

# Teaching Chishona in Zimbabwe: A Curriculum Analysis Approach

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## Abstract

ChiShona is spoken by many in Zimbabwe, thus the purpose of this paper is to outline the history of the language Chishona and the justification for teaching it as a part of the Zimbabwean school curriculum via a focus on language standardisation and harmonisation, and the challenges in the teaching ChiShona.

## Historical Background of ChiShona

There are several dimensions as to where the word 'ChiShona' came from. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1980: 163) the Shona "are a group of culturally similar Bantu-speaking tribes of Negroid-Armenoid origin, numbering someone million in the 1960s". Mutswairo (1996) says that the so called 'Shona' are 'Mbire' and not Shona. The ancestors of the Mbire were part of the general Negroid population that was later called Bantu by a number of European linguists who had undertaken studies in African languages. Beach, in Mutswairo (1996) states that some place this migration between 300 and 200 B.C. and that by between 500 and 300 B.C. the Black people had filled the entire sub- region as far south as the Eastern Cape. Mutswairo (1996: 8) says, "This migration forms part of the general pattern that includes the ancestors of the Mbire from Guruuswa; now referred to as the Shona".

When Europeans came into this region in 1890, they identified two districts, namely Mashonaland and Matebeleland. Matebeleland was the district for the Ndebele speaking people and Mashonaland was the district of the Shona speaking people (Kahari, 1990). The term 'Shona' therefore referred to the people and 'ChiShona' the language of the Shona people. In its broadest sense 'ChiShona' represents the language, habits, beliefs, culture and wisdom of the Shona people. As a representation of all these aspects, we have 'ChiShona' as a subject in the Zimbabwean school curriculum.

Specifically, the term ChiShona came into use in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Mutswairo, 1996). Magwa (1999) says that it is believed that the word Shona originated from the Ndebele. This is because the Shona ancestors lived in the Western region which the Ndebele called 'esitshonalanga'. From this word came the name AmaTshona which became ChiShona we know today. Despite all these dimensions, what is interesting is that Magwa (1999), Doke (1931), Mutswairo (1996), Chimhundu (1997) and many others all agree that ChiShona is an amalgamation of five main sub-languages namely; Chikaranga, ChiNda, ChiManyika Chizezuru and Chikorekore. Therefore, ChiShona is not exclusive; this explains why we do really understand each other despite the various languages.

The unification of the Shona started off with the missionaries in the hope of spreading the gospel. The missionary conference that met in 1901 accepted an alphabet for universal unification and application in Mashonaland. Thus, Springer, in Doke (1931:4) says, "...it is possible to have one Bible for the whole of Mashonaland". The major languages were studied and written in different geographical regions, the regional or social language of Zezuru was studied at Chishawasha (1892), Waddilove (1896) and Epworth under father A. Burbridge, A.M. Hartmann, J. White and W.A. Elliot. Nda was studied at Chikore and Mount Selinda under the American Board Missionaries in 1893. The Manyika language was studied at St Augustine's Penalonga in 1893; at Old Umtali and also at Triashill in 1890 under the Catholic fathers like D.R. Pelly, E.H. Etheridge and Mrs A.E. Springer. The Karanga language was studied at Morgenster in 1892, Mukaro and Gokomere under the tutelage of prominent figures like Father A.A. Louw, Mrs C.S. Louw, Father J.T. Helm and A.A. Louw (junior) (Kahari, 1990). Each missionary society had been following its own method of writing, hence varying orthography. This resulted in chaos, confusion and misunderstandings. Therefore, the missionaries in an effort to produce a common version of the Bible for the Shona people did a lot of work in the early writing of the Shona language, and later, they agreed on a Common Shona Orthography (Magwa, 1999).

It is important that there are two types of the Shona language, the spoken and written forms. Within the origins of ChiShona there were shifts and turns mainly to transform ChiShona from an oral to written form. Emphasis was now in changes in orthography. Several meetings were held by the missionaries in 1903, 1905 and 1908 respectively in an effort to solve the existing differences in spellings and word division. This continued until 1913 when they agreed that there was need for government involvement and assistance. In 1928 the government agreed that ChiShona should be taught at primary school level.

