A Review of Indigenous Languages Situation in Languages-in-Education Policies in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe: A Comparative and Critical Approach

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The incorporation of additional indigenous languages into the primary school curriculum in multilingual societies creates both opportunities and challenges, with far-reaching ramifications for educational policy, pedagogical techniques, and sociocultural identities. This review examines the indigenous languages' situations to identify implementation challenges at the primary education level in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. Also, the complexities of extra-indigenous languages in language policies in selected countries are considered in the discussion of the challenges through a wide range of opinions and perceptions. It is argued that the need to harness beyond educational benefits of indigenous language inclusion leads to sociocultural benefits of social cohesiveness, cultural preservation, and identity building among pupils. The main challenges associated with indigenous languages, at the primary school level, in the three countries, are policy inertia, resource limitations, weak parental support, high school drop-out, cultural misfit, and societal attitudes. This paper advocates for comprehensive and maximal utilization of indigenous language inclusion benefits in primary education; and alternative and adequate arrangements for pupils whose home languages differ from indigenous languages in primary education. If building more democratic and inclusive educational systems in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe is a concern, all hands must be on the deck to cater for different languages and cultures. The paper, further, provides insights, based on Critical Theory, into how language-in-education policies in primary schools could be addressed and resolved to harness the benefits of multilingualism and linguistic diversity.

Keywords: indigenous languages, primary education, language policy, pedagogical approaches, primary education, sociocultural/socio-economic implications

Introduction

Language is crucial for the socio-economic development of a country (Araromi, 2018). In the African

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continent, the use of a selected indigenous language is a widespread practice in multilingual nations (Adebile, 2011). The multilingual matter has been a concern for educators in Africa and consequently, there has been extensive research on the adoption of local or indigenous languages in education and applied linguistic fields (Anukaenyi, 2019; Ogunmodimu, 2015; Araromi, 2018). The languages-in-education situation is a linguistic issue with both legal elements and cultural constructs, which overlaps with larger concerns on language policy, pedagogical techniques, sociocultural ramifications, and teacher preparation (Nwokoro et al., 2020).

Languages-in-education policy and its impact on education are critical for understanding the larger context in which an indigenous language inclusion occurs. Varying and novel ideas evolve on how to enshrine linguistic equity in primary education as the most critical level of education (Akinkurolere & Seru, 2023; Igboanusi & Peter, 2016). Hence, the language-in-education policy is usually reviewed to align with the benefits of multilingualism in a nation (Ogunmodimu, 2015).

In Nigeria, likewise other countries like Botswana and Zimbabwe, arguments have significantly favoured the use of indigenous languages. Beyond this, the x-ray of viewpoints and learners' experiences shape language policies and pedagogical methods, and provide insights on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of some languages in certain primary school contexts (Ndukwe, 2015). Therefore, the consideration of classroom language practice is essential for the effective implementation of linguistic diversity policies that match with community values and preferences for linguistic heritage, while the link between language proficiency and pedagogical techniques is critical to the effectiveness of incorporating indigenous languages in education, because educators are required to apply effective techniques in teaching using indigenous languages to foster language proficiency and diversity.

This study was intended to connect relevant and key literature in investigating challenges experienced in the use of approved indigenous languages in primary schools in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. This would contribute to knowledge by creating awareness and understanding of the challenges. Further insights will be provided on linguistic diversity in education and approaches to more inclusive and effective educational methods for speakers of non-adopted indigenous languages in primary education.

Background Information

Botswana Language-in-Education Policy

Botswana has been observing and glorifying only two languages of instruction in primary schools since independence in 1966. Setswana has been used as a national language while English has been used as an official language. Before independence, there was a fluid policy where other indigenous languages were used for teaching and learning with code-switching allowed for clarity. After independence, the 1977 Commission-Education for Kagisano recommended that Setswana be used as a language of instruction for the first four years of primary schooling while English took over at Standard Five. This was done for nation building and unity amongst Batswana (Republic of Botswana, 1977). Soon it was realised learners start learning English late and yet English is the language of the examination and students would have not mastered it after using it as a language of instruction for three years only.

Another commission in 1993 was assigned to investigate the issue, and it recommended that Setswana be used as a language of instruction from Standard One while English is taught as a subject. At Standard Two, English now becomes the language of instruction while Setswana is taught as a subject (Revised National Policy on Education, 1994). This is still the current policy. It may be noted that changes in languages of

instruction have been silent about the indigenous languages in the classrooms. What this meant was that learners who do not speak these two languages of instruction did not have equal opportunities with learners who understand and comprehend the language. For them, learning became a nightmare. The education system did not empower the ethnic minority groups to learn in their indigenous languages.

Nigerian Language-in-Education Policy

The linguistic situation in Nigeria has the imprints of colonization despite being a multilingual nation. The use of the English language as the predominant language in education is a testament to the colonial's legacy. It complicated the multilingual issues in the country and pushed most of her 450-500 indigenous languages to the background except Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo (Araromi, 2018; Fafunwa, 1974). There was, indeed, a huge loss of educational access and opportunities for learners who do not speak these languages.

