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## Decolonising Pedagogies: Unpacking Postcolonial Language Policies in Higher Education Systems of South Africa and Zimbabwe

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### ABSTRACT

Following their independence from colonial rule, most African nations adopted postcolonial language policies. As a result, some southern African countries were held accountable for implementing an exoglossic policy that favoured foreign colonial languages; in contrast, other independent states took an exclusive stance that gave preference to native tongues in their socio-economic sectors. This article therefore sought to evaluate the accomplishments made in the last three to four decades since South Africa and Zimbabwe became democratic republics. The article is timely, as we are drawing closer to the mid-target of the Decade of Mother Tongue 2022–2032 proclaimed by UNESCO, an organisation that is also the custodian of the fund for the cause. Cultural capital theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for this investigation. The theory revealed how language education policy frameworks and regulations affect the way indigenous languages are taught and learned in the curriculum of the two countries. The nature of this investigation was qualitative, as it used a multiple case study approach, employing two examples of language in education policies in Zimbabwe and South Africa respectively. A reportable narrative about accomplishments to date was woven together based on thematic web-like data analysis. Discourse analysis was done on national language policy frameworks and language education policies germane to the teaching and learning of indigenous languages. The results show that the milestones achieved included the inclusion of indigenous languages in the national constitutions of both countries, the design of language education policies and the elevation of indigenous languages to languages of teaching and learning in institutions of higher education and schools, languages of communication in governance, the establishment of language institutes, training teachers for language and

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making corpus planning and digitising indigenous languages. Based on these findings, the study therefore recommends similar studies in other contexts.

**Keywords:** Cultural Capital Theory; Exoglossic; Exclusion; Indigenous Languages Pedagogy; Post-Colonial Language Education Policies

## 1. Introduction

Like most African countries, South Africa and Zimbabwe appear to view proficiency in the English language as synonymous with education, and hence regard education as a foreign endeavour<sup>[1-3]</sup>. Colonial ethnolinguistic legacy has therefore persisted in African education systems. The education curriculum, from infant to tertiary level, is still heavily languagised such that the mastery of the former colonial master's languages has remained mandatory. Although translanguaging is beginning to make inroads in South Africa, it is still a taboo in Zimbabwe that is perceived to be a result of deficiency in vocabulary. The language and cultural anomalies in the majority of education systems remain a source of ongoing struggle for post-independence governments in Africa.

In South Africa, both the advent of democracy in 1994 and the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in 1996<sup>[1]</sup> rekindled hope that ultimately African languages, in addition to English and Afrikaans, would soon be utilised as languages of teaching-learning throughout the education sector of South Africa. The inclusion of African languages as official languages in the South African Constitution<sup>[1]</sup> is meant to rectify the historical and linguistic imbalances that apply to various areas of life in South Africa. However, in spite of the government's efforts and significant measures assumed by both private and public institutions to promote the use of African languages, the article reveals that the use of African languages in higher education still leaves a lot to be desired<sup>[2]</sup>. Contrary to most African countries, the so-called Asian tigers advanced immensely in the past 60 years through the use of their indigenous languages. Brock-Utne<sup>[3]</sup> noted with concern the continued use of colonial languages as language of instruction, which may serve the small elite and work to the disadvantage of most Africans. The scholar summed up the South African situation as that in which language of instruction is a powerful mechanism of social stratification that widens the inequality gap. In

disgruntlement, Brock-Utne<sup>[3]</sup> posited that Africa continued to be divided into three spheres; Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone, as languages of instruction do not promote understanding of what is learned in most schools in Africa. This is in tandem with the World Bank<sup>[4]</sup> released in its education strategy, 2020 called Learning for All, which departs from Education for All. Given the state of language policy and practice in education in South Africa and Zimbabwe, a thorough examination of the extent to which indigenous languages have been elevated to instructional languages in higher education is necessary.

## 2. Background

Scholarly debates on matters of national language policy have persisted for a while. The seriousness of the matter is evidenced in the frequency of meetings and conferences held regionally and internationally, as well as their inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) list. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2012)<sup>[5]</sup> conference on national language policy resolved that linguistic and cultural diversity is a key component of global peace and harmony. Gora<sup>[6]</sup> attests to a close relationship and complicated inseparability between language and economic development. As a result, it is widely known how important it is to teach in the mother tongue<sup>[2, 6]</sup>. Rajendra and Dominic<sup>[7]</sup> argue that learners who do not have an African language in South Africa are deprived of the opportunity for meaningful construction within the African context that forms their life world. The goal of UNESCO's cultural policies is to preserve and advance cultural variety in all manifestations, including modern and heritage-related forms.

Prior research studies on bilingualism noted that learning in a foreign language requires more time than studying in one's native tongue. Mother tongue would be an ideal medium for information transfer and education.

