

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

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ABSTRACT The study sought to establish the views and preferences of parents and teachers regarding the language to be used as the medium of instruction in early childhood development in Zimbabwe. A mixed research approach using semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire as instruments was conducted among 80 respondents comprising of 30 early childhood development teachers and 50 parents whose children were enrolled in early childhood education learning centers in Norton urban district, Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe, and an expert from the national curriculum development unit. Shona is the mother tongue predominantly spoken in the study area. The Zimbabwe education language policy stipulates that the second language should be introduced only after Grade 3. The findings of this study revealed that eighty-six percent of parents preferred the use of English as medium of instruction in early childhood development, while 66.7 percent of teachers preferred both English and Shona together. To address the mismatch between ideological and policy ideals on one hand, and practical reality on the other, the study recommends an evidence based, participatory national language policy review and development that consults parents, teachers and children among other stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

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

struments of education and culture, and as significant means through which to participate in national life (Skutnabb-Kangas 2009).

Like most African countries, Zimbabwe is a multilingual (Chabata 2008), multicultural and multiethnic society (Phiri et al. 2013, Ndamba 2008; Setati 2005) with 16 official languages recognized by the country's new Constitution, which prescribes that "all officially recognized languages are treated equitably" (Government of Zimbabwe 2013:17). According to the Education Act (amended 2006), "any one of the languages may be used as the medium of instruction depending upon which language is more commonly spoken and better understood by the pupils" (Government of Zimbabwe 2006: 28). This is a major improvement from the pre-independence era in Zimbabwe, which was characterized by a language policy that did not officially recognize indigenous languages spoken by the majority of the population.

The Zimbabwe language policy, as stated in the Education Act of 1996 (amended 2006), raised the status of indigenous language by requiring that children in preschool and infant school (3-8 years) be taught in their first language (L1) and learn English (L2) as one of the subjects in the curriculum. As a subject, English should be taught without code switching or direct translation. Under the language policy, English becomes a language of instruction from Grade 4 upwards. Ouane and Glanz (2011) argue that this

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Zimbabwean language policy can be identified as a possible model for bilingual education.

The acknowledgement and promotion of bilingualism in schools by the Zimbabwean language policy has drawn the interest and scrutiny of many researchers (Makanda 2011; Ndamba 2008; McGroarty 2010; Setati 2005; Roy-Campbell 2006) and inquiry from various professions of concern (Phiri et al. 2013). Researchers have noted that not much is being done to fully implement the policy. Despite this positive policy pronouncement in Zimbabwe, the status and use of language for educational purposes is seldom raised by policymakers (Gudhlanga 2005).

English appears to continue to be the preferred medium of instruction in schools and in early childhood development. Chabata (2008) observed that in the post colonial era, Zimbabwe has an unbalanced bicultural and bilingual situation in which the H or high status language (English) is the official language of the former colonial power, while the indigenous languages are of L or low status languages. Mutasa (2003: 304) supports the notion, "Parents perceive English as the answer for them and their children's problems in that at present, unquestionably English is the gateway to success socially, politically and economically".

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

Mkandawire (2005) asserts that the New Approach to teaching and learning in English in early childhood development was founded by Joana Moyo's new approach experiment in 1975 at Hope Fountain Mission in Matabeleland, which was influenced by the colonial era policies. In the experiment, children were taught in English from the first day they entered school. Due to political and colonial reasons, the experiment did not give 'equal status' as English on the importance of indigenous languages (Shona and Ndebele) spoken by the majority of peo-

ple in Zimbabwe. The new language policy formulated in post colonial Zimbabwe in 1987 and revised 2006 seek to correct this bias, realizing the value of the mother tongue in teaching and learning.

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

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

According to The Hanen Centre (2015), research shows that when adults create rich language and literacy environments and respond to a child's communication in specific ways, they can boost that child's emergent language and

literacy development and increase the likelihood of future academic success. The adults with the greatest potential to help are the most important ones in that child's life, that is, his parents and caregivers, including childcare providers and early childhood educators (ECEs) (The Hanan Centre 2015).

Language development supports the child's ability to communicate, and express and understand feelings (Raising Children Network 2015). It also supports thinking and problem solving, and developing and maintaining relationships. Learning to understand, use and enjoy language is the critical first step in literacy, and the basis for learning to read and write (Raising Children Network 2015).