In recent time, the revised version of National Policy on Education in 2013 indicates the use of indigenous languages in the primary school from Primary 1 to Primary 3 as the language of instruction while the later stages are Primary 4 to Primary 6 (NPE, 2013; Ndukwe, 2015; Ibrahim, 2021). This is captured thus:

> The medium of instruction shall be the language of the immediate environment for the first three years in monolingual communities. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French and Arabic shall be taught as subjects. (FRN, 2013, p. 8)

The languages of immediate environment may coincide with or differ from mother tongues or home languages depending on individual children and the multilingual nature of Nigeria. Nigeria has a record of about 400-500 languages and the need for national unity and cohesion favours the use of common regional language(s) in education, which are Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo (Nwokoro et al., 2020; Ibrahim, 2021; Adegbija, 2008; Akinkurolere, 2011; Araromi, 2018).

The language policy on education in Nigeria was formulated because education is a tool for the advancement and development of the country and also, there should be equitable educational opportunities for all people at the public primary, secondary, and university education systems in the country (Ibrahim, 2021). The latest development of languages-in-education policy in Nigeria is the inclusion of additional indigenous languages because the dearth of some indigenous languages and the decline of the linguistic competence of most youths were observed and there was a call for proactive measures (Araromi, 2018; Akinkurolere & Akinfenwa, 2018).

Although all indigenous languages may not be a language of instruction, especially the undocumented language, the sociocultural ramifications are based on educational outcomes, identity creation, cultural preservation, and social cohesiveness leading to questions on the implementation of select languages for instruction in primary schools (Nwokoro et al., 2020).

Zimbabwe Language-in-Education Policy

In Zimbabwe, 17 languages are officially recognised (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). The languages are English (formerly the sole official language), Shona, Ndebele (national languages), Chewa, Shangani, Tonga, Hwesa, Chikunda, Sotho, Xhosa, Sena, Tshwawo, Barwe, Venda, Kalanga, Nambya, and Tswana (minority languages). Before the promulgation of the 2013 Constitution, the 2006 Education Amendment to the 1987 Education Act was the key reference point about language issues as Zimbabwe does not have a language policy

document. It liberalised the use of these languages (mentioned above) to allow the more commonly spoken language in an area to be used as the medium of instruction before Form One (Grade 8). Section 62 of the policy states that:

> 1. Subject to this section, all the three main languages of Zimbabwe, namely Shona, Ndebele and English shall be taught on an equal-time basis in all schools up to form 2 level (Grade 9).
> 2. In areas where indigenous languages other than those mentioned in subsection (1) are not spoken, the Minister may authorise the teaching of such languages in schools in addition to those specified in subsection (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 subsections (1) and (2) may be used as the medium of instruction depending upon which language is more commonly spoken and better understood by pupils.
> 5. Sign Language should be the priority medium of instruction for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Given this scenario, all indigenous languages (minority or national) of Zimbabwe can be used as mediums of instruction. The recognition of indigenous languages in general and minority languages in particular in the Zimbabwean education system looks like a move in the right direction. This is because the use of the learners' L1 in education ensures enhanced cognitive development (Nishanthi, 2020, cited in Mhindu, 2021). However, researches have been conducted on the implementation of the so-called recognition of indigenous languages in Zimbabwe and the findings have shown that the use of these languages in education is far from becoming a reality owing to several reasons.

From the specific address of the language-in-education policies in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, it is obvious that the three countries share common factors. First, they are not just Anglophone countries, but they use English along the non-indigenous language in education. Apart from this, the countries are multilingual with evidence of linguistic diversity. Nigeria has the highest number of languages with just one official language followed by Zimbabwe with 16 official languages (Kadenge & Mugari, 2015; Tom-Lawyer, Thomas, & Kalane, 2021).

Botswana has the least number of languages with two official languages (Mokibelo, 2014). The reason is premised on the population factor and the subjectivity of the phrase "languages of immediate environment" in Nigeria. The crux of the matter is that the three countries have reviewed their language-in-education policies to include more indigenous languages, but some pupils are still linguistically-marginalised. Hence, the comparative study interrogates the challenges to the implementation of the language in education policies in the three countries and offer practical solutions to improve the situation in these African countries and beyond.