At the regional level, African leaders' meeting in Ad-

dis Ababa on July 28 and 30, 1986, decided that people's language lies in the core of their culture. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU)<sup>[8]</sup>, reaffirmed that using indigenous languages can hasten social and economic development, hence its linguistic recommendations below:

- a) African countries need to assert their independence and identity in the field of languages;
- b) Africa needs to take practical action to accord their indigenous languages their rightful official roles, as provided by the Cultural Charter for Africa in Lagos;
- c) Each state has the right to devise a national language policy that reflects the cultural and socio-economic realities of its country;
- d) Adoption and promotion of indigenous languages of those countries can be achieved when there is a political will; and
- e) The promotion and adoption of African languages as official state languages is of advantage in education, politics and cultural affairs of states.

It is now well known beyond reasonable doubt that using African languages is essential to the success of African mass literacy efforts, as well as socio-economic development<sup>[2, 6, 9, 10]</sup>.

Nhongo<sup>[10]</sup> made a domestic investigation of Zimbabwe's progress in developing a workable national language strategy. Results show that to have precise language practices, beliefs, and management decisions in communities at both the micro and macro levels, thorough language planning, which includes status, corpus, and acquisition planning, is necessary. To date, Zimbabwean language policy is still a draft that was recently validated in 2024.

According to the Cultural Policy<sup>[11]</sup>, Zimbabwe's indigenous languages provide a rich linguistic and literacy legacy for all people, and should be a fruitful foundation for strengthening national understanding. It further specifies that studies must be conducted in native tongues to produce dictionaries, textbooks, literary works, and scientific and technical publications in these languages. In sync with the observation, thinking processes are guided and organised by language<sup>[12]</sup>. It is extremely difficult for students to conceptualise what they are learning when they are required to learn in a language in which they are not proficient<sup>[13]</sup>. Studies are crucial because they highlight difficulties Zimbabwean higher ed-

ucation students and teachers encounter when required to think in languages other than their mother tongues. Similarly, South Africa is said to disenfranchise the African majority of learners through its English language-only instruction<sup>[2, 7]</sup>. Hence, the study's purpose is to uncover milestones South Africa and Zimbabwe have made regarding the elevation of national indigenous languages into media of instruction and languages of intellectualisation in higher education systems in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Several studies that have discussed the value of mother tongue education contend that universal primary education, let alone education for all, is unattainable when instruction is provided in a foreign language, even in cases where it is free and required. Indigenous languages are much more than just cultural phenomena, according to academic research on the subject<sup>[14-17]</sup>. This is true because authors contend that language plays a crucial role in the transmission of culture, formation of identity, and establishment of values. The aforementioned studies also hold value for the current investigation, as they underscore the need to employ the mother tongue as a means of development<sup>[14-17]</sup>, and to attain an international universal education by 2030. Foreign languages, which are not mother tongues, are particularly difficult for students pursuing education, hence the need to take stock of ethnolinguistic milestones regarding the status of indigenous languages in higher education in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Several researchers looked at people's opinions regarding the use of the mother tongue in the classroom in Zimbabwe. They found that colonial language policy was the cause of unfavourable sentiments<sup>[6, 18, 19]</sup>. Colonised communities in most African states adopted the languages of their colonial overlords during the colonial era<sup>[14]</sup>. While Shona and Ndebele were the only two officially recognised national languages of Zimbabwe during the colonial era up to soon after independence, students were required to utilise the English language in school<sup>[13, 14, 20]</sup>. According to the position of languages in Rhodesia as well as the early independence era in Zimbabwe, all other national languages were marginalised until they received formal recognition in the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Amendment 20<sup>[21]</sup>.

Chabata<sup>[22]</sup> conducted research on the accomplishments of the African Languages Research Institute in advancing the status of indigenous languages. The results

showed that to empower indigenous languages, orthography and dictionary documentation were necessary to guide word division and spelling to become more standardised. Chabata draws the conclusion that the status of languages increased as a result of developments in orthography and documentation. Similarly, Sibanda<sup>[23]</sup> used decoloniality to investigate whether Zimbabwe's language policy represents a fundamental break from colonial language policy and came to the conclusion that, despite the government's claims to the contrary, language policy is a continuation of colonial practices. Similarly, De Wet<sup>[24]</sup> noted with concern that the majority of South Africans prefer English compared to their native language as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) after the first four years of schooling. The position contradicts the South African constitution, which acknowledges the rights of all learners to receive education in the official language or language of their choice in public educational institutions where this is reasonably practicable. It is against this background that this article, through the cultural capital theory lens, sought to uncover milestones covered in the elevation of national indigenous languages to media of instruction and language of intellectualization in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The situation is the same as what Gora, Mavhunga and Muringani uncovers regarding the attitude of parents and learners towards the use of Indigenous languages use as medium of instruction<sup>[25]</sup>.

