perpetuating the existence of an elite group, which is characterized by relatively high economic status, high educational level and high competence in English (Robinson, 1996; Granville, Janks, Joseph, Mpahlele, Ramani, Reed and Watson, 1998). Therefore, African nations remain "prisoners of the past" since they are so overwhelmed by established practices to such an extent that it is virtually impossible to break away from them (Bamgbose, 1991). Hence, the colonial and neo-colonial subjects tend to undermine their own language, as mentioned by Adegbija (1994:33) who says:

*This attitude of denigration towards one's own language and the exaltation of European languages has not been easy to remove in Africa. Its scars are still very visible today, particularly in the education system.*

Thus, the fact that indigenous languages are not used for education beyond the lower grades has greatly contributed towards African indigenous languages being regarded as less important.

Attitudes can be created through functions that people perceive particular languages as performing. In the African context, Robinson (1996) is of the opinion that official and local languages are regarded as opposed to each other, rather than as complementary as evidenced by the fact that one of the two languages may be regarded as a more suitable language for certain domains, and the characteristic functions are seen in dichotomous terms. Robinson (1996) says the local languages are characterized by oral usage, individual/community usage, emotional attachment, village solidarity and personal loyalties. The official language is characterized by institutional usage, written usage, functional use, economic advantage and national communication. English as an official language has therefore been associated with success, power, prestige, progress and achievement, and such associations have generally resulted in English getting a high positive evaluation (Adegbija, 1994).

Cummins in Otto (1997) is also of the view that language can be used in the form of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) which requires sound literacy skills, vocabulary that is broad to allow for subject-matter mastery, concept development and skill in formal oral and written expression. And by virtue of it being used in formal education, CALP can be viewed as a prestigious form of language usage and in the Zimbabwean context; English is accorded the role of CALP (Otto, 1997). Another main form of language use is regarded as the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), a form of L1 which is acquired in early childhood and meant for social access due to its relatively limited vocabulary. Otto says in Zimbabwe, the L1 is accorded the role of BICS which has contributed to negative attitudes towards the first language, because of it not being used as CALP, during the initial years of schooling.

## **Learner Attitudes**

In colonial Africa, Westermann (1949) in Ngara (1982) 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, which they were prepared to get rid of as quickly as possible.

In Tanzania, where education in primary schools is conducted in Kiswahili, studies by Roy-Campbell (1996) 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. Such sentiments expressed by students who could hardly communicate in English can only be attributed to attitudes. Roy-Campbell goes on to say that students do not value their mother tongue, hence they would prefer to learn using a language that they do not understand even when given the option to use their own language in learning.

South African learners who were interviewed by Setati (2005); Langa and Setati (2006) preferred the use of English in the learning of mathematics in the secondary school. These researchers attributed learner choice of the language of instruction to the socio political situation. These learners did not see value in their African languages as they do not have any social and economic benefits.

In Zimbabwe, Ngara (1982) acknowledges that students had negative attitudes towards African languages. This was evidenced by the way the University of Rhodesia students in the 60s used to regard an English Honours degree as prestigious whereas a degree in Shona had a low reputation. Ngara goes further to say that even white government officials were aware that Africans had negative attitudes towards their own language. Rwambiwa's (1993) findings confirmed that pupils often humiliated teachers of African languages by expressing their (pupils) negative attitudes towards learning indigenous languages. Rwambiwa (1996) argues that such attitudes, expressed by students towards the mother tongue, are encouraged by the language policy of 1987 which requires students to learn all subjects in English beginning in grade four.

## **Community and Parental**

With reference to West Africa, Fyle (1976) says that during the colonial period, community attitudes were developed when everything pertaining to Europeans was regarded as excellent and worthy of imitation, whereas all that which belonged to the local African community was considered to be inferior. People in post-colonial countries still identify education with former colonial languages as evident in new South Africa and Namibia, where Roy-Campbell (1996), Granville et al (1998), Setati (2005) observed that Africans still resist mother tongue education in favour of English which they view as a language of knowledge. Although children from non-English environments speaking backgrounds have potentially rich linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the communities do not indicate an awareness of such linguistic richness because of attitudes which range from ignorance or indifference to support and pride, and this somehow affects children's learning (Murray and Smith, 1988).