Problem Statement

Most African countries do not start education at lower levels with children's familiar languages in rural and remote areas. Policymakers and agents become rigid and prefer to use Anglophone and Francophone languages prescribed by the policies despite learners not understanding and comprehending them. This has left learners who do not speak the prescribed languages of instruction far behind in the education system. Learners' indigenous languages were not wanted in primary schools in the past. If learners do not understand the languages of instruction, it places high linguistic demands on both teachers and learners; learners would not be able to associate concepts with what they learn or bring from home. Their knowledge, background, and history do not play any significant role in learning and teaching. Further, learners may neither be stimulated

nor become creative in alien languages; hence, they may remain empty containers that must be filled with noise only by teachers' voices. In this regard, the impact of such policies may have far-reaching consequences that go beyond the classroom. It is upon this problem that the authors further scrutinise and review comparatively the challenges encountered by learners. McConville (2019) wants readers to imagine a scenario whereby pupils appear on their first day in school to the reality of the teacher communicating in a new language which they must learn. Anyone could "imagine if the new languages are two". This paper is problematizing the concern of McConville and other scholars on the linguistically marginalised pupils in primary education in three countries.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Theory is Marxist-based tradition from the Frankfurt School that challenges the power structure in any system (Celikates & Jeffrey, 2023). It is a fact that the educational system provides a platform for the interplay of policy, power, politics (Young, White, & Williams, 2023). This is the reason language policy issues are regarded as both educational and ideological matters (Igboanusi & Peter, 2016).

Critical theory in education advocates for "progressism" in any education systems because practices can perpetuate social inequalities, and how such progressism can be transformed to empower marginalized groups (Morrison, 1989). The marginalised groups in primary school education are the pupils whose home languages are not included in the languages-in-education policy.

In the past, the marginalisation of indigenous languages for the dominance of English language was a societal issue which caused a great damage in the educational system as it affected the standard of education and made speakers academically poor (Bamgbose, 2000; Tom-Lawyer, Thomas, & Kalane, 2021). This aligns with the view of Critical Theory, which critiques power and social order, of which, language-in-education policy is one as it overlaps justice, equity, inclusiveness, and diversity. These are power dynamics involved in the decision-making processes of language-in-education policies. More so, these decisions provide social outcomes in the educational system especially in relation to pupils' home languages (Cummins, 2000).

Significantly, Critical Theory aligns with the goal of this paper as it advocates for inclusive education systems. Also, addressing the challenges of indigenous languages implementation in primary schools is consequences of linguistic inequalities. This framework provides a starting point for a thorough and critical examination of language-in-education policies in the primary schools of three African countries, Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, based on their unique and shared historical, social, and political contexts.

Methodology

Adopting a qualitative method of analysing secondary data is a systematic way of reviewing literatures. Literatures from 1999 to 2023 were studied to produce common themes on the language-in-education policy issues in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. Implementing a critical theory-based approach to language education in any country faces challenges, including language barrier, cultural misfit, high school drop-out, lack of parental support, policy inertia, societal attitudes towards languages, resource limitations (Anukaenyi, 2019). The comparative review is based on these eight themes.

Results

The problems of language-in-education are thematised as identified in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe.

Challenges of Implementing Language-in-Education Policies

Language Barrier

The language-in-education policy in Botswana has created language barriers that go beyond the classrooms. Research indicated that the language barrier is a fundamental problem. For example, the recognition of only two languages in the language-in-education policy has created language barrier problems. Children from indigenous groups start school speaking their home languages and therefore some of them hear the school languages on the first day of school. Further, these children grapple with the structure of the two target languages as well as the content unlike their counterparts who struggle with content only in one foreign language (le Roux, 1999; Nyati-Ramahobo, 1999; Mokibelo, 2014; 2023).

The language barrier has silenced indigenous children in the classrooms, they cannot contribute towards discussions or provide answers, they can neither comprehend nor understand, and they cannot express themselves in any way because the target languages have become a huge mountain in front of them and therefore cannot cross over to the other side. UNESCO (2024) asserts that nearly nine in 10 children who are in school cannot read and understand a plain text by the age of 10. In Botswana, these are the children who are disadvantaged by the school languages. In other regions, the language barrier is further complicated by the fact that in most cases, teachers and learners do not speak the same language—they do not have a common language, and this contributes to communication problems in the classrooms. Interventional strategies have to be sought such as calling other people who are already occupied with their duties such as cleaners and cooks to come and interpret and translate (Mokibelo, 2014). While this is only a temporary measure, it has proved to be ineffective because once the interveners leave the classrooms, things go back to where they were. The language barrier creeps in; hence, the problem remains unsolved. On the same breath, these problems are created by the language-in-education policy because for decades, it has left out indigenous languages out.

The issue of ethnicity exists in Botswana, indigenous languages have been undermined, and the only eight major groups being recognized are "Tswana, Bakalanga, Basarwa, Batswapong, Babirwa, Bakgalagadi, Bayei, Hambukushu" (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1999; Chebanne, 2002). They are not all officially recognised in the classrooms. When they are used, they are used haphazardly such that learners still do not acquire knowledge. A review of the language-in-education policy to an inclusive one could ultimately solve this problem of language barrier that even overlaps into other areas and creates more problems. UNESCO (2024) points out that country-led action will drive change, supported by effective multi-stakeholder partnerships and financing. This is a challenge to African governments to take responsibility and lead such changes in education to make a difference in children's lives.

