

# Language situation and language policy in-education in Zimbabwe: A perspective towards Tonga learners

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the language situation in Zimbabwe with a bias towards the language policy in-education. It seeks to establish the effect of the language policy in-education in Zimbabwe on the academic performance of the Tonga learners. The researchers sought to establish how the use of either Shona or Ndebele as medium of instruction and the learning of these languages as subjects negatively impacted on the performance of Tonga learners in primary schools. Our analysis goes beyond understanding the academic performance of Tonga learners and also seeks to establish the impact of such a status quo on other aspects of the Tonga people's lives such as culture and identity because whatever goes on in the classroom has a bearing on these social arenas. The data for this study were collected from native Tonga speakers, especially those that went to school before the language policy changed, that is, who were using Shona, Ndebele and/or English as medium of instruction in the education system in Zimbabwe at lower grades. The study established that the peripheralisation and marginalisation of Tonga in the education sector dealt a huge blow on the psyche, and self-confidence of the Tonga learners and their society at large in Zimbabwe. The study concluded that there is however, hope for the Tonga learners and community, ensuing from the official recognition of Tonga language, among other former marginalised languages, in the 2013 National Constitution and the subsequent amendment of the Education Act in 2020. These two critical developments will, without doubt, reverse the hegemony of Shona and Ndebele languages as medium of instructions in schools.

**Keywords:** Language Policy, Marginalisation, National Constitution, Tonga, Zimbabwe

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## INTRODUCTION

Language policy is generally construed as a declaration about language use and status within a country or institutions such as universities. It is an official decision made by government or responsible authorities concerning the use, status, and promotion of language(s). It contains decisions, rules, regulations, and guidelines on the status and use of languages (UNESCO, 1997). The debate on the language policy-in education in Zimbabwe has been raging since independence in 1980. Clearly, there is consensus among scholars that the language policy in-education in Zimbabwe has not only been discriminatory but also largely influenced by the colonial mentality and policies (cf Kadenge & Mugari, 2015; Magwa & Mutasa; 2007; Hachipola, 1998; Chimhundu, 1993). While this narrative is true, our view is that the blame on the colonial government for designing discriminatory language policy in-education is exaggerated. We argue that in as much as the colonial government came up with an unfair language policy, it was the responsibility of the post- independence government, from 1980, to rectify the discriminatory language policy. That the government of Zimbabwe did not replace the discriminatory language policy soon after 1980, suggests that it was comfortable to administer a divisive and discriminatory language policy in education.

Spolsky (2004) argues that language policies take various forms such as a clause in a national constitution, Act of Parliament/language law, or cabinet or Ministerial document/directive, or administrative regulation. A review of the Zimbabwe language in-education policy documents from 1930s to 2020 shows that there are at least seven policy and legislative documents that guided the usage of languages in the

education system in Zimbabwe. These are, among others, the 1930 Doke Recommendations, the 1981 Language Policy Directive, Section 62 of the 1987 Education Act, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Permanent Secretary's Circulars including number 1 of 2002, the 2006 amendment of Section 62 of the Education Act, Section 6 of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe, and the 2020 amendment of Section 62 of the Education Act.

Kadenge and Mugari (2015) however, cite other documents as relevant when analysing the language policy in-education in Zimbabwe. These documents are, The Position Paper on Zimbabwe's Language Policy (Government of Zimbabwe 1997); the National Language Policy Advisory Panel Report (hereafter referred to as NLPAPR) (Government of Zimbabwe 1998), and The Nziramasanga Report on Education and Training in Zimbabwe (Nziramasanga 1999). These documents are said to have been influential in shaping the language policy in Zimbabwe. However, as much as these documents contributed towards the formulation of language policies in Zimbabwe, they are not part of the language policies themselves because they were not government pronouncements considering Spolsky's (2004) clarification on the forms taken by language policies. These were documents produced by government commissioned consultants to proffer technical advice to government. As such, these documents contained views of consultants which were not necessarily government views. Therefore, this paper only reviews policy documents from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and legislation from parliament related to the language policy evolution in Zimbabwe.

This study therefore, seeks to establish the effect of the language policy in-education in Zimbabwe on

the academic performance of the Tonga learners. Our analysis goes beyond understanding the academic performance of Tonga learners and also seeks to establish the impact of such a status quo on other aspects of the Tonga people's lives such as culture and identity because whatever goes on in the classroom has a bearing on these social arenas.