In Zimbabwe, research carried out by Moyo (1991) in Nondo (1996) revealed that negative attitudes by parents towards the African languages are passed on to children. Parents of children at Wankie Secondary School regarded Ndebele L2 as being of no value to their children's lives since it did not render a person employable. The same sentiments were expressed by children of parents concerned. These parents had no objection to their children learning English which they felt was more important for the future of their children.

Part of this study focused on learners' language preferences since these children are the direct beneficiaries of language policy which recognizes the significance of learning in the mother tongue in the lower grades. Parents' views were also sought to establish if there is consistency between language policy and parents' perceptions of the role of the mother tongue in learning.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The study sought to establish the extent to which pupils in grades 1-3 and parents with children in those lower grades value the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction. The impetus of the study came from the strong evidence from research findings which indicate that the mother tongue plays a crucial role in the learning of bilingual children during the early years of schooling.

## **Method**

### *Design*

The study was a descriptive survey that used face to face interviews and questionnaires to collect qualitative and quantitative data.

### *Sample*

Convenience sampling was used to extract sixty (60) pupils aged between six and eight years in grade 1-3 (20 from each grade) and forty-two (42) parents with children in the infant grades. The study also targeted all school heads, all infant teachers and all Teachers-In-Charge of Infant Departments (TICs) from twenty-eight (28) schools to elicit their views on parents and pupils' language preferences in learning. Seventeen (17) TICs, twenty-five (25) heads and 152 infant teachers participated in the study. School heads, TICs and infant teachers were included in the study since these interact with pupils and parents most of the time. They get salient issues from parents through utterances, comments and suggestions during consultations and Parents's days. Respondents were selected from urban, peri-urban and rural schools in the Masvingo District of Education.

## *Instruments*

Face to face interviews were used to collect data from both pupils and parents. The interviews were conducted in the mother tongue since most of the respondents were not competent in English. If the interviewer is skillful, Best and Kahn (1993) believe that the interview can be regarded as a data gathering device which is often superior to others as people are more willing to talk than to write, and confidential information may be obtained from respondents who might be reluctant to put it in writing. The interview was considered suitable in this study in order to determine respondents' opinions, attitudes or trends of beliefs (Sharma, 1994).

The interview schedule for parents had closed and open-ended questions to allow the researcher to follow points which needed elaboration and to clarify questions the respondents misunderstood (Mouly, 1978). The interview was specifically aimed at answering the research question on whether there was consistency between the language policy and parents' perceptions of the role of the mother tongue in learning. The interview guide for parents had questions which solicited information on their children's grade level, whether they preferred their children to learn in the mother tongue in view of the current language policy, and to state reasons for their language preferences.

The interview schedule for pupils in grades 1-3 was structured and intended to find out children's language preferences in speaking, reading and writing. It was meant to answer the research question on the perceptions and attitudes of pupils on the use of L1 as a medium of instruction. Best and Kahn (1993) say that interviews are particularly appropriate in getting responses from young children.

The questionnaire in this study served as a complementary data collection instrument. The respondents were primary school heads, TICs and infant teachers. There were two questionnaires, one for grade 1-3 teachers and the other for school heads and TICs. Questionnaires were quite appropriate as respondents were regarded as competent to complete the questionnaires as their academic level was such that they could fill in the instrument with minimum assistance from the researcher. The questionnaire was structured and the structured questions were considered appropriate because they were relatively easy and quick to answer (Best and Kahn, 1993). With three types of samples and 194 respondents, the structured questions enabled data to be analyzed and compared easily. Reliability was ensured because the questionnaire was structured to allow for greater uniformity in the way questions were asked. Similar questions were asked of infant teachers, school heads and TICs and responses were compared, thereby catering for reliability.