The thorny issue of common spelling and orthography arrived, however, the missionaries could not agree on a common language to represent the Shona language. After this fiasco, Professor Clement Doke, a South African language expert was called in to assist in the writing of the Shona language. Doke is credited as the first person to produce the first Shona alphabet. He started the work in 1929 with the help of other missionaries from the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference, like B.H. Barnes representing the minority field of Manyika and Ndau, A. Louw representing Karanga and Burbridge representing Zezuru (Magwa, 1999). The study of individual regional languages was of great help to Professor Doke when he drew up his report on Shona in 1929, and his comparative study in 1931 (Kahari, 1990).

The observations made by Doke were that the five Shona specific regional languages use a number of words that are similar, which made his work easier. He used Zezuru as the starting base because it was common in all the other specific regional or social group languages. In 1931, Doke used the word ChiShona to represent all five languages (Doke, 1931). Thus, Chimhundu (1997) states that Doke designed a unified orthography for Shona and made a number of important recommendations on language which has remained the major reference point in the history of writing in Shona. From 1931 all Shona words were written using Doke's alphabet. Doke's findings were accepted and became operational in all schools and in government departments. Doke's document was used in the Shona literature as from 1931 1955 where changes were effected by an orthography committee and the changes basically involved the special phonetic symbols. All the 1931 letters that could not be computed were changed. All published books had to use the 1955 orthography for example as in *Feso* by S. Mutswairo. This was up to 1967, Magwa (1999). The 1967 agreed orthography is the current Shona orthography and it includes spelling, word division, capital letters and punctuations. It was agreed that such letters as L, Q. and X are not used in Shona. Thus, the system of writing that we use in ChiShona today was fixed by Doke many years ago, although with some modifications. The dictionaries by Barnes, Hannan and the current ALLEX project owe a lot from Doke's landmark recommendations on Shona orthography (Chimhundu, 1997).

## **Standardisation and Harmonisation of the Shona Language**

Efforts or work that helped the standardisation and harmonisation of the Shona language can be understood as falling into two major periods. The early work would start with missionaries and Doke's efforts which were later consolidated by George Fortune and others. The second phase would be attributed to the efforts of African scholars led by Herbert Chimhundu, Wiseman Magwa, Pedzisai Mashiri, Kutsirayi Gondo, Andy Chabanne and Kwesi Prah from 2006. The process is sometimes referred to as the unification process of ChiShona.

As mentioned above, Doke (1931) was the first author of a process of standardising and harmonising the Shona language. Before Doke's (1931) efforts, different missionary groups located in Mashonaland province had produced different writing systems of ChiShona that were produced using the language variety that was predominantly used in the area where the church group was first founded in Zimbabwe.

Thus, we find that in Manicaland, four orthographies evolved at St Augustine Mission (Anglican, 1897), Old Mutare Mission (Methodist, 1890) and Mt Selinda and Chikore Missions (American Board Missions, 1893). In Masvingo, there was mostly the Morgenster Mission orthography (Dutch Reformed Church, 1892). In Mashonaland, there was Chishawasha Mission (Roman Catholic, 1892) and Waddilove Mission (Methodist, 1896). All these missionary centres had developed their own writing systems that were based on the historical origins of the missionary groups. For example, those who came from German used German language influences to come up with a ChiShona writing system for the centre. The same applied for those from Britain, Holland and others. This system had produced a multiple of orthographies of writing ChiShona in Zimbabwe. Hence, Bibles, hymns and other church materials were produced differently by these missionary stations.