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

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to establish the views and preferences of parents and teachers regarding the language to be used as medium of instruction in early childhood development in Zimbabwe.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

The research study applied the mixed methodology approach. The study also took a constructivist (Smith et al. 2008) explorative perspective, seeking to establish the perceptions of parents and teachers as the primary basis for drawing different conclusions and constructing meaning on language and learning, and it does not preempt a particular hypothesis. The researchers collected information from participants through interviews, which yielded authentic and qualitative data that were interpreted to explain the participants' views (Marshal and Rossman 2006), facts, opinions and attitudes (McDaniel and Gates 2001; Brink et al. 2012). Question-

naires were also used to collect quantitative data. Data was obtained from parents, teachers and the curriculum development expert using guided semi-structured interview instruments. The sample size in this study was eighty respondents consisting of thirty teachers, fifty parents and one curriculum development expert. Parents and teachers were the primary respondents, while the curriculum development expert served to provide a general understanding of the policy situation relating to language in Zimbabwe.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Views of Parents and Teachers on Language to be Used in Early Childhood Development

Mother Tongue for Parents and Teachers

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

Table 1 shows that nearly all (96.3%) of the respondents used Shona as their mother tongue while 3.7 percent used Ndebele. The three respondents whose mother tongue was Ndebele were all teachers from the Matabeleland region who had moved to the study area for employment.

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

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

Language Preferences of Parents and Teachers

Teachers and parents were asked to indicate the language they thought should be used for teaching and learning in early childhood development. The combined responses indicate

that 62.5 percent preferred English, thirty percent preferred a combination of Shona and English, while 7.5 percent preferred Shona as shown in Table 2.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- ♦ *It is important for children to grow up having the knowledge of English, which was also used in higher learning institutions, job interviews, and by most employers.*
- ♦ *English should be taught as first language to reverse the colonial era practice during which it was used as a second language among the Blacks.*
- ♦ *Children already know or speak their mother tongue before going to school or preschool; therefore it is better for them to be taught in a different language, that is, English.*
- ♦ *Most of the subjects at school are being taught in English, therefore teaching English at an early age helps learners understand what was being taught much better.*

- ♦ *Interviews for enrolling learners in schools or preschools are conducted in English; therefore it would make it easy for learners to understand the language.*
- ♦ *Learners can fit in any English-speaking environment for example, outside the country without feeling inferior.*
- ♦ *Most of the television programs, for example, cartoons are in English, hence, learners would understand better, and become fluent speakers of the language, which would help them to do better in most subjects taught in English.*

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

- ♦ *It is difficult for some learners to understand concepts being taught in English.*
- ♦ *Mother tongue makes it easy when learners want to translate into English.*

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

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

Preferred languages	Distribution of parents
	Percentage (%)
English	23.3
Shona	10.0
English and Shona	66.7
Total	100.0

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

- ♦ *In a multilingual country such as Zimbabwe, it is possible that some learners might not understand either of the languages; there is a possibility that some children may not understand when teachers use only either English or Shona. Therefore, using both languages would help teachers clarify concepts and communicate effectively for the benefit of all learners.*
- ♦ *Learners would be comfortable and free to communicate with others in the language they knew best.*
- ♦ *The concepts were understood best if mother tongue was used together with English*

because the teacher would be able to clarify concepts.

- ♦ *Learners get used to both languages making it easy for them to communicate in English while at the same time using Shona with people who could not speak in English.*
- ♦ *The main disadvantage of using both languages as reported by teachers was that most learners spoke in their mother tongue at home and would forget English vocabulary when they come to school.*

A few teachers preferred the use of English only arguing that (Verbatim):

- *This enables the foundation for English language to be set at an early age making it easy for learners to fit into the society as they could communicate with anyone, even in cases where they visited other countries.*
- ♦ *This boosts learners' self-esteem, as they would view themselves as unique with a special language, and they could also tackle any question asked in English because they knew the language.*
- ♦ *Teaching in English makes it easier for non-Shona speaking teachers to communicate easily with children and to teach effectively. As a Ndebele speaker, it's easy to communicate with Shona speaking people in English.*