### *Procedure*

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Provincial Education Director for Masvingo Province. The interviews were conducted by the researcher. Pupils who were interviewed were identified by teachers as weak, average and fast learners in order to ensure that all ability levels were represented. Parents who had come to conduct business at the schools and had pupils in any of the infant grades were interviewed. Questionnaires were administered to school heads, TICs and infant teachers of 28 primary schools.

### *Data Analysis*

Descriptive analysis, frequencies and percentages were used.

### *Results*

Results show that all the sampled pupils speak Shona/Ndebele at home. Concerning language spoken with friends during break time, at home and at play, all the pupils indicated that Shona/Ndebele was the only language they used for communication.

The results show that the majority of children understood when the mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction in the infant school. Hence, children's responses to the interview concerning their language preference in reading, speaking and writing showed that:

- that the majority of pupils interviewed preferred to read and write in English, but when it came to speaking, they mainly liked Shona/Ndebele.
- more respondents indicated that children preferred to learn in English
- the greater percentage of those who responded indicated that parents wanted their children to learn in English.
- various reasons were given by parents for the language preferred as the medium of instruction

## Findings and Discussion

Perceptions and attitudes of pupils in grades 1-3 were assessed on the basis of their language preferences in reading, speaking and writing. The general finding was that children preferred to read and write in English, while they mainly liked to speak in Shona/ Ndebele. However, it may be necessary to mention here that when children said they liked to write in English, they could have meant copying English words from the board since they may not be able to express themselves adequately in English, which is a second language (Dyanda and Mateta, 2001).

A possible explanation for favouring English more than the L1 may be that children are told by parents that they go to school to learn English (Fyle, 1976; Roy-Campbell, 1996; Otto, 1997). Attitudes that English is more important than Shona/Ndebele may be passed on to children by parents who tell children that English provides educational and employment opportunities in the future (Nondo, 1996) , thus children may begin to develop negative attitudes towards the L1 which they might then regard as less important (Bamgbose, 1991; Robinson, 1996; Adegbija, 1994).

Pupil attitudes can also be explained in terms of influence from teachers (Ndamba, 1999; Setati 2005). When teachers undermine the children's L1 and use English as the medium of instruction from the first grade, this may result in children having a negative attitude towards their mother tongue (Murray and Smith, 1988; Ngara, 1982). This attitude comes about possibly because when their mother tongue is not used for educational purposes, children may not attach any importance to it (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986; Bamgbose, 1976; 1991; Roy-Campbell, 1996; Gatawa, 1998; Langa and Setati 2006).

However, on a more positive note towards L1, the study found that children liked to speak in the mother tongue more than in English during lessons. This may be due to the fact that these children, who all indicated that they speak Shona/Ndebele at home, may find it free and natural to express themselves in their mother tongue during lessons (Duminy, 1975; Fyle, 1976; Ngara, 1982).

The study found that there was no consistency between the language policy and parents' perception of the role of the mother tongue in learning since parents clearly indicated that they preferred English to Shona/Ndebele as the language of instruction for their children in the infant grades. English is positively evaluated possibly due to its functions in the future of children, as expressed by one of the respondents in an interview:

*“Kana akapasa Shona haina zvainomubetsera pakuwana basa. Mwana haagoni kuwana College, ndizvo zvinotaura hurumende. Ndingada kuti mwana arohwe achiroverwa kudzidza chirungu.”* (If he/she passes Shona, it will not help him/her get a job. The child cannot get into College, according to the Government. I prefer that my child be beaten in order to learn English).

Another respondent put it thus, *“Mwana anozoenda mberi asina zvaanoziva. Nokudaro vanenge vauraya upenyu hwemwana zvachose.”* (The child would proceed without knowing anything. As a result they would have totally destroyed the future of that child).