From 1903, the Southern African Missionary Conference for all church organisations working in Zimbabwe began to discuss efforts to produce a unitary writing system for ChiShona to help produce one Bible that could be used throughout Mashonaland. This marked the beginning of standardisation and harmonisation of various ChiShona language varieties in Zimbabwe. Thus several efforts by the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference continued to discuss the issue of standardisation and harmonisation of all language varieties in Mashonaland in all its meetings from 1903 to 1928. And in this process, they enlisted the support of the Southern Rhodesia government in 1913 when the government saw the need to unify the language varieties of Mashonaland in order to make their teaching easier in the schools. But the selfish fighting among groups to use the issue to increase their missionary influence in Southern Africa continued to give problems as representatives of various missionary groups wanted to have their own versions of the writing system used as the basis of a standardised and harmonised orthography of ChiShona. Thus, Zhuwawo (2014) says that the language politics of Christian dominations contributed to the creation and promotion of Zezuru, Karanga and Manyika as the main regional or social group languages which Doke accommodated in a unified orthography of a unified language that was given the name Shona.

Chimhundu (1997) sees that the survival, standardisation and development of ChiShona was guaranteed by sheer numbers of native language (mother tongue) speakers, and the creative genius of the people. Ngugi (1987) agrees with Chimhundu when he says that African languages refuse to die especially through the input of the peasant and working class.

ChiShona as a subject and a language has a future in Zimbabwe. It has been given a lifeline in the curriculum with a number of policy statements from government and developments in the print and electronic media. The ALLEX project spearheaded by Chimhundu is another positive development to the enhancement of ChiShona. The production of the Shona dictionary *Duramanzwi ReChiShona* has enhanced a resolving unification and language issues in ChiShona teaching and learning.

### **Shifts and Turns in the Teaching of ChiShona**

The Shona language in the Zimbabwean school curriculum has also seen shifts and turns which were noted especially after independence. First, according to the Nziramasanga Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999: 158), “as part of the effort to raise ChiShona and IsiNdebele to a status equal to English, a full ‘O’ level certificate in 1981 was defined as having five passes at Grade ‘C’ including a language”. This raised the status of ChiShona and IsiNdebele to that of English. However, the equality of ChiShona to English was short-lived as it was affected by an about-turn in policy in 1985 due to pressure from institutions like Colleges of Education, the University of Zimbabwe and also from conservative elements in the Ministry of Education and society and as full ‘O’ level subject-based certificate of the British-based education system was redefined to mean five ‘O’ level passes, including English. Another turn was that at one time, following the capitalist ideology, ChiShona was excluded from the examination system at grade seven level, when only two subjects, English and Mathematics were examined. However, since 1982, with the advent of scientific socialism, ChiShona has become a permanent feature in the Zimbabwean examination system at grade seven levels. Up to 1981 students wrote four subjects for the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate and ChiShona was not affected by the scrapping of the examination at the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate examination level.

In 1987 languages of the minority groups were recognised and introduced in schools. These were taught in their localities up to grade three. The recognition of minority languages was an expression of the democratic principles for which the liberation war was fought. However, further introduction of minority languages from grade four upwards has been hampered by a lack of teaching and learning materials, a lack of trained teachers to support the innovation, and also negative attitudes by both teachers and pupils since these languages have only a three year run in the schools, not examinable at grade seven (Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training, 1999).

ChiShona is now an examinable subject at all public examination stages from grade seven to tertiary level. As one of the recommendations of the Nziramasanga Report of 1999, it was stated that ChiShona and IsiNdebele should be accorded national and official status and taught in all schools at all levels throughout the country. These languages as well as English should be the medium of instruction throughout the education and training system. According to the Secretary's Circular No 2 of 2001 ChiShona was compulsory up to the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate level, and only optional at the 'O' level. However, another shift was made in the Secretary's Circular No 3 of 2002 which states that a full 'O' level certificate shall consist of at least five compulsory subjects namely, English, History, Mathematics, Shona or Ndebele, and Science. One of the expected learning outcomes on this circular (No. 3 of 2002: 3) is that "... learners should be able to communicate effectively and proficiently orally and in writing in English and Shona or Ndebele". This is also in line with Circular No 1 of 2002 which equated ChiShona with English and, which says

*"ChiShona and Ndebele can also be used in teaching of other subjects where this will facilitate comprehension of concepts."*

Therefore all these shifts and turns increase the justification for teaching of ChiShona in the Zimbabwe school curriculum.