## **AN OVERVIEW ON THE LANGUAGE POLICIES OF ZIMBABWE SINCE 1930**

### **Doke's 1930 recommendations**

The genesis of the language policy in-education conundrums in Zimbabwe could be traced to Doke's recommendations on language use in education in Zimbabwe in 1930. Two very critical recommendations made by Doke in 1931 determined the subsequent marginalisation of Tonga and other native languages in Zimbabwe. One of Doke's recommendations regarding languages that were to be used in Zimbabwe as a whole was that:

*...there be two official native languages recognised in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), one for the main Shona speaking area and one for the Ndebele-speaking area (Doke 1931:76).*

The other recommendation by Doke specifically dealt with the Sebungwe, a region inhabited by the Tonga people. The Sebungwe Region by then covered current Hwange, Binga, Gokwe North and South and Nyaminyami districts. For this region Doke recommended that:

*It may be possible to treat the whole Sebungwe through the medium of Shona as the non-Shona section, the Tonga are also non-Ndebele and thus save the area*

*from being treated as bilingual (Doke 1931:77).*

These two recommendations excluded Tonga from the Zimbabwean education system. The first recommendation entrenched Shona and Ndebele as the only native languages to be recognised in Zimbabwe while the other recommendation specifically indicated that the Sebungwe region should use Shona instead of Tonga, the local language. Since the 1930s, the teaching and learning of local languages in Zimbabwe was confined to Shona and Ndebele even though there were more than 16 other local languages in the country. The adoption of this language policy reverberated colonial government agenda of managing linguistic diversity in the country at the expense of the rights of speakers of other local languages. It is usually argued that Doke's recommendations were informed by a need to foster unity among Zimbabweans. However, the exclusion of other local languages in the education system had its negative consequences on Zimbabweans whose languages were not used as a medium of instruction as well as not taught as subjects in primary schools. In Doke's recommendations, English maintained the supremacy and hegemony it had before as it remained the principal language of instruction in schools.

The 1981 Language Policy Directive Immediately following the attainment of independence, the Zimbabwean government issued the first language policy directive in 1981. This policy directive mainly reflected the status quo in which English was the supreme language in schools followed by Shona and Ndebele as they were the only languages to be used in schools as medium of instruction and taught as

subjects. Thus Tonga, together with the rest of Zimbabwean languages, was excluded. The minor difference between the status quo regarding language use between pre-independence Zimbabwe and the period immediately after independence, according to Hungwe (2007), is that this directive curtailed the hegemony of the English language in the education system by making English an optional subject for the school-leaving certificate. However, the 1981 language policy directive did not last long as it was replaced by the Education Act of 1987.

### **The 1987 Education Act**

While Zimbabwe's independence brought much hope and anxiety to the speakers of many marginalised languages, their hopes were further dashed when the 1981 language policy directive and the 1987 Education Act cemented the colonial language policy and further labelled them as 'minority languages.' This policy required that English, Shona and Ndebele be taught in public schools. According to Section 62 of the 1987 Education Act, the following were the provisions:

1. The three main languages of Zimbabwe namely Shona, Ndebele and English are to be taught in all primary schools as follows:
  - a) Shona and English in all areas where the mother tongue of the majority residents is Shona, or
  - b) Ndebele and English in all areas where the mother tongue of the majority of residents is Ndebele
2. Prior to the fourth grade, either of the languages referred to in (a) or (b) of subsection (1) may be used as the medium of instruction, depending upon which language is commonly spoken and better understood by the pupils.

3. From the fourth grade, English shall be the medium of instruction, provided that Shona and Ndebele shall be taught as subjects on an equal time allocation basis as the English language.
4. In all areas where minority languages exist, the Minister may authorise the teaching of such languages in primary schools in addition to those specified in subsection (1) (2 and (3).

The provisions of the 1987 Education Act as noted above reflects a deliberate effort by the post-colonial government to close-out the speakers of other local languages, including Tonga, from the education system. Although subsection 62(4) provided for the sitting Minister to authorise the teaching of the 'minority languages' up to Grade 3, this was hardly implemented by government despite deafening calls by the affected language groups. This language situation continued unabated although advocacy from the affected language speakers also continued to increase pressure on the government.