This shows that parents of Shona/Ndebele children have become use to English as a language which provides their children with a more profitable future in the world of employment. English is viewed as performing high functions than the mother tongue which does not render a person employable, hence parents tend to negatively evaluate indigenous languages because they do not perform such high functions (Adegbija, 1994; Granville et al, 1998; Ngara, 1977; Robinson, 1996; Otto, 1997; Saville-Troike, 1982).

The other explanation for the positive evaluation of English by parents is that because of the colonial policy, parents got used to undermining the L1 since it was not at all used as a language of instruction from the first grade. Rwambiwa (1996), Gatawa (1998) and Gudhlanga (2005) attribute the negative attitudes towards the L1 to the fact that the current language policy requires children to learn in the mother tongue only in the lower grades. Children will eventually have to learn in English and will be required to pass English as a subject in order to obtain a full “O” level certificate. This was demonstrated by one parent in this study who, with reference to the use of Shona/Ndebele as the language of instruction in the infant grades, says,

*“Ndinodaro nekuti ndiwo mavambo akashata. Kana vana vazosvika pabvunzo dzavo mufomu 4 zvinozovaremera towana kuti mwana ane mamwe ma ‘subject’ asi chirungu asina.”* (I say so because that is a bad beginning. When children get to form four examinations it will be difficult for them, resulting in them passing other subjects but not English language).

The negative attitudes towards L1 are further enhanced by the fact that parents are ignorant of the role of the mother tongue in learning, particularly for bilingual children during the early years of schooling (Mwamwenda, 1996; Sprotsty, 1995; Jeffreys, 1996; Borich and Tombari, 1997; Bamgbose, 1991; Whitehead, 1997). In this study, only 19% of the parents showed an appreciation of the role of the mother tongue in the learning of children. The community appears to be ignorant of the linguistic richness brought to school by children from non-English speaking children (Murray and Smith, 1988).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings suggest that parents and children had a more positive attitude towards English than the mother tongue as the language of instruction at the infant level. This shows that people have been so linguistically colonized that they have more faith in the L2 than they do in the L1 process of children's learning. Parents and teachers need to be exposed to information concerning the value of using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction as these participants were not aware of the educational benefits of using the L1 during the initial years of a child's schooling.

Attitudes need to be changed by parents and pupils who seem to favour English more than the L1. This should be done through campaigns to educate people on the rationale use for using the L1 in learning at the infant level. This would help to create "a new generation of Zimbabweans who are proud of their languages and their values, their cultures and their heritage" (Zimbabwe Languages Association {ZLA}, 1997). Rwambiwa (1996) advocates for a commission of committed intellectuals of various disciplines who can design and produce a de-colonizing media, so people can start to love and respect Shona and Ndebele. Otto (1997) is also of the view that for there to be a relatively balanced bilingualism, there is also a need for a thoughtfully planned language policy for Zimbabwean families.

Currently, the African Languages Research Institute (ALRI) is making great strides (Chimhundu, 2003; Magwa, 2007) to promote indigenous languages standards through sub-projects which involve making monolingual mother tongue dictionaries. Unless there is attitude change at all levels of society, and strong government intervention, the work done by ALRI might be a futile exercise.

In short, the majority of respondents in this study indicated that they favoured English as the language of instruction in the infant grades because English is a gateway to success in school and subsequent employment opportunity. Thus, if Shona and Ndebele are accorded national and official language status (Mavhunga, 2008), then the community would consider them as important because only then would they enable one to access vocational training and to rise economically, socially and politically.

There is a need for further research on how to solve the current problem on implementing a mother tongue policy at the infant school level in Zimbabwe. And it seems there is no imminent solution in sight, because twenty-eight years after independence, parents, teachers and pupils still have negative attitudes towards learning in the L1, despite benefits offered by mother tongue instruction.

Furthermore, research is necessary concerning on how Zimbabwe as a nation can take advantage of additive bilingualism rather than viewing it as a subtractive bilingualism which undermines learning at the L1 level. Hence, the scope of this research should also extended to how skills can be enhanced between the L1 level and the L2 level, considering that some studies show that the transfer is not automatic (McLaughlin, 1987; Roller, 1988).

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