The ChiShona language has thus come a long way. It has gone through various stages of modification to what it is today. What is encouraging is that there are continuous reviews and researches in ChiShona much to the development and enrichment of the language. Its unifying element of bringing together more than seventy-five percent of the population in Zimbabwe is the strongest justification for the teaching ChiShona as a subject in the Zimbabwean school curriculum.

Many people, including parents, teachers and pupils regard the teaching of ChiShona as a sheer waste of time. The present diglossic situation has elevated English to a higher status than ChiShona. This explains why ChiShona has not received the attention it deserves in Zimbabwean schools today. However, the major question is, 'Is this thinking sound in view of modern studies and development in the field of psychology that a child learns better in his or her own language?' This scenario is not tenable and explains the alienation of the present generation. This is all the reasons to point to the importance of ChiShona language in the curriculum. In support of the justification for the teaching of ChiShona, a former Director of African Development (Education) in Garwe (undated) says:

*Education for the present needs of the African must be based upon, and grow out of the African's past and his chief link with the past is his mother tongue. To exclude the child's own language is a great mistake and injustice as this separates the child from his own land.*

He goes on to say that it would be tragic for the African child to despise his or her own native language and with it goes all that they have inherited from the past. Thus, there is need for attitude and mindset change towards the use of ChiShona for its survival and continued use in Zimbabwean schools, and in the society at large.

The shift and turns alluded to above in the Shona language were a deliberate effort by the religious, political and academic fathers to authenticate the subject and give it a role and place it so deserves. The world over and in most cases, children are taught effectively in their mother tongue, apart from Africa. The assumption is that the native language (mother tongue) bridges the gap between the home and the school and in turn reducing culture shock. In fact, the child is first socialised in the mother tongue. Also from a philosophical point of view, the school must be an extension of the home. According to Pestalozzi, it must be a gentle and refined transition from home to school (Ornstein and Levine, 1985).

The theories of language acquisition and learning propounded by behaviourists, nativists and mediation theories have pointed to the fact that children first learn a language of their immediate environment which is the language of their parents, siblings, care-givers and friends. Natural education has its emphasis on practical rather than book learning. Children should learn from experience. This is also in line with pragmatism, a philosophical theory which looks at knowledge as being created through interaction with the environment. Dewey thus advocated for problem solving as the appropriate method of teaching and learning (Akinpelu, 1981). The children have to learn the first language through experimentation and imitation, and this is the language they have to use in their day to day lives. Therefore, the teaching of ChiShona as the arterial language of the majority of the Zimbabwean population is strongly justified from a philosophical point of view.

## **The Justification of Teaching ChiShona**

The justification of the inclusion of ChiShona in the school curriculum stems from the understanding that it is the language used for communication by the majority of the Zimbabwean population. It also carries with it people's wisdom and way of life. ChiShona goes beyond defining the Zimbabwean nation, but represents social survival of the people. Thondlana (2001: 36) says:

*It is important to note that maintaining a speaker's native language has an affective dimension, that of enhancing the speaker's self- concept and their cultural background and identity*

The justification for teaching of the subject thus has its own philosophical, psychological, sociological, historical and ideological basis with the hope to produce an integrated member of Shona society.

Philosophically, the curriculum planner has to justify why certain activities are taken over others. The pragmatic question is around the choice of forms of knowledge to accept as a society. The question is what knowledge is of most worth? Maravanyika (1982) attempts to answer the question by saying that what we teach in schools need not be externally prescribed. What we agree on as worthwhile can form the basis of our curriculum as long as it meets the felt needs of society. The position satisfies the nativists thinking that worthwhile knowledge is based on the needs of society. It is in this light that the teaching of ChiShona in the Zimbabwean schools can be justified, as the selection of its content addresses the society's cultural needs. For example, the teaching of Shona registers (ukama, tsika nemagariro), proverbs (tsumo), poetry (nhetembo), idioms (madimikira) and folk tales (ngano), to mention a few. This is in line with Lawton's (1975) definition of curriculum as a selection from a people's culture.