The article aligns with the United Nations declaration of 2022–2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. It further aligns with UNESCO, which recently observed the International Year of Indigenous Languages (2019)<sup>[26]</sup>. This is in tandem with the idea that languages are inextricably linked to identity. Yet, most Africans find their languages have varying degrees of vitality: some are only sparks, some have powerful flames, and some are on the verge of extinction. To rescue languages threatened with extinction, UNESCO established a new fund in 2023. The fund is meant for the decade that will support activities and projects carried out by, with, and for indigenous people to preserve and revitalise their languages. UNESCO Director General, Audrey Azoulay called on member states and partners to support and participate in taking immediate action and provide indigenous children with the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue and have such language online to improve access and incorporate indigenous wisdom into public

policy. The Director also advocated for the preservation of living and intangible cultural heritage, which encompasses practices, representations, ways of expressing oneself, and skills and information that are still relevant to some of the most pressing contemporary challenges. Speaking during the Cultural Survival representative celebration held on December 13, 2022, at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France, speakers pledged to use grant partnerships, advocacy, technical support, and other strategies to advance and save indigenous languages around the world. As evidence of the seriousness and urgency of the matter, Magwa (2024)<sup>[27]</sup> asked member states at a conference for the Global Taskforce, International Decade of Indigenous Languages, to set timelines for their action plans in the promotion of indigenous languages promotion. Thus, through the cultural capital theory lens, the study attempts to uncover the progress that Zimbabwe and South Africa have achieved in the elevation of national indigenous languages to media of instruction and languages of intellectualisation.

Cultural capital theory, according to Bourdieu<sup>[28]</sup>, states that learners come into school with knowledge, values, attitudes, norms and tangible and intangible home assets that either scaffold or bar the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The theory presupposes that higher-class home assets material and non-material help students achieve better educational credentials than those from lower socio-economic classes. The educational system acknowledges disparities in class. Higher class habits and possession of cultural capital are conducive to success in educational systems. Most characteristics of the upper class are absorbed into the educational system. Students from the upper class have a stronger edge over their counterparts from the lower class when they dominate higher-class features. Lower-class pupils' chances of completing their education are further destroyed if the educational system imparts knowledge using methods used by the upper class.

The parallels and variations between policy provisions and implementation tactics in Zimbabwe and South Africa may be explained by this idea. Even though they may take on distinct styles, the two nations are in very identical circumstances. Regarding the state of the Zimbabwean language system, Magwa<sup>[29, 30]</sup> bemoaned that the language of government does not correspond to the language of the governed. In fact, most people's native tongues are not the official

languages of the country and, in particular, the language of their education. The discourse on community development rarely mentions the language of the people. Most citizens of Zimbabwe and South Africa lose the linguistic and cultural capital they accumulated since birth when they continue to speak other languages. In this case, this article argues that the portrayal of English and its sensibilities as the educational cultural capital is an artificial creation and a ploy designed to short-change non-English speaking Africans. Thus, the article sought to uncover ethnolinguistic developmental milestones attained by South Africa and Zimbabwe, and their implications on the general processes of teaching and learning in higher education, especially in teacher education.

Intergovernmental Conference on Language Policies in Africa held in Harare, Zimbabwe, from March 17–21, 1997, produced an ambitious plan of action known as the Harare Declaration. The plan paved the way for the creation of clear policy frameworks and implementation tactics. Fifty African nations attended the meeting, which presented African decision-makers with a turning point in the recognition of the critical role that African languages should play in development<sup>[31]</sup>. African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) was recognised as an office of the AU tasked with advising member states in this area and coordinating language policy and planning across the continent. The assembly of AU heads of state in Khartoum in January 2006 declared 2006 as the year of African languages. Ten years after the summit, UNESCO assigned Professor Neville Alexander of the University of Cape Town, South Africa, who was experienced in the field of language policies in Africa, the unsettling assignment of writing an introduction that would outline the history of language planning in Africa from 1997 to present. According to the renowned African languages scholar, Professor Ayo Bamgbose, Professor Neville Alexander confirmed that the conference resolutions are no more than a recycling exercise, whether the conference participants were aware of it<sup>[17]</sup>. To achieve unimpeded education for all, indigenous languages should be developed so that speakers use their mother tongues effectively in all spheres. This is to improve their sense of self and pride in their cultural heritage and identity<sup>[15]</sup>, hence the need to assess ethnolinguistic progress.

Since the introduction of Western education to African societies in the late 1800s, the issue of the medium of teach-

ing in Africa emerged. African children have been taught the basics of schooling in colonial languages from that point on<sup>[9, 32]</sup>. Most African nations kept their second and additional languages as their official languages of instruction, examination and intellectualisation well after assuming political power. However, it is now well acknowledged that indigenous languages that are native for many African people are strategically positioned to serve as media of instruction and intellectualisation languages<sup>[2, 3, 33]</sup>. The question is: What milestones of elevating indigenous languages were covered to serve educational purposes in both Zimbabwe and South Africa?

### 3. Materials and Methods

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the accomplishments of elevating indigenous languages into media of instruction in higher education that South Africa and Zimbabwe achieved in the last thirty to forty-four years since they became democratic. The methods for obtaining, presenting, and analysing data are described and justified in the overview below.