Similarly, in Nigeria, the pronouncement of three languages out of about 500 languages as the major indigenous languages of instruction in the primary education along with English language in 1977 National Policy on Education (NPE) document was a burden of linguistic barrier on most pupils as these languages are not spoken as their home languages (Anukaenyi, 2019; Senayon, 2021). The policy was reviewed in 2004 and further reviewed in Section 2, Paragraph 5(d) & (e) of NPE (2013) to include language of the immediate environment from Primary 1 to Primary 3 while Primary 4 to Primary 6 will be in English language.

The complexity of Nigeria's multilingualism is such that many children could still have a language of the immediate environment that is different from their home languages. The policy document as revised in 2013 lacks consideration for such pupils, and this is still a gap because such children find themselves in the dilemma

of communicating in a language that is different from their home language (Bamgbose, 2000; Tom-Lawyer, Thomas, & Kalane, 2021).

Comparatively in Zimbabwe, the 2006 Education Amendment Act recognises 16 local languages and leaves out other minor languages like Nyanja, Lozi (spoken in some areas in Hwange), Lemba, and Pfumbi (spoken in some parts of Beitbridge (Nyika, 2008). This means that learners who speak these languages are forced to learn through the language of the majority or English and this may negatively impact on their performance. As Trudell (2016) observes, better attainment in education is guaranteed if the child's home language is used in education compared to when they are made to learn in a language that they are still learning. For speakers of the excluded languages in the Zimbabwe language in education policy, educational achievement may be difficult since their languages are never used in the classroom.

Research has also shown that some languages may be "included" in the language in education policy, but in reality, they are excluded. For example, Shangani language is officially recognised but in Mhindu's (2016) study, it was established that most elementary-level teachers in the schools under study used English as a medium of instruction and code-switched to Shona owing to their lack of proficiency in the Shangani language. This is the case with many other officially recognised minor languages as teacher deployment in Zimbabwe does not consider the teacher's first language (Mhindu, 2021). As a result, even those who seem to be included remain excluded and continue to learn through unfamiliar languages.

Cultural Misfit

The other problem created by the language-in-education policy in Botswana is the cultural misfit. The findings from studies indicated that children from indigenous groups experience cultural shock in schools and classrooms. For example, some children live in rural and remote areas where there are no developments in most cases. When these children enter schools, they find strict rules that govern them on a daily basis (Chebanne, 2002; Polelo, 2004; Mokibelo, 2010). The rules are in the hostels, where they do not have to go out of the hostel once they get back from school. This is something that they are not used to and therefore retaliate by sneaking out of the hostel to go into the village which is against the rules of the hostel (Mokibelo, 2014). Secondly, they are told that they cannot converse in their native languages because there are internal policies in the school that restrict them from using their own. Thirdly, there are unwanted issues that are not in their cultures like smoking and drinking. In government schools, this is not allowed and therefore, some of the children find it a hard punishment because they have been doing that at home (Polelo, 2004). Again, the books or materials they use for learning do not reflect their culture, some of the cultural issues used are too foreign, from other countries and therefore they cannot associate their lives with some of the concepts used for teaching and learning, and this makes teaching and learning cumbersome. In brief, the school culture is different from their home culture, so children find it difficult to adhere to it.

Similarly, cultural shock is observed in Nigeria as language and culture are intricately related. Hence, pupils experience cultural shock when they are taught in a different language from their indigenous language (Olaoye, 2013). The inability of pupils to express themselves in English language implies loss of thought, art, and emotions because they would rather keep quiet than allow co-pupils to make a mockery of them.

Also, pupils experience culture shock when the curriculum does not reflect their culture (Zira & Zumo, 2020). Harnessing meaning and conceptualising ideas become a herculean task since there is a cultural gap between what they are familiar with and what they are being taught in a foreign language.

The situation is no different in Zimbabwe. Most teachers in Zimbabwe believe in using English as the medium of instruction and as a result, most learners, especially those from rural areas, find themselves in a situation where they are expected to speak and learn new knowledge through the English language. Sadly, most of these learners have their first encounter with the English language when they enter school. Ndamba (2013) observes that, participants in her study were concerned about producing uncompetitive individuals if they were to use a local language as the medium of instruction since learning in the mother tongue was considered equivalent to lowering the standards of education. Also, English is the language of examinations, and this situation forces teachers to abandon the mother tongue for the English language (Mhindu, 2016). Thus, learners experience culture shock as they grapple with learning the English language at the same time trying to master the content which is taught through the same.