### **The Permanent Secretary's Circulars including Number 1 of 2002**

With mounting pressure from the speakers of marginalised local languages and various other sectors of the country, the Zimbabwean government through Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture Permanent Secretary, produced a raft of policy circulars that redefined the language policy in education in Zimbabwe. One of such circulars was number 1 of 2002. Below is an extract from circular number 1 of 2002:

3 January 2002  
 SECRETARY'S CIRCULAR  
 NUMBER 1 OF 2002  
 POLICY REGARDING  
 LANGUAGE TEACHING AND  
 LEARNING

In line with the Nziramasanga Commission and further to the existing language policy regarding the learning and teaching of languages in Zimbabwe's education system, we hereby redefine the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture's position on the issue. The redefinition will clear any uncertainties that may still exist.

**1) *Minority Languages***

These are languages that are spoken by relatively small indigenous groups in various parts of Zimbabwe. They include, but not limited to, Kalanga, Tonga, Venda, and Sotho. These languages are currently being taught up to Grade 3. From January 2002, these languages will be assisted to advance to a grade per year until they can be taught at grade 7. The table below shows how this will happen:

GRADE	YEAR
GRADE 3	Already in place by 2001
GRADE 4	January 2002
GRADE 5	January 2003
GRADE 6	January 2004
GRADE 7	January 2005

The annual progression of classes will enable the necessary inputs to be made in advance. This includes teachers, classrooms, and material. By the time these languages are offered at Grade 7, new arrangements will be made for their further development. In other

words, we will cross this particular bridge when we come to it.

There were other subsequent circulars produced by the Ministry on language policy which included the Permanent Secretary's Circular Number 3 of 2002 on 'Curriculum policy: primary and secondary schools; and the Director's Circular Number 26 of 2007 on 'Policy guidelines on the teaching of local languages in primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe.' One common thread in these circulars was that although they brought hope to the speakers of the marginalised and excluded local languages, their pronouncements were never accompanied by any budgetary support from the central government to bankroll the production of textbooks, and training of teachers for the newly introduced marginalised languages in the education system. This is commonly referred to as declaration without implementation and is common among governments in Africa (cf Bamgbose, 1991). Bamgbose (1991:11) observes that the general characteristics of African language policies are notorious for 'avoidance, vagueness, arbitrariness, fluctuation and declaration without implementation.' Thus, the teaching of the marginalised local languages remained on paper after 2005 while English, Shona and Ndebele continued to be taught across the country including those areas which could have started learning their marginalised languages.

The Permanent Secretary's Circular number 1 of 2002 appears to have been crafted in terms of Section 62(4) of the 1987 Education Act which authorised the sitting Minister to permit the teaching of 'minority languages' in their areas. However, these circulars still had their own limitations as they did not

amend the legislation on the teaching of languages but just provided for the teaching of the marginalised languages within the confines of the discriminatory 1987 Education Act. Thus, these circulars appear to have been meant to appease the restless speakers of the marginalised languages yet did not bring much change on the ground.

### **The 2006 Education Act Amendment**

The 2006 Education Amendment Act was mainly similar to the Permanent Secretary's Circulars including Number 1 of 2002. It also did not open more space for the marginalised languages in the education system. The Education Act Section 62 (Languages to be taught in public schools) as amended in 2006 provided as follows:

1. All three languages of Zimbabwe namely Shona, Ndebele, and English shall be taught on an equal basis in all schools up to Form two.
2. In areas where indigenous languages other than those in subsection (i) above are spoken, the minister may authorise the teaching of such languages in schools in addition to those specified in (1).
3. The Minister may authorise the teaching of foreign languages in schools.
4. Prior to Form one, any one of the languages referred to in Subsection 1 and 2 may be used as medium of instruction depending on which language is more commonly spoken and better understood by the pupils.
5. Sign language shall be the priority medium of instruction for the deaf and the hard of hearing

In this amendment, the marginalised languages remained outside the

mainstream education system. It is not clear why the teaching of the marginalised local languages continued to be at the mercy of the sitting minister to authorise, in terms of Subsection 2, as opposed to Shona and Ndebele that were granted unlimited usage in the education system (in terms of Subsection 1). Thus, the 2006 amendment rather cemented the continued hegemony of Ndebele and Shona in the education system.