#### 3.1. Qualitative Paradigm

The article used a qualitative paradigm, which is an approach of inquiry that crosses academic disciplines and is typically used in social sciences and other contexts. It is primarily concerned with non-statistical methods of inquiry and analysis of social phenomena. This paradigm is useful for linguistic milestones achieved by South Africa and Zimbabwe regarding the elevation of indigenous languages into media of instruction and intellectualisation. The qualitative paradigm provides a thorough understanding of two geographic units of analysis, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Nieuwenhuis<sup>[34]</sup> states that the primary goal of qualitative research is to explain why different behavioural patterns exist in the first place by comprehending social and cultural settings and processes that underpin them. The qualitative paradigm is concerned with interpretations and meanings according to Morgan and Sklar<sup>[35]</sup>. As a result, the paradigm drives the analysis of data gathered from document analysis of policy documents germane to this study's objectives to reveal subthemes, themes, and global themes. This results in a thorough understanding of the milestones of elevating

national indigenous languages into media of instruction and languages of intellectualisation made in both South Africa and Zimbabwe. This is against the assumption that colonial languages continue to dominate African education learning spaces, thereby disenfranchising the majority of African learners<sup>[3, 36, 37]</sup>. The paradigm has been chosen because it enables investigators to describe milestones covered by the two countries in decolonising languages in higher education systems.

### **3.2. Research Design: Dual Case Study (South Africa and Zimbabwe Language Education Policies)**

The case study design is appropriate for the goal of this research endeavour, which is to take stock of milestones covered in elevating national indigenous languages into media of instruction in higher education educational systems in South Africa and Zimbabwe, since it acknowledges the complexity and embeddedness of social truth. Nieuwenhuis<sup>[34]</sup> believes that a case study allows for a comprehensive understanding of how participants interact and react to each other in certain settings and has an influence on the decision to take one. To address the how and why aspects of a research project, the emphasis is on how participants interpret the study phenomenon. In this instance, uncovering the milestones of elevating national indigenous languages into media of instruction in higher education languages achieved in South Africa and Zimbabwe through a dual case study highlighted similarities and differences between strategies used by the two systems with regard to provisions of policies and their effects on procedures of implementation.

### **3.3. Population**

According to Morgan and Sklar<sup>[35]</sup>, a research population is a collection of people, things, or events that have something in common and collectively reflect all or a portion of studied cases. The education language policies in higher education, especially teacher education and associated language policy documents for Zimbabwe and South Africa, such as regional, continental, and worldwide treaties and constitutions, are the main subjects for this study.

### **3.4. Sample and Sampling Procedures**

The sampling process is influenced by the qualitative approach of the investigation. A sample size is a collection of items drawn from the population for the purpose of investigation, and sampling is the process of choosing objects to be investigated<sup>[35]</sup>. The language of education policy documents from South Africa and Zimbabwe, which are constitutions, language policy documents, language education policy documents, bills and Acts were chosen for study because of their extensive discussion of linguistic conditions in educational institutions, especially higher education. These policy documents act as operationalisation, framework, guiding language conceptualisation and operationalisation. The article critically discourses, and content analyses the linguistic components that expose milestones that South Africa and Zimbabwe achieved in efforts to elevate national indigenous languages into media of instruction, languages of examination and intellectualisation languages. Purposive sampling looks for more diverse data sources with features similar to variables or aspects being studied<sup>[36]</sup>. Purposive sampling is therefore appropriate for this article's goal, which is to focus on texts that act as a road map for the operationalisation of education language policy in higher education, especially teacher education.

### **3.5. Research Instruments**

To take stock of milestones that South Africa and Zimbabwe have covered so far in elevating national indigenous languages into media of instruction, languages of examinations, and intellectualisation in higher education and teacher education in particular, this study used a document analysis guide as a research instrument. According to Nieuwenhuis<sup>[34]</sup>, a research instrument is a tool used to collect data for a study. The use of the textual study of texts, reports, and language policy documents sought to find out what milestones these two countries made in elevating national indigenous languages in their education systems. An overview of parallels and differences, as well as how they affect realisation of goals in higher education and teacher education in particular teaching and learning was provided through a thorough examination.

## 4. Results

The data output was qualitative. The presentation of qualitative data relies on descriptions. Regarding milestones covered in elevating indigenous languages in Zimbabwe and South Africa, researchers analysed clauses in policy documents basing on themes in the document analysis guide. A documentary analysis guide is essential in the process of data analysis as it informed the researchers on what data was sought for. Taking a leaf from Charmaz and Thornberg<sup>[37]</sup> and Charmaz<sup>[38]</sup>, the article utilised grounded theory as a coding technique while cultural capital theory serves as an analytical lens for data. The themes produced were merged into a story fit for reporting, in thematic web-like data analysis.

The fact that the documents under examination were readily available and in the public domain means there were no serious ethical concerns. The national constitutions, language in education policy documents, language bills, acts and all other scholarly materials are open for scholarly use. The research is part of the literature meant to sensitising South African and Zimbabwean linguistic communities about linguistic issues in education, which is a constitutional right.