High School Drop-out

The consequences of the Botswana language-in-education policy have resulted in cultural misfit and language barrier; indigenous groups decide to drop out of school because they see no reason they should sit in the classrooms without benefitting anything. The high school dropout starts from lower classes such as Standards One, Two, Three, and Four (Mokibelo & Moumakwa, 2006; Mokibelo, 2010). By the time learners reach completing classes, half the children who had registered would have left school. In Ghanzi, children from Bokamoso preschools used to drop in Standard One classes, the reasons being that in their preschool education, they were taught in their native languages—San languages and when they are admitted into Standard One, they are now told that their languages are unwanted and not relevant to the school learning (Mokibelo, 2014; Nguluka & Gunnestad, 2011). The children get a language shock and therefore decide to go back home.

The language-in-education policy left some children behind, especially the indigenous groups. The children are not granted the equal amount of learning like their counterparts who speak the target languages. For the indigenous groups it is an uphill challenge that they must deal with in primary schooling especially at the tender years of learning while they are still trying to get acclimatised with the school environment. Most of them decide to go back home instead of wasting time sitting on the four walls of the classrooms without any effective teaching and learning taking place. On the other hand, UNESCO (2024) has acknowledged the fact that Africa is still home to the largest out-of-school population in the world: 98 million school-aged populations do not go to school. This includes the numbers in Botswana.

Similarly, the lack of diversity in the curriculum of the school, the language of instruction inclusive, is a cause of the untimely withdrawal of students from school in Nigeria (Zira & Zumo, 2020). Pupils who could not understand the medium of instruction will be highly demotivated. Nigeria is one of the countries in Africa where pupils started learning a foreign language or non-relatable indigenous language (Tom-Lawyer, Thomas, & Kalane, 2021). Most privately owned primary schools opt for a monolingual method of instruction to evade the imprecision and complexity of choosing a language of environment (Akinkurolere & Seru, 2023). Thereby, pupils are motivated to learn in the English language, which also serves as an official language.

Comparatively, learners from minority language groups in Zimbabwe find it difficult to integrate well into the school system as they are marginalised by those from the majority groups. For example, the recognition of Shona and Ndebele as national languages makes these languages more prestigious than minority languages. Minority language learners may find themselves in a situation where they are negatively labelled by learners who speak the national languages. For example, Hang'ombe and Mumpande (2020) note that the exclusion of

the Tonga language in the education system prior to the enactment of the 2013 Constitution led to dehumanising discourse about the Tonga people and this led to school dropouts among Tonga speaking primary school learners. Thus, the continued exclusion of learners' home languages in the education system may impact negatively on them to an extent that they may be forced to drop out of school.

Lack of Parental Support

Another issue the policy gave birth to was lack of parental support. The findings from various scholars also indicated that there is lack of support from parents as regards their children's education (Mokibelo & Moumakwa, 2006; Mokibelo, 2014; Bolaane & Saugestad, 2006; Motshabi, 2006). For example, parents do not understand the languages of the school. Therefore, it is the policy that leaves them out because indigenous languages are not recognised in schools and classrooms. In rural and remote areas, some parents do not stay with their children because children stay alone in hostels to access education. Therefore, in most cases, parents do not contribute to their children's education by assisting with homework. Further, children who stay with their parents or grandparents are still left out because their parents are illiterate and only speak their home languages. This means that whenever children bring homework, they cannot be assisted by their parents. Similarly, it is difficult for some parents to attend Parents Teachers Association meetings because they do not understand the school's official languages. Hence, some see no reason to attend such meetings because they cannot contribute anything, and they may not understand what the teachers are saying. This is a dilemma of the policy.

Similarly, children in Nigerian primary schools do not enjoy parental support when their tasks are in English language. This is prevalent among illiterate parents of Primary 4-Primary 6 pupils. A recent study on the Nigeria scenario of language-in-education in primary level has two categories of parents, which are parents interested in the use of English language and those promoting the use of indigenous language (Akinkurolere & Seru, 2023). Most educated parents send their children to private schools while the parents of pupils in public schools enjoy communication in major indigenous languages during meetings and visitations but parents who do not understand any major indigenous language are alienated from effective communication. The attitudes of parents toward the medium of instruction are a significant factor affecting the language-in-education policy in Nigeria.

In Zimbabwe, parents want their children to learn through the English language. For example, 58.6% of parents in Magwa's (2015) study wanted their children to be taught using English as the official medium of instruction. Like in Ndamba's (2013) and Mhindu's (2016) findings, parents in Magwa's study felt that knowledge of English Language opens up a lot of job opportunities and as such, it is "…logical for Africans in the country to realize that knowledge of spoken and written English is more useful and economically rewarding than enhanced knowledge of the local indigenous languages" (Magwa, 2015, p. 13). This kind of thinking by parents makes it difficult to realise the benefits of using indigenous languages as the medium of instruction (MOI) in the Zimbabwean education context and it impacts negatively on the implementation of the language-in-education policy.

English Preferred by Teachers

The results of the policy emerge as teachers having indicated that they preferred English over the use of Setswana or even indigenous languages (Molosiwa & Mokibelo, 2010; Mokibelo, 2023). This is common in most African countries where English is glorified than our own languages. In schools, school administrators

and teachers mount school policies that echo "English speaking zone" and some children never enter such zones because they do not speak English.