It should be understood that a language of a specific group of people is one of the strongest manifestations of its culture. Culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values which Ngugi (1987) views as the set of eye-glasses people come to view themselves. Nyerere's philosophy of African socialism (a.k.a., Ujamaa) was built around African traditional culture based on folk culture, hence, 'the back to the village concept' (Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production, 1981). Zvikoni, in *Teacher in Zimbabwe* (1997: 4) reinforces the idea when he says,

Rurimi rwaamai ndiwo chete mutauro unoumba hwaro hweunhu pamunhu (mother tongue is the firm foundation for developing a complete Zimbabwean).

This is a powerful statement which underlines the role of ChiShona in personality and society building. From the above views, the subject of ChiShona is thus designed to produce various types of people, that is the rational, hedonistic, imaginative and problem solving person as discussed in detail below. The selection of ChiShona in the Zimbabwean school curriculum is thus not by accident, but carefully calculated to achieve certain desired ends.

From the selection of its content, ChiShona imparts important cultural concepts and ideas. From a metaphysical point of view (Ornstein and Levine, 1985), much of the schooling learning represents the efforts of curriculum makers, teachers and textbook writers to describe reality to students. ChiShona, both as a language and subject has attempted to describe certain dimensions of reality. This has been achieved through an idealist curriculum especially at the secondary and tertiary levels where cultural heritage of the people has been taught through Shona literature. Idealist curriculum believes that cultural heritage is hierarchical and literature (ChiShona literature included) is ranked high since it is the chief source of moral and cultural models of exemplars and heroes (Ornstein and Levine, 1985). The Shona language is also ranked highly since it is necessary for communication, an essential tool at all levels of learning.



The Shona primary school syllabus (1980) Grades 1-7, confirms that various topics are learnt through poems, novels, idioms, proverbs, and essay writing to mention a few. The use of literature becomes more pronounced at secondary and tertiary levels where most of the moral and cultural issues are taught through novels, poems and registers. The study of Shona literature enhances reflection and imagination in learners and thus leading to stronger conviction and deeper understanding of issues. Therefore, from an epistemological point of view (Akinpelu, 1981) on this aspect, ChiShona as a subject helps to develop an imaginative person. To add to this, Grant (1989) says that the culture of a child is found in his or her own language and the language should be taught in its purest and best forms so that the child can appreciate literature, stories and poems of his or her country and perhaps a contribution to them when they grow older. This helps the learner to exercise reason in the practical interaction with the environment, where knowledge and values originate through experience. All this helps in the development of a rational and problem solving person.

The various knowledge the child acquires through Shona literature, is designed to produce a person who is rational. The analysis of various characters and situations presented by authors and poets give insight to learners about the nature of society. ChiShona is, thus, applauded for concretising events and episodes in novels to reflect the situation on the ground. This dovetails into procedural knowledge which links theory and practice (Akinpelu, 1981). The teaching of such aspects as registers, proverbs, idioms and so on in ChiShona is examples where an attempt has been made to link theory and practice. From a sociological perspective, the effort is to produce two types of people, the Durkheimian (an advocate of modern social science) and the Parsonian (a person who argues that the primary work of sociology is to create a set of abstract generalizing concepts capable of describing a social system) person.

In this case, we are looking at a person who lives in society with the necessary interaction, experience and exposure which makes him or her become human. On the other hand, we are also looking at a person who is an integral part of the social and cultural system of society and who is functional. All these aspects emerge through ChiShona which captures the essence of the Zimbabwean people, and thus the teaching of this subject is justified from both a philosophical and sociological standpoint.