### **The 2013 National Constitution**

The 2013 National Constitution brought yet another hope to the speakers of the marginalised languages in Zimbabwe in terms of the inclusion of their languages in the education system. In terms of Section 6 of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe, the following provisions subsist:

1. The following languages, namely Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, sign language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda, and Xhosa, are officially recognised languages of Zimbabwe.
2. An Act of Parliament may prescribe other languages as officially recognised languages, may prescribe languages of record.
3. The State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must-
  - (a) ensure that all officially recognised languages are treated equitably; and
  - (b) take into account the language preferences of people affected by government measures or communications.
4. The State must promote and advance the use of all languages used in Zimbabwe, including sign language,



and must create conditions for the development of these languages.

In terms of Section 6 of the national constitution, all 16 languages are regarded as being at par. This means that English, Shona, Ndebele, Tonga and the remainder of the 16 officially recognised languages are to be promoted and treated equitably. However, so far there is no act of parliament yet that prescribes other languages as officially recognised or languages of record. In terms of Subsections 6(3) and (4), the state and all institutions are legally bound to ensure all officially recognised languages are not only treated equitably but also promoted and their usage advanced in Zimbabwe by creating conditions for their development. This position was a major shift by government from the previous marginalisation of these languages to their promotion.

### **The 2020 Education Act Amendment**

As part of realigning all legislation to the current National Constitution, the 2006 Education Act was further amended in 2020 to align it to Section 6 of the 2013 National Constitution that officially recognised 16 languages. Thus, Section 12 of the Amended Education Act of 2020, repeals Section 62 of the Education (Languages to be taught in public schools) and provides as follows:

- (1) Every school shall endeavour to—
  - (a) teach every officially 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 at early childhood education.

- (2) School curricula shall as far as possible reflect the culture of the people of every language used or taught in terms of this section.
- (3) The use of any language in terms of subsections (1) and (2) shall be subject to—
  - (a) the availability of resources to the State for giving effect to these provisions; and
  - (b) the availability of teachers, examiners, textbooks and other educational materials necessary for instruction in and of any of the languages.”

The provisions of the 2020 amendment may be viewed as progressive yet they are quite deceptive in the sense that the teaching of the languages is subject to their having teachers, examiners, textbooks and other relevant teaching/learning materials. However, government has not made any effort to ensure that there are enough textbooks and teaching materials to facilitate the teaching of these languages. This can be said to be a case of declaration without implementation that the Zimbabwean government is well known for (cf Chimhundu, 1992).

From the language in-education policies outlined above, it is clear that Tonga and other marginalised languages have been peripheralised or excluded in the education sector. In the next section, we provide some of the effects of the exclusion of Tonga in the education sector on Tonga learners. The effects of the exclusion of Tonga in the education sector on Tonga learners are discussed later in the study.

## **DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY**

The data for this study were collected from native Tonga speakers, especially those that went to school before the language policy changed, that is, who were using Shona, Ndebele and/or English as medium of instruction in the education system in Zimbabwe at lower grades. The researchers targeted both those who dropped out during their primary school endeavour and those that persevered and made it to higher grades and eventually to tertiary level. The researchers sought to understand the experience of these participants with regards to the medium of instruction and the local language(s) that were offered to them as subjects during their primary school days as learners. Precisely, the researchers sought to establish how the use of either Shona or Ndebele as medium of instruction and the learning of these languages as subject negatively impacted the performance of Tonga learners in primary schools.

The sample size for the study was 46 participants. Initially, the researchers aimed at having 60 participants, 30 participants that dropped out of the school system at primary level and 30 that made it to higher grades and eventually to tertiary education. However, it was very difficult to locate the intended 30 participants that had made it to higher grades and eventually to tertiary level. Instead, only 16 participants in this category were located for this study. This brought the total number of participants to 46. Of these 46 participants: 15 were from Binga District, 12 from Hwange District, 13 from Nyaminyami/Kariba District, and 6 from Gokwe North District. These participants were identified through snowball sampling.

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect the data for the study. Focus group discussions were mainly used for the participants that dropped out of the school system in primary school.

## **DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Effects of an exclusive language in-education policy on Tonga learners**

In this study, it was found out that the teaching of either Ndebele or Shona as subjects and their use as a medium of instruction, in addition to English, had a negative effect on Tonga learners in primary schools. It was noted that 90% of the 46 study participants indicated that from grade 1-7 of their education, they viewed themselves as 'second class' learners during their interaction with their friends in school. This is because depending on the province the schools they attended are located, Ndebele or Shona was regarded and used as the language of wider communication both outside and inside the classroom. The participants recalled that they were 'forced' to identify with the so-called 'major languages,' Shona or Ndebele, yet they spoke Tonga language when at home. Most of the participants observed that anybody who did not identify him/herself with Shona language was regarded as being Ndebele, and anybody who did not identify him/herself with Ndebele was regarded as being Shona speaking. This way, they argued, made them feel largely out of place within the school environment which negatively impacted both their psyche and self-esteem.