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

- ♦ *Learners who are weak in English might not understand and grasp concepts, making teaching and learning in the class difficult.*
- ♦ *Since English is not the first language some learners are not used to it and this created communication breakdown between teachers and learners.*
- ♦ *Those parents who cannot speak English are not able to help their children improve their English vocabulary or do their homework since they could not speak the language.*
- ♦ *The mother tongue is a social tool for the learner to address his or her needs, interests, feelings and made the learner fit into his/her culture. Therefore, English is not good for intellectual development.*
- ♦ *Poor grades in Shona spoilt learners in Grade 7 or Ordinary Level results certifies given that it is their mother tongue,*

which they are expected to know and pass. Thus, Shona should be used as a medium of instruction to improve the learners' performance and results in the subject.

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

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

Code Switching

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

As depicted in Table 5, the majority (77.5%) of teachers and parents indicated that the language used at home should not be the same, as the one used for teaching and learning, while 22.50 percent of the respondents thought the language should be the same. Further analysis as shown in Table 6 revealed that the majority (86.0%) of parents (as shown earlier, all parents had Shona as their mother tongue) preferred their children to be taught in English, which was different from the language spoken at home.

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

Prefer code switching?	Distribution of respondents	
	Number	%
Yes	62	77.5
No	18	22.5
Total	80	100.0

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

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

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

- ♦ *It allows children to learn two languages simultaneously.*
- ♦ *As parents we are impressed when children speak in English.*
- ♦ *Ability to speak in English demonstrates evidence that children are going to school.*
- ♦ *Most subjects at school except Shona, are prepared or written in English, therefore the mother tongue is not supposed to dominate in teaching and learning.*

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

- ♦ *Shona is easily understandable than English.*
- ♦ *To avoid confusing the child.*

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

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

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

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

- *It improves the vocabulary of the two languages.*
- *Most of the subjects are in English, therefore it is easy for learners to grasp and understand concepts.*
- *For better communication when they meet other people not speaking their mother tongue.*
- *Some teachers and learners come from other areas where Shona is not dominant or not spoken and therefore it is best to communicate in English.*
- *The mother tongue used by learners and teachers may be different. These sentiments were supported by a parent, who said,*

“My nephew was born and bred in Matabeleland where they speak Ndebele and now he’s in Mashonaland. Therefore, English helps him communicate with those who do not speak his mother tongue—Ndebele.”

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

“Cognition is more influenced by daily language.”

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

A major weakness resulting from switching between languages underscored by both teachers and parents was that it led to code mixing or using two languages to complete one phrase or sentence such as saying “*ndipewo firewood*” (with “*ndipeiwo*” being Shona for “please give me”) to be similar to learning two languages at the same time, and according to one respondent:

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

Learners’ Influence on the Choice of Language

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

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

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

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

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

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

DISCUSSION

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

Parents (86.0%) strongly preferred the use of English as medium of instruction in early childhood development, while teachers (66.7%) preferred the use of both English and Shona simultaneously. These findings are consistent with those revealed in the study conducted in Mwenzi by Mugweni and Ganga (2010) where the use of the mother tongue, Shona was shunned by most people. These findings contradict some of the strong Afro-centric positions that consider African mother tongue languages as critical to the development of Africans. For example, Mavesera (2009) observed that African emancipation could not be cultivated, expanded or developed where the language of instruction is different from the home language or the language people normally speak in their everyday lives.

Tables 3 and 4 show sharp differences between the parents' expectations regarding the language to be used for teaching and learning

and the realities that the teachers experienced. For example, eighty-six percent of the parents preferred English compared to 23.3 percent of teachers, while 66.7 percent of teachers preferred use of English and Shona interchangeably compared to eight percent of parents.

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

The researchers believe that in practice, the differences reflected in Tables 3 and 4 should be reconciled to ensure that parents and teachers have a common position and understanding that considers the best interest of the child's learning demands and environment. As long as these preferences remain different, there is potential for conflict between parents on one hand, who will always express dissatisfaction with teachers, and teachers on the other, who will think that parents make unreasonable expectations and demands of them. In a bid to enroll and retain more children, private pre-schools are drawn to use English to please the parents, although this may not necessarily be in the best interests of the children. Consequently, the child may suffer from an inconsistent language teaching system that may not be sensitive to their learning needs and challenges. However, as noted in Table 8, almost half (43.3%) of teachers considered it necessary to bend and use Shona from time to time to serve the best interest of the child, risking potential sanctions of going against school language policy.