The section outlined the research paradigm, design, population, sampling techniques, data presentation, analysis, and interpretation. Coming next is a section on the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data on milestones South Africa and Zimbabwe have covered in elevating national indigenous languages into media of instruction, examination languages and intellectualisation languages in higher education.

### Section 6: Status of the Constitution to Do with National Languages in Zimbabwe and South Africa

South Africa and Zimbabwe have section 6 in their constitution, which spells out the official languages that are recognised in that country. Both countries are multilingual and multicultural, with 11 and 16 official languages and ethnic groups in South Africa and Zimbabwe, respectively. The two countries have seven (7) cross-border languages shared between South Africa and Zimbabwe, which are Ndebele, Sotho, Tswana, Tshivenda, English, Xhosa and Khoisan. The provision is evidence that the governments of the two countries respect their citizens' intangible linguistic and cultural

heritage.

The inclusion of section 6 in the constitution indicates the two countries' commitment to communicate with citizens, provide services in those languages and afford the necessary protection for the official languages. Key requirements are to elevate the languages to media of instruction, intellectualisation and examination in higher education. In Section 6 subsection 1, each of the two countries listed the official languages. The Republic of South Africa's official languages are as follows; Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu<sup>[39]</sup>. The following languages, namely Chewa, ChiBarwe, English, Kalanga, Khoisan, Nambya, Nda, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, Sign Language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa, are the officially recognised languages in Zimbabwe<sup>[21]</sup>.

In Section 2, each country attempted to give background to the establishment of section 6 in the constitution. While the two countries were both formerly colonised and need to redress colonial linguistic and cultural imbalances, South Africa openly says it and Zimbabwe is silent. South Africa specifies the languages of 'our people', while Zimbabwe simply refers to the languages as officially recognised languages. The major point of departure is in the terminology used where South Africa says, languages of 'our' people, it invokes a sense of ownership; and again, the wording, 'the state must take practical and positive measures...' is compelling the state to act on the languages issue. On the contrary, Zimbabwe chooses to use mild language and says, 'An Act of Parliament 'may'... such wording gives room to or not to take action about the language issue. The two dichotomies show the level of political will the countries display on the language issue. Zimbabwe is leaving the clause open that the Minister may prescribe other languages<sup>[21, 39]</sup>.

In Section 3, while both policy provisions appear to support the development and utilisation of national indigenous language and consideration of preference of the affected community, they differ in two respects (i) South Africa clearly states that at least 2 official languages are used, while Zimbabwe complicates the issue by saying that all officially recognised languages are treated equitably. Maybe this is in consideration of the previous close that has the possibility of other languages that may be prescribed yet not officially recognised. (ii) Also, there is a difference in word-

ing in which Zimbabwe spelled that... ‘must ensure’... and ‘take into account people affected...’ while South Africa says ‘...taking into account ‘usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances’<sup>[21, 39]</sup>. While the Zimbabwean stance is compelling implementers to take action, South Africa gives room for not taking action, if the implementers may use alternative language, or may not be cost-effective, or may not be feasible.

In Section 4, both countries pledge to ensure parity among the official languages. South Africa added that the government, by legislative and other means, ‘must regulate and monitor the use’ of official languages<sup>[39]</sup>. This could be the reason South Africa has a language board, language policy, and language map, while Zimbabwe only has a language committee and draft language policy. Zimbabwe further insists that the state must create conditions for the development of those languages<sup>[21]</sup>.

In Section 5, the difference in this category is that South Africa clearly states the establishment and role of the Pan South African Language Board, as well as the categories of languages in the country that require protection<sup>[39]</sup>. Contrary to South Africa, Zimbabwe let such crucial guiding information to inference. A Pan South African Language Board established by national legislation must: (a) promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of (i) all official languages; (ii) the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and (iii) Sign language; and (b) promote and ensure respect for (i) all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including (ii) Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages used for religious purposes German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu are said to be considered<sup>[39]</sup>.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Similarities in the Two Countries’ Constitutional Language Positions

Both the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the Constitution of South Africa have Section 6 that lists the official languages of each nation as indicated in the table above. South Africa has eleven (11) and Zimbabwe has sixteen (16) national languages. The inclusion of these languages in national constitutions is a significant milestone towards elevating their status, and it is a demonstration of the politi-

cal will to address this long-standing language issue. They value the intangible cultural capital that communities possess. Both nations deserve praise for recognising national languages by enshrining the matter in their constitutions. Therefore, the authority of the two nations’ supreme laws may enable the criminalisation of violations of such provisions. The stance also demonstrates the great value that both governments place on national languages as intangible cultural heritage assets. Revisiting and adjusting the provisions to do with languages is an abrupt awakening call to the importance of languages, which are catalysts for social and economic progress. The inclusion of section six (6) in the constitution is therefore a milestone towards granting languages a high standing and guaranteeing citizens the right to speak. The constitutional provision accords the languages to the appropriate level of legal recognition. The scenario refutes the view that many African countries are in the process of self-colonisation under the guise of empowerment, globalisation, and access to education<sup>[29]</sup>. It means African nations are not wasting time learning European languages, while Asian and European nations are learning concepts and making notable advancements.