Similarly, Nigeria situation indicates that most pupils are taught in English language in both Year 1 and Year 2. Counihan, Humble, Gittins, and Dixon (2022) conducted a study on the teachers' literacy programme and its effect on pupils reading abilities in Nigeria and it was found out that 97.4% of primary one pupils speak both English and mother tongue in school while 68% of the pupils never use English language at home. Indeed, it is a shock that this situation contradicts the stipulation of Federal Republic of Nigeria - Revised National Policy on Education (2013). This is because teachers prefer to communicate with the pupils in English language or both English language and indigenous language rather than indigenous languages only.

Like in Botswana and Nigeria, teachers in Zimbabwe have a negative attitude towards the use of indigenous languages in education. Findings from Magwa's (2015) study indicate that, overall, teachers and lecturers preferred English to mother tongue in terms of its use as the MOI. According to his research findings, 67.5% of teachers and lecturers indicated that they preferred English as opposed to Shona or Ndebele to be medium of instruction in education. In such circumstances, MTE policy implementation becomes impossible because the supposed implementers of such prefer the English language to local languages as the medium of instruction.

Policy Inertia

For decades, research indicated that the language-in-education policy disadvantaged learners in the lower primary schools, especially children from the so-called ethnic minority groups. Suggestions and recommendations have been made to the Ministry of Education and the government to invest in having an inclusive policy to accommodate indigenous languages in the classrooms. Earlier, the reception to these suggestions was lukewarm with no effective intervention strategies in place. Teacher aides who did not speak some of the Indigenous languages were placed in classrooms but could not address the language barrier effectively; some children were still left out. Further, the research indicated the need to research on languages that are not in print by engaging linguists to research and document them. This process has been slow. In 2022, the government drew an inclusive language policy for Early Childhood Education and conducted workshops for teachers on teaching in multilingual set ups. However, this has not taken ground. These are baby steps to show commitment. But we are yet to see the initiative taking off the ground. A strong political will to change this scenario and to see education for all as an investment could propel a fast move to transform this unpleasant situation.

In Botswana, the teachers and school heads and heads of department reported that there was language barrier in the classrooms, no common language between teachers and students, the distance between the languages of the school and the learners home languages was significant, learners grappled with the content and structure of the two languages at the same time, high school dropout, and parents could not assist because of illiteracy. This could mean that no effective teaching and learning took place, and the classrooms were packed with children who suddenly could not express themselves or absorb any information due to the language barrier.

The Nigerian experience of little effort or motivation in implementing the language-in-education policy is policy oddity, which has been identified as a common challenge in Africa (Igboanusi & Peter, 2016). Even though the research of Counihan et al. (2022) indicates that the three major indigenous languages, Yoruba, Igbo,

and Hausa, should serve as the medium of instruction in the lower primary, many pupils have a different language of environment, but neither is implemented in some schools, especially private primary schools (Akinkurolere & Seru, 2023).

This, further, implies that the policy is not effectively implemented or undermined. This is premised on the fact that vagueness, inconsistencies, and imprecision are observed in the clauses of language-in-education policy as the linguistic situation varies from one region to another. The ineffective policy implementation is, also, due to a lack of support system and political will in different regions in Nigeria (Young et al., 2023). Minor language speakers may not be motivated to learn in another indigenous language that is categorised as a major language.

Findings from Mhindu's (2016) study showed that MTE education policy implementation in Zimbabwe is difficult because the government has not shown seriousness on its importance. McKenzie and Walker (2013) observe that one of the central contributory factors to the success of a MTE policy is that government should show strong political will to support mother tongue learning. This has not been the case with MTE in Zimbabwe. Participants in Mhindu's (2016) study indicated that the way the 2006 MTE policy is stated shows that the government of Zimbabwe does not want to commit itself to the use of local languages as mediums of instruction. It says local languages "may" be used as mediums of instruction in areas where the listed languages are spoken. This has negatively impacted on the use of these languages as mediums of instruction since it is left in the hands of teachers whether or not to use them. Findings showed that education officials have not tried to train teachers on how the policy should be implemented. As a result, teachers had different interpretations of the policy, and this negatively affected its implementation. In addition, no follow-ups were made on whether teachers at the elementary level were using Shangani for teaching and learning.

The above findings were consistent with Ndamba's (2013) findings in her study on the implementation of Shona (a national language) as the MOI. She established that there was lack of commitment on the part of policymakers as they did not make any effort to disseminate information to make teachers aware that the mother language could now be used as the medium of instruction up to Grade Seven level. Such lack of commitment to enlighten implementers on the policy which should guide them in their day-to-day practice could be attributed to lack of political will, which results in continued vernacularisation of African indigenous languages because of colonial hangover (Chimhundu, 1997, as cited by Ndamba, 2013).