The axiological perspective also comes in to justify the teaching of ChiShona in the Zimbabwean school curriculum. Embodied in ChiShona are the beliefs, values, attitudes and norms of the people. This is why Awoniyi (1982) laments the use of other languages than the native language when he says that there is no greater injustice that can be committed against a people than to deprive them of their language. Chitiga, in *Hachipola* (1998) deplors the existing diglossic situation whereby English takes the prominent position in the people's lives. According to her, this historical situation is a culmination of years of colonisation and enslavement and something should be done to preserve African languages and culture for posterity's sake.

We have been socialised to believe that without English, the future is bleak. Kahari, in Chiwanza (*Sunday Mail*, December 13, 1998) points out that language policies introduced by African governments since independence had generally favoured the colonial languages, especially English, by making them compulsory for entering institutions of higher learning and the world of work. This has resulted in the denigration of indigenous languages and culture, especially ChiShona in Zimbabwe.

Youth today have been tempted to admire foreign values and shun their own values. It is self-denial. To redress the situation there is a need to transmit culture and values, not through language in its universality but in its particularity. Therefore, the teaching of ChiShona in the Zimbabwean school curriculum is part of the decolonisation process. ChiShona, as a subject has these societal expectations through the use of content that emphasises values, hence the teaching of proverbs, idioms, folk tales, similes and metaphors among other things which reflect the Shona people's ability to be productive and understand their social and natural environments. Mutswairo (1996) has a lot of proverbs to show the Shona people's culture and values in line with idealist thinking which emphasises the individual personality and the fullest self-realisation of each child (Ornstein and Levine, 1985). Examples of some proverbs according to Mutswairo (1996:93) are:

Kupfuma kunowanikwa nedikita.  
Chitsva chiri murutsoka.

From these two proverbs it is clear that the Shona do not conceive history as an abstract, but as a concrete process of living. The emphasis here is on labour process which produces the material well-being of the society, and also develops its consciousness. This is a philosophy of life which focuses on the necessity of stimulating people to be the subjects and objects of their own process (Mutswairo, 1996).

The teaching of ChiShona in the school curriculum reveals that Shona society also had proverbs that articulate its ideal beauty. This is not beauty for its own sake, but it is historical and utilitarian process, seen in proverbs like:

*Totenda maruva tadya chakata.*  
*Totenda yabikwa imba yepwere.*

From Mutswairo's (1996) view, experience has taught the Shona that the significance and meaning of a thing increases in proportion to its relevance to the society. To them, beauty is not justified by its existence; it should serve a social purpose. Hence, an expressive vision and aesthetic philosophy imparted to the new generations through the teaching of ChiShona in the Zimbabwean curriculum.

According to Mutswairo (1996), a close study of Shona proverbs reveals that they express the Shona people's strong desire to cultivate and promote the best in the individual and society as determined by their resources at each stage in their development. This type of empirical knowledge has helped the Shona and ChiShona as a subject cultivate a problem solving person who interacts with the environment to get results. Therefore, this content from ChiShona as a subject presents to us a world where the Shona language has a powerful social purpose and words value. Therefore ChiShona as a subject produces worthwhile knowledge and deserves to be taught in the Zimbabwean school curriculum. Thus, the individual's first language, ChiShona in this case, is the best means of appreciating, preserving and developing culture and values. From all these views, the teaching of ChiShona in the Zimbabwean school curriculum is strongly justified from an epistemological, metaphysical, and axiological point of view, and from the issues discussed above, it is also justified from a sociological point of view.

The theories of child development have underlined the strong relationship between language and the child's thinking processes. The child starts off in the pre-linguistic stage and develops to the linguistic level. These stages are determined by the individual child, the environment and various experiences encountered. In line with this, Skinner (1993) argues that the child comes into the world a tabula-rasa, an empty slate and the environment shapes the child's language as he or she constantly interacts with his or her social environment. Nativists on the other hand hold the view that language is innately determined by a hypothetical module of the human mind posited to account for a child's innate predisposition for language acquisition, hence a 'language acquisition device' (LAD).