### 5.2. Constitutional Provisions to Do with Language in Education in South Africa

Apart from simply including the language issue in the constitution, South Africa further explained the language rights of the speakers. In guiding stakeholders in education for making language in education policies and implementing them, the South African constitution has section 29 subsection (2). In the South African constitution, languages are human rights issues in which everyone has the right to receive education in official languages of their choice. In the clause, the following was outlined in the South African constitution.

#### Education

*(2) Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of, this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account -*

*(a) equity;*



(b) *practicability*; and

(c) *the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices*<sup>[39]</sup>.

While the intention is good, the condition of ‘practicability’ terminology is diluting an otherwise radical decolonising position of the South African language situation in the education system. The condition gives room for planners and implementers to decide either to use or not to use the languages, depending on what they perceive as practicable. Such wording like ‘practicability’ leaves some loopholes for implementers to claim non-practicability and ignore the condition. The condition makes people not commit themselves to a given condition.

Similarly, section 30 of the South African constitution on, *Language and culture*, adds that, ‘Everyone has the right to use the language and participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights’<sup>[39]</sup>. While section 30 gives freedom to use language and participate in own choice of cultural life, the wording ‘but’ signals a give-and-take situation where the constitutionally given linguistic rights of the concerned communities are rescinded. The right to use language and participate in the cultural life of their choice is conditional, and the conditions depend on the contexts, which may be restrictive as to bar them from enjoying them.

In addition, section 31 in the South African constitution again on *cultural, religious and linguistic communities* – says;

- (1) Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community -
  - (a) to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language; and
  - (b) to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.
- (2) The rights in subsection (1) may not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights<sup>[39]</sup>.

In this case, the cultural and linguistic rights of freedom to form associations afforded to the concerned communities are conditionally curtailed in exercising them. The concerned should take into consideration that their exercises are in tan-

dem with other provisions in the Bill of Rights. Such curtailment is, in other words, a limitation of the enjoyment of constitutional rights.

On the other hand, the constitution of Zimbabwe<sup>[21]</sup>, section 63 states, ‘Every person has the right -

- a) to use the language of their choice, and
- b) to participate in the cultural life of their choice;

But no person exercising these rights may do so in a way that is inconsistent with this chapter<sup>[21]</sup>.

Again, the wording ‘but’ circumscribes the intended beneficiaries from exercising their rights, especially if the condition is not specifically predetermined. Also, that who then assesses whether the exercise is consistent or inconsistent with the concerned chapter. Hence, just like in the South African context, the wording, ‘but’ limits the given rights.

The two countries’ national constitutions demonstrate the nations’ political will to create linguistic equity that ceases to languagise communication. Thus, it is prudent that the article follows up and takes stock of milestones made towards elevating the national languages into the medium of instruction for teaching and learning in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

### 5.3. Language in Education Policies and Higher Education in South Africa

Coming up with the language in education policy is evidence of commitment to developing and operationalising official languages in higher education. Similarly, recognition of the languages transcends to other spheres because teachers and human resources trained in the languages are likely to use them with ease. Higher education is one of the state agencies that is mandated to develop and promote the growth of formerly marginalised languages. It is also an avenue through which languages cut across other spheres. Zimbabwe’s Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation Science and Technology Development acknowledged that the socio-economic development of any nation is determined by the vibrancy of its higher education (Strategic Plan Document, Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, 2021–2025). In this case, the ethnolinguistic development of South Africa and Zimbabwe is determined by careful language planning of the respective education systems of both countries. With South Africa and Zimbabwe commemorating their 30th and 44th

birthday days respectively since the advent of their majority rule, it is important to look back and establish the milestones achieved in the elevation of national indigenous languages in the respective countries.

#### **5.4. South African Legal and Regulatory Context**

South Africa has a Higher Education Act policy framework on languages that applies to all public higher education institutions in South Africa. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training<sup>[40]</sup>, the policy framework is interpreted and applied consistently with the following legislative frameworks and regulations: The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (Section 29(2))<sup>[39]</sup>; the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997 as amended 2020)<sup>[41]</sup>; the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training<sup>[42]</sup>; and the National Language Policy Framework<sup>[43]</sup>; the National Curriculum Statement<sup>[44]</sup>; the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions<sup>[43]</sup>; Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grade R–12<sup>[45]</sup>; Pan South African Language Board Act No. 59 of 1995 and the National Development Plan (NDP)<sup>[46]</sup>. The listed documentation is evidence of South African linguistic trajectory and the milestones they have achieved in elevating the status of national indigenous languages. The accustoming of a higher education language policy borrowing from other regulatory frameworks is a sure sign that it does not contradict other provisions relating to languages in the country. The legislative pieces demonstrate that the government of South Africa puts a high premium on communities' linguistic and cultural capital assets. In this section, Zimbabwe has a weakness of not having a higher education policy and simply relying on inference of the language in education policy for primary and secondary education. It means there is no framework for languages operationalisation in higher education.