Research has shown that teaching learners using their native language as



a medium of instruction is important because it helps learners not only to understand and conceptualise what they are taught but also to think in their language and feel at home with the learning process (cf Cummins, 2007; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Krashen, 1985). In these studies, it is argued that the use of a language other than a mother language negatively affects the academic performance of learners. These studies further concluded that a young learner thinks better and effectively in their mother language compared to using a language that they are not familiar with. Thus, 90% of the participants of the present study that dropped out of school attributed their drop-out to the use of either Ndebele or Shona as the medium of instruction in class instead of Tonga. They argued that the use of these languages (Shona and Ndebele) made it very difficult for them to follow the learning process. Some respondents also noted that the view held by some teachers that maZambezi (as sometimes Tongas would be referred to) were primitive, backward, and barbaric made them so uncomfortable at school that sometimes they opted to stay at home and miss lessons.

Teaching a language as a subject and the use of a language that is not a native language of the learners as a medium of instruction has been described as “submersion” (cf Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) because it can be compared to an act of immersing learners under water where they can suffocate (Benson, 2004). In this case, Tonga learners could be said to have been subjected to cultural and identity suffocation. This is because language, culture and identity are inextricably intertwined (cf Crystal, 1987). In terms of identity, it is possible that Tonga learners suffered an identity crisis because, as stated already, they

as much as possible tried to identify with Shona or Ndebele in addition to identifying themselves as Tonga. This argument is in sync with Muchenje, et al. (2013) and Goduka (1998) who contend that language is not only a medium of communication but also a reservoir of culture and identity.

From the focus group discussions, it emerged that most of the Tonga people that went through the education system up to tertiary education did not only persevere but also ended up betraying their cultural and linguistic identity as Tongas and got assimilated into Shona/Ndebele culture for them to mingle well. Thus, to date some of them identify themselves more as Ndebele or Shona. Group participants partly attributed the cultural and linguistic identity betrayal to the circumstances that these learners found themselves trapped in at primary school. The current researchers believe that the cultural and linguistic betrayal is partly the reason why it was difficult to find the intended number of participants that have gone through the school system up to tertiary institutions, among those that went through primary school before 2002.

The other problem that was cited by participants that exacerbated the need for Tonga speakers to exercise their linguistic and cultural identity right from grade 1 is that the teachers that taught them, depending on the province, were mostly Ndebele or Shona. This is because very few Tonga people had gone through the education system up to tertiary level because of the high drop-out rate that could be attributed to a language situation and language policies in-education that were hostile to Tonga, among other factors. In terms of how Tonga learners related to Ndebele or Shona teachers, most of the participants pointed out that they used Ndebele or

Shona when speaking to teachers because the teachers did not only not understand Tonga but also refused to learn Tonga as they despised the language. The participants also indicated that during those days (their primary school days), they thought that speaking Ndebele or Shona was fashionable and that they viewed these languages as being pathways to success as they were also associated with 'townhood' and prestige. Those who insisted on speaking in Tonga at school were viewed as backward and derogatorily labelled as 'MaZambezi.'

The exclusion of Tonga in the education system prior to 2002 and 2013 also gave way to dehumanising discourse about the Tonga people. Study participants opined that this discourse caused some of the primary school Tonga learners to drop-out of the school. Some study participants remember their parents telling them that even if they passed to go to secondary schools, they would be subjected to the dehumanising discourse. The discourse was premised on the negative myths levelled against the Tonga people such as the belief that they slept in trees, have six toes, and have tails (cf Mumpande 2014). As such, both the Tonga parents and learners did not take schooling seriously, and this led to a high drop-out rate especially in the early grades of schooling. Unfortunately, the present researchers did not manage to find another form of evidence on the high drop-out apart from the claims by the sampled participants. However, the fact that this was mentioned by at least 85% of the participants is evident enough of the validity of the claims.