Although psychologists have different positions about language, they converge at the point that there is a close relationship between language and thought and that the language used to think should be the arterial language, in this context, the mother tongue. The former Director of African Development (Education) in Garwe (u.d.) says that of great importance to education is the clearness of ideas which are of utmost importance in the building of such ideas in the native language. Hence the Shona of Zimbabwe need language to identify themselves and all the things that surround their lives and it would be an injustice not to have it in our Zimbabwean school curriculum.

Given any practical problem which requires reasoning, the learner can show rational knowledge through the use of ChiShona as a vehicle of communication. The individual uses his or her first language most of the time to communicate thoughts, feelings, desires, interests, ideas and any acquired knowledge. This same language is also the language of the individual's imagination and dreams. Thus the learner can recruit an encyclopedia of knowledge which cannot clearly be articulated in another language. There is a slow development of skills if a second language is used.

This brings us to the problematic issues in teaching of ChiShona, where the use of English in the teaching of Shona grammar at 'O', 'A' and tertiary levels. Grant (1989) admits that the child's ideas and thoughts are in their own language and will be long, after speaking good English. The use of English therefore in the teaching of Shona grammar, often deskills a lot of students who find the subject very difficult as they first have to grapple with language before they understand the concepts. This has affected the quality of both performance and participation in these lessons. This problem however has a lot to do with the influence from some historical antecedents.

Examples are the influences from people like Doke who wrote the first Shona orthography in English. Also people like George Fortune who wrote Shona grammatical constructions Volume 1 and 2 at 'A' level (an academically rigorous educational level) and interestingly, all the books used in the teaching of Shona grammar are written in English. However, with the production of the first monolingual Shona dictionary in 2001 (the Duramanzwi Guru ReChiShona) by the University of Zimbabwe sponsored ALLEX project (spearheaded by Herbert Chimhundu), this problem will very soon be a thing of the past. The dictionary has a lot of Shona terms to be used in the teaching of grammar at the 'O' and 'A' levels, and in the higher and tertiary education levels with Shona terms to be used in the teaching of other various subjects. Hence, a step forward in the scrapping of the use of English in the teaching of ChiShona wherein it is being taught in its purest form, a great development as today the ChiShona teaching complexion has changed with requisite human resources as it is being taught from the first grade to the tertiary level.

However, this argument should be taken further to look at subjects where English has strictly had exclusive rights as a vehicle of communication and compare it with ChiShona in terms of pass rate. The performance in ChiShona is better. Ngugi (1987) laments the learning situation in most African schools which has become a cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience because of the use of foreign languages. The Zimbabwean school curriculum is no exception in this regard. The language of education is foreign, the languages of most textbooks used are foreign and the language to understand concepts is foreign as Ngugi (1987) puts it. What this has done is to handicap and divorce the learner from his or her upbringing. This has compromised the quality of learning in formal learning situations and thus Dube and Gleghorn (1999:2) lament that:

*When the second language is learnt at the expense of the first, the net result of the learner's achievement in schools has been shown to be negative.*

Magwa (1999) reinforces the same argument by saying that ChiShona simplifies many concepts in teaching learning situations. The most fortunate thing in the classroom is when English has failed many Zimbabwean teachers; and they remember to use ChiShona which is the language of the collective memory bank of the people's experiences. This satisfies the idealist philosophy that genuine knowledge is acquired intellectually and the arterial language through which this can be achieved (Ornstein and Levine, 1985).

In support of the above view, Dube and Gleghorn (1999) after their study of code switching during the teaching of mathematics in several primary schools in Zimbabwe applaud the use of ChiShona in the teaching of mathematics which state that the use of the learner's arterial language serves several purposes viz:

- *It helps to explain or clarify procedures to be followed,*
- *It helps build and affective bridge between the school and home,*
- *It promotes understanding of the important concepts being taught and*
- *It develops academic skills in the first language as well as the second.*

Therefore all these views are a clear indication of the type of relationship that ChiShona has with other various subjects, because it is very closely linked to every other subject in the Zimbabwean school curriculum. Hence Grant (1989: 138) says:

*Every lesson is a language lesson, because in every lesson language is used*

Therefore, it is the duty of teachers to fine tune language in schooling practices to match children's varied needs in rural, urban, farm, high density and low density schools, thereby maximising their access to multivalve forms of knowledge.