As shown in Tables 6 and 7, a point of convergence however existed between parents and teachers when it came to the language used at home and school, with eighty-six percent of parents and 63.3 percent of teachers agreeing that the language used at home (mother language) should not be the one used in teaching and learning. Thus, both parents and teachers preferred English language to be used as medium of instruction at school, while the mother tongue could continue to be used and developed at

home. It can be argued that preference for code switching (a child speaks mainly Shona at home and English at school) as reported by the majority of both parents and teachers is positive in that it promotes additive bilingualism (Cummins 2009) where English is acquired without any loss of Shona language. When considered together with the preference by teachers to use both English and Shona in teaching and learning environments, preference for code switching strengthens this convergence between parents' and teachers' preferences, and presents opportunities for building consensus between the two camps, which could inform the review, development and improvement of the language policy in Zimbabwe.

On the other hand, reasons presented by parents for preferring English, most of which are consistent with literature points to the influence of the colonial past (Ndamba 2008), the socio-economic demands and expectations for employment and success (Mutasa 2004), and globalization (Maseko and Dlamini 2014; Shizha 2012), social participation (Rory-Cambell 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas 2009), social status and acceptance in determining English as the preferred language of teaching and learning in Zimbabwe. In addition, in Zimbabwe, English language has largely been adopted as an international and universal language. Teachers appeared to take a pragmatic perspective in their reasons for preferring both English and Shona together, and they considered what was best and easier for them to teach in ways that made it easy for children to learn. The position taken by teachers also ensures that no children are disadvantaged or discriminated in teaching and learning environments given the arguments by some researchers (Snipes et al. 2008; and Snow et al. 2007) that lower socio-economic status and parents' educational levels can affect language development and skills upon entering school, and that those who cannot grasp English at the time of entering school are already disadvantaged (Benson 2009).

The observations and arguments made by some respondents, that is, 36.7 percent of teachers indicated that using Shona (the language used at home) at school made it easier for learners to learn the second language (English) building on the first language that the child already knew is supported by Masuku (2002) and (Maseko and Dlamini 2014), who suggested that this

enabled the learner to search from the mother tongue "database" to enhance new learning.

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

Parents largely preferred English language as medium of instruction, largely influenced by socio-economic and political reasons, while teachers preferred both Shona and English, largely concerned with the academic aspect relating to ease of teaching and learning for both teachers and learners. Drawing on the weight of the discussion, the researchers are of the view that Shona and English should be used together as media of instruction to cater for all learners slow and fast in learning irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, and to avoid discrimination.

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

ing and learning. These can be parents, teachers, school heads or even learners.

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

CONCLUSION

English is the language preferred by most respondents to be used in teaching and learning. Most parents preferred their children to be taught in English, while teachers preferred the use of both Shona and English. Parents presented arguments relating to economic opportunities and social status associated with English as a language of power and influence that is universally accepted and used to communicate globally. Teachers preferred Shona and English mainly for professional and practical reasons, to make it easy for teaching and learning. Teachers used the mother tongue to clarify concepts when they identified learners who would not have mastered what has been taught in English. Considering that some learners could have been proficient in English before they were even enrolled at preschool or school, and these would be deprived on their continuation of speaking English at school if the mother tongue were used.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research study proposes the following recommendations:

- ♦ The government should promote awareness, creation of education policies among teachers, parents and communities. Educational planners should consult stakeholders who are involved in teaching and learning. These can be parents, teachers, school heads or even learners.
- ♦ Further research should be conducted in areas where different languages are spoken to find views and opinions of people on which language should be used as a medium of instruction in early childhood development.
- ♦ While the benefits of the mother tongue are well argued academically, intellectually, and philosophically, they should also be dem-

onstrated in the practical lives of an increasingly technologically and economically driven global village, and the aspirations of Zimbabwean parents for their children to fit well and competitively into this global village.

NOTE

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