Participants shared that some of the Tonga learners detached themselves from Tonga language and culture by changing their surnames from Tonga to Shona or Ndebele so as to blend well with the Shona /Ndebele speakers at

school who were viewed as 'superior.' In fact, some of the people that participated in this study still used either Ndebele or Shona surnames. This Tonga 'linguistic and cultural identity migration' had a net effect of creating a pool of Tonga-speaking 'Ndebeles/Shonas' who sought cultural and language refuge in the Shona/Ndebele languages and culture due to the societal hostility. The children of the 'migrated Tonga' did not suffer from dehumanisation in schools because they were now viewed as Ndebele/Shona just from their 'adopted' new surnames.

One interesting case under the dehumanising discourse was a chilling testimony by one of the study participants. She narrated of how one day she came face-to-face with the dehumanising discourse during her last year of study at one of the tertiary institutions in the country in 2016. That evening, she walked to the exit gate of the institution on her way home. As the security officer vetted the students at the gate during the routine checks to ensure that every student exits the institution with their bonafide property, the officer's attention was caught by the unfamiliar name on the student's identity card. To satiate his anxiety, the officer requested to know the language in which the name was given. Once the officer was told that it was a Tonga name, he requested to ascertain whether or not the student had a tail and six toes.

The officer's questions to the participant: 'Is it true that you have a tail? Is it true that you have six toes?' caught the attention of other students around the Tonga student who were equally eager to authenticate the myths about the 'tail and six toes' on the Tonga student. The student felt embarrassed and dashed out of the then swelling cloud though with much difficulty because by then she was surrounded by many other students.

This participant said this encounter deeply affected her because she could not imagine that there were people who still believed that Tongas have tails and six toes as late as 2016. It took time for her to recover from what she describes as a 'shock and social shame' that she was surrounded by a hostile community who harboured such baseless myths against the Tonga people. She wished she could transfer from that institution as a matter of urgency. Such experiences have the capability to stultify the performance of a learner in school, and in some cases, they can cause some learners to leave school prematurely.

The participant noted that the embarrassing encounter on that day reminded her of her days at primary school when her friends who had dropped out of school warned her that if she insisted on going to school, she would be subjected to ridicule someday by these Shona/Ndebele people. The participant indicated that at a tender age, or right from grade 1, Tonga learners knew that they were viewed as being primitive by some of their compatriots in the country, especially those that had not had social encounter with them before. Possibly this increased the number of those that dropped out of the school system in primary school.

### **THE FUTURE OF A TONGA LEARNER IN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

The official recognition of Tonga and other formerly marginalised languages by the National Constitution of 2013 and the efforts of pressure groups such as the Tonga Language and Culture Committee (TOLACCO) and Basilwizi Trust began to permute the language

policy in-education. This cast a ray of hope on the academic path of every Tonga learner that would step their feet in grade 1. Basilwizi Trust is a Community Based Organisation formed by the Tonga to spearhead socio-economic development in the Zambezi Valley, largely inhabited by the Tonga-speaking people, and advocate for the teaching of Tonga in the Zambezi Valley schools.

With the official recognition of Tonga by the national constitution, our forecast is that more Tonga learners in primary schools in Binga, Gokwe North, Gokwe South, Hwange, and Kariba districts will now make it to secondary schools, colleges and universities. Our forecast is premised on two grounds: Firstly, the official recognition of Tonga, together with other languages, as one of the officially recognised languages in Zimbabwe mean that Tonga would now be taught as a subject from primary schools to university level. This view is also buttressed by the provisions of the 2020 Amendment of the Education Act (see Section 2.7 herein). Section 1(a) (b) of the 2020 amended Education Act provide that all officially recognised languages must be taught in schools and the medium of instruction in schools must be the language of examination. Furthermore, Section 1(c) provides that every school shall ensure that the mother tongue is to be used as a medium of instruction at early childhood education. Although there is variance between policy pronouncement and implementation, there is hope for the Tonga as they can now claim their right to use Tonga as a medium of instruction at early childhood as stipulated by the amended Education Act of 2020.

The participants observed that the constitutional recognition of Tonga language was viewed as not only the

recognition of the language but its people as well. This has been viewed as the dawn of a new era where the presence of the Tonga people in Zimbabwe has been officially recognised and as such they will 'walk tall' among other language speakers. Participants noted that the official recognition and the teaching of Tonga from primary school to university is in itself motivation enough to Tonga learners and parents alike; it is an important factor that has encouraged parents to send their children to school and to support and encourage them to work hard and progress to all levels of education without fear of stigmatisation.