From all the above discussions, it is clear that all subjects in the Zimbabwean school curriculum cannot do without ChiShona as a language that helps to promote the majority of the learners' understanding of the several important concepts being taught as Child (1993) describes language as the human being's finest asset. In this regard, ChiShona is justified as a subject to be taught in the Zimbabwean school curriculum, as it is the basis of a child's thinking process.

## Challenges in the Teaching of ChiShona

Despite all this appreciation a subject as important in the lives learners and the society at large, ChiShona has continued to be dogged by many problems. The already alluded to problem is the constant reference to English terms in the teaching of ChiShona. For a long time Shona grammar was taught in English at secondary and tertiary levels, using Fortune's *Grammatical Construction Volume 1 & 2*, although now the situation has changed given the promotion of the language by local authors. Since 2000, there has been a positive shift with educational and academic people acknowledging and implementing the teaching of ChiShona in secondary to tertiary levels. In the same vein, the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council has dispensed with English and now sets the Shona examination in Shona, using Shona terminology. However, the issue of specific regional or social group languages lead to terminology problems and the question is how the specific regional or social group languages and finding names to new technology can be standardised is still a challenge. For example, the internet is called 'indaneti' (the phonological translation), while others call it 'dandemutande roruzivo.'

Second, the issue of teaching minority languages has been another big problem. According to Machinga (1998), language policy in Zimbabwe recognises the ethnic diversity of the country and in the first three grades of primary school ChiShona, IsiNdebele and other local languages, the so called minority languages are used as mediums of instruction. The argument is that each ethnic and indigenous language in Zimbabwe should find its place in the curriculum as part of the minorities' cultural rights. While this is the most acceptable and desirable position it is the absence of requisite material and human power in these minority languages which has hampered its implementation. This should not be interpreted as a ChiShona gate keeping on other minority languages, but a regard for them as welcome siblings that should bolster the notion that education in the mother tongue is the best option. The 2014 initiative by the government and its partners to educate primary school teachers in these minority languages is a welcome development that will raise the status of minority languages.

The other important point is the government's policy statements concerning ChiShona and other indigenous languages in which they have had a halfhearted attempt to legitimise the use and teaching of ChiShona. For example, the Secretary's Circular No 2 of 2001 said that ChiShona is compulsory from grade one up to form two and optional at 'O' level. The hope was that Circular No 3 of 2002 which had embraced ChiShona as one of the languages to be used as a medium of instruction would address the negative attitudes people have on the subject. Hence, Chimhundu (1997) agrees that both the national and the minority languages are suffering from a lack of policy and planning which tends to leave them statusless and without any defined or officially recognised roles.

What is envisaged is the lack of seriousness or political will to implement the provisions of the 1987 Education Act and the amended Education Act of 2006, even when the Minister is given powers to authorise the teaching of such languages in primary schools. These problems can be overcome if the political and academic people bring their heads together and chat about ways towards the standardisation, promotion and development of ChiShona and other minority languages so that they can become the mediums of instruction in Zimbabwean schools, especially where they dominate.

To conclude, Awoniyi (1982) says that one must understand that the mother tongue is like a shadow, one cannot get rid of it. The social, political and academic circles are realising that in teaching, instead of considering the child's first language as a hindrance, it is basic, if effective learning and communication are to take place. It should, therefore, be acknowledged that education is a crucial instrument for nation building and that the arterial language is central to that process. The move to take into account the use of ChiShona and minority languages in education is long overdue. Thus, the teaching of ChiShona in the Zimbabwean school curriculum is strongly justified from a historical, philosophical, psychological and sociological stand point.

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