Resource Limitations

Botswana has not yet trained teachers for indigenous languages. It is only through the efforts of Bokamoso Preschool—an NGO-sponsored school that there are San teachers who teach at a preschool. Further, there are some materials in print in Nama and Naro for children to use at preschools. However, the government is still lagging in training teachers in these indigenous languages to place them in schools where they are needed.

There are limited human and material resources. Trained teachers in indigenous languages are needed for the implementation of language-in-education policy (Zira & Zumo, 2020). In Nigeria, most teachers were trained using English language as the medium of instruction and they are still expected to teach pupils using indigenous language. This reality is awkward since the teachers cannot give what they do not have.

The availability of teaching materials and finance to support indigenous language materials and teachers are pivotal to the success of the policy. No wonder, Ndukwe (2015) found that the scarcity of indigenous

languages textbooks and materials is inhibiting effective delivery of instruction in indigenous languages aside from the fact that the few indigenous language teachers lack a training that aligns with the core statements of language-in-education policy in Nigeria. In addition, most of the available indigenous language teachers lack motivation (Araromi, 2018).

Findings of Mhindu's (2016) study showed that the Zimbabwean government has not considered the language spoken by teachers when deploying them to schools. According to the Shangani speaking participants of the study, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MOPSE) should have ensured that proficient Shangani teachers were deployed in Shangani speaking schools to ensure its use as medium of instruction. Sending in non-Shangani speaking teachers to these schools, according to the research participants, is a subtle way of saying the Shangani language is not important and should not be used as the MOI. That is why the Shona teachers in the three schools were grappling with teaching Shangani speaking learners because of their limited knowledge of the Shangani language. This situation led to non-implementation of the MTE policy as Shona speaking teachers (who happened to be the majority) used English and sometimes code-switched to Shona during lesson delivery.

Another challenge to MTE policy implementation in Zimbabwe was on unavailability of material resources to support the use of the indigenous languages as the MOI. Findings in Mhindu's (2016) study show that all textbooks and teachers' guides were in English, and hence, teachers had to translate from English to Shangani because pupils must learn through the language, they understand better (Shangani), yet the books are in the English language. Both Shangani and Shona speaking teachers highlighted that it was difficult to implement an MTE policy where resources were not available. The situation was even worse for non-Shangani speaking teachers who had to ask colleagues to help them translate the material from English to Shangani as they could not do it themselves due to their non-proficiency in the language. This led to non-implementation of the MTE policy.

Societal Attitudes

Previous research indicated that parents and teachers prefer that their children be taught in English (Molosiwa & Mokibelo, 2010). The reasons varied: that their languages were not recognised in the education system and the world of work; that their languages would not give their children jobs and therefore they would want their children to be taught in English. Teachers on the other hand saw it unfit to learn indigenous languages because they will be looked down upon because knowing English is prestigious. While this was the issue in previous research, the scenario has changed now; parents want their children to be taught in their languages for conceptualisation. They have admitted that their children are not effectively learning due to English because some have experienced the say issue. In this regard, this attitude is slowly changing for parents and learners to be proud of their languages and culture.

Research showed that Nigerian citizens demonstrate cold attitudes towards using indigenous languages in primary schools. A specific study conducted in junior schools indicated that societal value is one of the three indicators of language implementation in schools apart from teaching materials and method of teaching (Alufohai, 2019). Some of the observed attitudes include inferiority versus superiority of indigenous languages especially among citizens whose languages have either been categorized as major or minor. This has significantly reduced the will to implement the statement on the "language of the environment" for early primary school pupils.

According to Vwamse's (2023) study, Nigerians priortised the foreign language while undermining the indigenous languages in education. Also, the divide of urbanism versus ruralism concerning the benefits and perceptions of international language such as English language, and on the use of indigenous languages which those in urban settings regard as less beneficial while those in rural settings believe is more useful in a multilingual nation like Nigeria contributing to the challenges experienced on the implementation of indigenous languages as languages-in-education at the primary level. More so, varying attitudes are observed in different zones as Southern and Northern parts of Nigeria demonstrate different attitudes (Ogunmodimu, 2015; Ibrahim, 2021).

Findings from Mhindu's (2016) study indicate that school heads in the three schools where the study was conducted had negative attitudes towards the use of Shangani as the Medium of Instruction. Despite the heads being aware of the 2006 policy provisions on the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, they discouraged the use of Shangani as the MOI. Those who taught using the Shangani were reminded that they should use the English language instead. The research established that these school heads were speakers of one of the national languages, Shona. This observation led to the conclusion that Shona speaking school heads in the three schools seemed to be holding on to the belief that major languages like Shona were superior to the so-called minority languages, hence, their open condemnation of the use of Shangani as the MOI. On the other hand, encouraging teachers to use the English language could be a pointer to colonial thinking that local languages were inadequate and could not be used as languages of instruction.