The researchers are of the view that such parental moral support and encouragement, which apparently was lacking among most of the parents prior to 2002 when the marginalised languages were first permitted to be taught, is invariably important if learners especially in primary school are to perform well academically. The Tonga people in Binga District have in the past demonstrated their dislike of their children learning Ndebele as they twice withdrew their children from schools, in 1981 and 2003, for two months in each case, protesting against the non-teaching of Tonga and imposition of Shona and Ndebele languages onto their children (Mumpande 2006). Thus, since the Tonga community overcame what they have been protesting against, it is hoped that they will have the zeal and encourage and support their children to go to school. Thus, more children will not only enrol in primary schools but also enter secondary school and eventually college and university. It is expected that in the near future, more and more Tonga speakers will penetrate the various social sectors owing to the education they will have received.

The only challenge for this forecast is the issue of the government's non-committal towards the effective implementation of the new educational policy. Despite the provisions of the 2013 National Constitution that officially recognises the previously marginalised languages, government is yet to set aside budgetary support to the production of the teaching and learning materials in these languages seven years after the pronouncement of the new language policy.

Secondly, the official recognition of Tonga as one of the languages in Zimbabwe has possibly helped to reshape and redefine the Tonga identity from the outlook of few Zimbabweans who may still had the perception that the Tonga people were a backward ethnic group who slept in trees. As such, the possible vestigial of the linguistic identity and cultural dismembering discourse will completely be wiped out. This is very important because it promotes, encourages and harnesses self-esteem among the Tonga learners right from primary school to university. Our view is that self-esteem and courage are key factors that any learner, especially in primary school, should have. Thus, our forecast is that the academic performance of Tonga learners at primary school level will continue improving and that the drop-out rate in primary schools will scale down. This is because Tonga is now included in the National Constitution and is reflected in policy documents in education.

Notwithstanding the seemingly bright future of Tonga learners from grade 1 upwards in terms of their academic performance, there are conditions that have to be met so as to ensure that the drop-out rate of Tonga learners at primary school level is

reduced. One of the conditions is that there should be political will to promote the marginalised languages. There is need that government takes a leading role in training teachers and availing the teaching and learning materials in these languages. In terms of teacher training, one would hope that more Tonga teachers will be trained and be deployed to teach in primary schools in Tonga-speaking areas. This is because the trend in many rural settings is that grade 1 learners are predominantly taught using local languages. Thus, there is need for such teachers to be conversant with Tonga.

So far government support and commitment to produce Tonga learning and teaching materials for primary schools and other levels of education is yet to be seen. The two organisations that have been instrumental in producing textbooks and literature books for use in primary and secondary schools are TOLACCO and Basilwizi Trust. By 2020, they had produced primary level (grades 1 to 7) and secondary and high school level (forms 1 to 6) teaching and learning material through an Education and Culture Department under Basilwizi Trust. This has enabled effective teaching and learning of Tonga language in schools at all levels. TOLACCO and Basilwizi Trust have, since 2002, successfully engaged teacher training colleges for an annual quota- system whereby Tonga speaking students get enrolled to train as teachers. According to Basilwizi (2019), over 850 Tonga speaking teachers have been trained through this quota system thereby resolving the shortage of Tonga speaking teachers in schools.

## CONCLUSION

In this study we have attempted to show how the language situation and language

in- education policies with regards to the languages taught as subjects in Zimbabwe has negatively impacted the academic performance and self-esteem of Tonga learners in the country in the recent past. We have highlighted some of the circulars and policy documents serving as guides on languages to be taught as subjects and used as medium of instruction in the country. We noted that Tonga was perspicuously excluded or marginalised in these documents. The negative effects of such a state of affairs have been proffered in the study. We have argued that the marginalisation can be said to have caused a high drop-out rate of Tonga learners in the early grade in primary schools.

We have also provided a forecast of what the situation will be like in the near future regarding academic performance, progression from primary to higher levels of education of Tonga learners, and eventually their penetration of the formal sector based on the inclusion of Tonga in the national constitution: more Tonga learners may have gained courage and self-esteem to progress from primary to colleges and universities, penetrate the formal sector employment-wise because more and more of them receive formal training. The inclusive language policy in education has not only motivated the Tonga to feel part of the Zimbabwean nation but also to participate equally in all aspects of the country and walk tall among the speakers of other languages in the country.

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