#### **5.5. Guiding Principles for South African Higher Education Policy Framework on Languages**

The South African Language Policy Framework for Higher Education Institutions is premised on seven specified principles, which are: promotion of access and success in

the academic enterprise; respect for linguistic and cultural diversity; parity of esteem and use of all official languages; nurturing an environment where multilingualism thrives; recognition that languages are critical resources; and enhancing people-centeredness in addressing ethnolinguistic interests<sup>[39]</sup>. The principles provide a conducive linguistic ecosystem to South Africa's diverse community. Premising the policy framework on the selected principles is not a coincidence, but a consideration of the national vision of reaching South Africa beyond linguistic inequity in all spheres and, especially in the education system.

#### **5.6. Expectations of Language Policy for Higher Education in South Africa**

The policy framework came up with a road map that establishes a niche of higher education responsibility in the promotion and development of indigenous languages. The framework guides institutions to come up with individual institutional language policies from which to draw their plans. It synchronises the operations of various institutions and makes their yearly plans, measurement and evaluation plans basing on what each institution is doing. The framework eliminates duplication and allows for complementarity. The policy statement spells out the role of higher education in the promotion of multilingualism for social, cultural, intellectual and economic development. It mandates all institutions to develop strategies, policies and plans for multilingual promotion. Each institution is mandated to indicate at least two official languages other than the medium of instruction they are developing for scholarly discourse and official communication, planning trajectory for development and study of all official South African languages, especially those which were historically marginalised, including the Khoi, Nama and San languages. Special consideration ought to be given to the development of competencies and capacity in South African Sign Language, consistent with the Official Languages Act, 2012 (Act No.12 of 2012). 27. All institutions are required to include in their language policies and plans, programmes that encourage the study of international languages, especially those languages that are important for the promotion of South Africa's cultural, trade and diplomatic relations<sup>[39]</sup>. However, priority should be given to historically marginalised South African languages, particularly those granted official status by the Constitution of the Re-

public of South Africa. Coming up with the language policy for higher education in South Africa was a splendid job. It narrowed the constitution to only higher education.

### **5.7. Creating an Inclusive Linguistic Environment in South Africa**

Language in Education Policy Framework for Higher Education designed a framework for creating an inclusive linguistic environment in which institutions are mandated to assist in preparing language teachers, interpreters, translators and other language practitioners to sufficiently serve the needs of South Africa's multilingual society. To ensure academic success for students for whom English is not their first language or mother tongue, such institutions must provide the necessary support. The institutions must support continuous research to explore and document strategies for intellectualising indigenous languages for use in higher education. As a way of cultivating a culture of multilingualism, the institutions must also ensure that official internal institutional communication and ceremonies are conveyed in at least two official languages other than English<sup>[39]</sup>. The policy enforced an inbuilt measurement, evaluation, assessment and learning modalities to continuously check on the performance of policies and whether they are achieving set targets. The policy framework created an inclusive linguistic environment that enhances people's confidence in official languages for purposes of teaching and learning, scholarship, communication and administrative use.

### **5.8. Capacitation of Official Languages in South Africa**

The policy framework for higher education capacitates the official Languages Department of South Africa. It mandates institutions of higher education to explore and document strategies for intellectualising indigenous languages. The promotion of indigenous African languages for use in scholarship in higher education (intellectualisation) will require, amongst others, the development of dictionaries and other teaching and learning materials. The Department is also mandated to work with other relevant government departments and entities to create or strengthen existing open-source multidisciplinary terminology banks to be accessed and used as a teaching and learning resource by all higher

education institutions.

### **5.9. Collaboration in Language Development in South Africa**

Institutions' language faculties and institutes and the Department of Basic Education are encouraged to work closely with the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) that was enacted through an act of parliament and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in the development of all terminology and authentication processes of the multidisciplinary terminology bank. Institutions are required to establish or strengthen (if existing) centres for Language Development to undertake relevant research required with respect to each of the official languages. Institutions are strongly encouraged to develop regional partnerships and collaborative language development programmes with other universities and language bodies to avoid working in silos<sup>[39]</sup>. This assists in the sharing of information and data related to language and terminology development for various disciplines.

South Africa's policy framework reiterated the realisation that language issues continue to deny some learners access to educational media. The indigenous languages, for example, are structurally denied intellectual space as media of instruction research and formal communication despite being elevated to official status. Thus, South African institutions of higher education still need to level the linguistic playing field to enhance parity and do away with the undervaluing and underdevelopment of official languages.