Researches by other scholars show that stakeholders in the Zimbabwean education system have negative attitudes towards the use of indigenous languages (major or minority) as mediums of instruction. For example, research by Ndamba (2013) revealed that parents had negative attitudes towards the use of Shona as the MOI, to such an extent that they even contemplated withdrawing their children from schools where a mother tongue policy was enforced. On the other hand, teachers were also unwilling to use ChiShona as the MOI even if textbooks were translated to Shona. Both teachers and parents in Ndamba's (2013) study had negative attitudes towards the mother language which they considered to be of no value to the education of a child and the subsequent future world of employment.

Solutions: A Critical Theory Approach

The solutions to the challenges identified in the implementation of language-in-education policies in the three countries require a critical approach. There should be pressure from the government to enforce compliance. The use of power to implement policies is a key idea of critical theory in education (Cummins, 2000). This will reduce policy inertia significantly. The political will to enforce compliance and fund human and material resources such as teaching materials, teachers' training, supervision and monitoring agencies must be in place. This will also reduce school drop-out rates in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe.

Even though the use of indigenous languages at primary school level remains challenging, it is still recognised as the best effort in any multilingual country. The solutions to the above problems demand that the ministries of education, in the three countries, should be concerned about the children who are not learning effectively in the classrooms. They cannot be ignored because they are missing in the education system. They are missing in their contribution towards their country's economy, in political circles, in social environments, and in education. This means that there must be a political will to change the scenarios and have inclusive policies that will encompass all student populations for them to benefit from the education system.

It is clear that resistance and struggle are common ideas of Critical Theory that influenced the marginalization of indigenous languages but, in consonance with the position of Hossain and Pratt (2008), the preservation of linguistic diversity is a right and sustenance of social equity, which has existed due to struggle within education and resistance to language-in-education policies. The educational systems, in the select countries, are to disabuse the minds of citizens and orientate them to not only embrace indigenous languages as mediums of instruction in primary education but also cater for the marginalised whose languages are different from the ones stipulated in the policies. The educational institutions' indigenous language support system should be introduced and sustained to ensure the major indigenous languages do not dominate the primary education language policies to the detriment of minor languages.

Societal attitudes and lack of parental support are ideological issues. Critical Theory in language education recognizes the influence of beliefs. Parents and other anti-indigenous languages are resistant because of their beliefs that the English language provides more opportunities for the pupils' academic success. This aligns with the concern of Akinkurolere and Seru (2023) on why parents prefer private schools (Nigeria) or English-medium schools (Botswana) to public schools. This reason is based on ideology, which should be addressed for a social change in the countries.

An inclusive language-in-education policy that allows home languages of learners to be used in classrooms and schools is necessary to build a solid foundation in learning. This should be followed by training teachers from indigenous groups to teach their own in their languages. This could be a game changer to make an overhaul of the policies and classroom learning. Such inclusive language-in-education policies come with political will and costs to invest in education. This is in tandem with Critical Theory's emphasis on education as a practice of freedom, aimed at empowering learners to challenge and change oppressive structures (Freire, 1970). More opportunities arise when language-in-education policies highlight the benefits derived from linguistic diversity as a pivotal to the development of the nations (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). Through the lenses of critical theory, Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe should cater for the linguistic-educational needs of all, irrespective of their languages by addressing the capability of education to uphold justice and equity. This review of language-in-education policies and practices recognizes and appreciates the linguistic nature, diversity, and rights of the marginalised groups in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, to argue for justice in their educational systems (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

It may be difficult to adopt all indigenous languages in primary schools, but it is still social justice, as upheld in critical theory, to ensure all primary school pupils are culturally fit in the primary schools (Hossain & Pratt, 2008). Human resource such as bilingual and multilingual teachers could fill the gaps by providing students learning opportunities in languages understood by the pupils, of which, there is little evidence that ministries of education and primary school boards consider proficiency in indigenous languages or languages of the immediate environment when recruiting, posting, or transferring teachers in Botswana's, Nigeria's, and Zimbabwe's primary schools.

Conclusion

The use of language in education develops a sense of belonging and pride among pupils, reflecting their cultural background. Thus, inclusion policies could build cultural bonds while also promoting a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment. Teacher training and professional development are critical for achieving linguistic inclusion goals. Educators must be prepared to teach indigenous languages successfully,

with proper resources and training programs, to establish environments that promote linguistic diversity and cultural respect. This can help improve the situation in countries like Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe so that minority language learners can fully benefit from the language-in-education policies.

This review has proved that insights from theoretical frameworks could be deployed to review papers by identifying relevant themes from literatures and connecting the key ideas of the theory to relatable thoughts on the themes. Hence, the views of the theory are further expanded and situated in scholarly works. The paper has, indeed, added a voice to academic discourse on language-in-policy education, applicability of critical theory in education, and linguistic diversity in primary education in Botswana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe.

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