### **5.10. Constitutional Provisions to Do with Language in Education in Zimbabwe**

On the other hand, Zimbabwe does not have a language policy for higher education specifically but depends on deductions and inferences from the Education Language Act for primary and secondary education and the Constitution of Zimbabwe<sup>[21]</sup>. Section 13 of the Language Education Act, as Amended in 2020, specifies that "languages taught in schools" are guided by the following:

- 1) Every school shall endeavour to:
  - a) Teach every recognised language
  - b) Ensure that the language of instruction shall be the language of examination

- c) Ensure that the mother tongue is to be used as a medium of instruction in early childhood education (ECE)
- 2) School curriculum shall, as far as possible, reflect the culture of the people of every language used or taught in this section<sup>[21]</sup>.

In Zimbabwe, this section of the Education Act serves by inference as a language education frame of reference at all levels other than primary and secondary education. Depending on each stakeholder's level of awareness, the inference may be based on different assumptions made by different stakeholders. The Education Act, Amended 2020<sup>[47]</sup>, is a departure from the 1987 Education Act Amended 1990<sup>[48]</sup> which recognised only three (3) languages that are English language, Shona and Ndebele. The widening of the scope to sixteen (16) languages is a milestone. Also, making the mother tongues serve as media of instruction for infants in ECE is a commendable gesture of inclusivity. In the example above, this indicates that: (a) all 16 legally recognised languages are taught in schools; and (b) indigenous languages are only used as a medium of instruction for self-taught subjects because they are the languages of examination. It could be interpreted as contradicting in certain situations, particularly in Zimbabwe's higher education system where indigenous languages are subjects or learning areas and are sometimes taught using the English language as a medium. Also, the examinations in most subject course modules are given in English language medium. A situation like this could lead to different interpretations of the same legislative piece that the medium of instruction should be the same as the language of examinations. It is also tricky whether the wording 'all schools' indicated in the clause is inclusive of higher education. On the other end, if the wording 'all schools' excludes higher education, especially teacher education, it would be an enigma how teachers are then going to be capacitated to use those languages when they have not themselves learnt in the indigenous languages. The assumption is that the teachers that learn indigenous languages are likely to be able to easily deliver in the indigenous languages. Chimhundu<sup>[49]</sup> expressed worry about the fact that Zimbabwean native tongues have been ruthlessly superseded by English in the economic sphere as well as the media, education, and a host of other domains. In the same vein, a Malawian national stated that it is not necessarily true that

a youngster taught in English will learn more than a child taught in the local tongue Chimhundu<sup>[49]</sup>. Considering this view, Magwa<sup>[30]</sup> argues that African governments typically undermine their own languages by giving foreign languages greater priority. Unfortunately, it is hard to locate a document that explains the significance of Zimbabwe's indigenous languages. The Zimbabwean Constitution's articles 82 and 87 include references to criteria that solidify the English language's position in terms of both language and legislation.

### 5.11. Centres for Language Development

Both countries established language centres for managing language-related issues. The centres lead scholarship in language research endeavours. Zimbabwe established the Midlands State University National Language Institute in 2018. This extends the work of the African Languages Research Institute that had been housed under the University of Zimbabwe. Similarly, South Africa established the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society to spearhead research in African languages and cultural issues. Overall, the use mother tongue is derailed by communities' negative attitude<sup>[50]</sup>. In SA universities is still in its infancy<sup>[51]</sup>. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the so called 'minority languages' are yet to be developed for use in spheres beyond community<sup>[52]</sup>. The underdevelopment of the African Indigenous languages date back to colonialism where they were forced to use the colonial masters' languages<sup>[53]</sup>. The non-use of African indigenous languages disenfranchise the African communities of their constitutional linguistic rights<sup>[54, 55]</sup>.

## 6. Conclusions

Both Zimbabwe and South Africa are attempting to decolonise African languages, but are approaching the task from different angles. South Africa has so far covered reasonable milestones in terms of policy provisions and regulatory frameworks. However, a lot still needs to be done in terms of policy implementation. In contrast, Zimbabwe still has a long way to go in terms of both policy formulation and putting in place implementation structures. The medium of instruction in higher education remained largely formerly colonisers' which is proving difficult to substitute.

Based on this article's findings, the following suggestions can be made:

- Budgetary commitment is required for language planning,
- Need for revisiting the wording that leaves room for ignoring policy pronouncements in the regulatory policy frameworks,
- A shift in mindset is required from the parents involved so that language-related concerns are given priority,
- There is a need for a well-structured inbuilt measurement, evaluation, assessment and learning (MEAL) approach that gives feedback on policy effectiveness.

## Author Contributions

B.T. and T.V.M. contributed equally in this article. B.T. was working on the Zimbabwe Education Policy while T.V.M. was working on the South African Education Policy. Both scholars are from the University of South Africa in South Africa.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the declaration of Helsinki, and approved by institutional Review Board, University of South Africa Ethics Committee.

## Informed Consent Statement

The study does not involve humans.

## Data Availability Statement

The policy documents and constitutions are on public domains.

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## Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interests.

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