Journal for Language Teaching **57(2) 2023, 20 pages**
https://doi.org/10.56285/jltVol57iss2a5836

African languages as media of assessment in the teaching of indigenous languages in higher education: A paradigm shift

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ABSTRACT

This study advocates a paradigm shift in the language of assessment in higher education, specifically in Teaching Practice at a Zimbabwean State University. Despite the university's language policy emphasizing the instruction of African languages in their respective languages, this research explores challenges faced by student teachers of African languages, who are taught and examined through indigenous languages in all modules except for Teaching Practice.

Using a qualitative approach, the study interviews ten randomly selected student teachers specializing in ChiShona, along with ChiShona section and Teaching Practice coordinators. Document analysis of assessment reports supplements the findings. The study reveals that English instruments used for assessing students in work-related training were designed for supervisors not specializing in indigenous languages, leading to translation difficulties for both supervisors and supervisees during document preparation and lesson delivery. Limitations imposed on ChiShona student teachers due to difficulties in interpreting the English instrument hinder their full potential. The conclusion asserts that using English in assessing Teaching Practice for African languages compromises quality in both practice and supervision. It recommends the use of assessment instruments in indigenous languages for more effective evaluation.

Keywords: African languages, supervision/assessment, higher education, indigenous medium, teaching practice, ChiShona

CITATION

Viriri, E. &. Ndimande-Hlongwa, N. 2023. African languages as media of assessment in the teaching of indigenous languages in higher education: A paradigm shift. *Journal for Language Teaching* 57(2): Article 5836.

eISSN: 2958-9320

1. Introduction

The issue of which languages to use in formerly colonised African education systems has led to growing debates with countries struggling to make standing decisions. This area of transforming language policies to accommodate the use of indigenous languages in education has become "an everlasting experimentation and argumentation" (Ogechi2009: 145). As Africa's member states gradually gained their independence from the British colonisers, Pan-African voices have been heard calling for the decolonisation of language in education throughout the education systems. Tanzania was the first to review its language policy with boldness, replacing English with Kiswahili as a medium of instruction in primary education in 1964. Other governments as shown in the following paragraph followed in introducing African languages as media of instruction in primary education but with hesitation. To address this pertinent issue, in 1997, African states met in Harare in Zimbabwe to discuss viable language policies for the continent. According to Thondhlana (2002: 31), it is at this UNESCO inter-governmental event that, "representatives made a commitment to seriously take positive steps towards implementing language planning and policy that, among other issues, takes into account the raising of the status and usage of indigenous languages." However, it is disturbing to note that decades after the commitment was made, most if not all, African language policies have largely remained exoglossic (Akumbu & Chiatoh, 2013).

Language policies across Africa demonstrate that governments have half-heartedly committed themselves to the cause. For example, in Tanzania, Kiswahili is the sole language of instruction at primary level whereas English is taught as a subject, but students must pass state exams which are conducted in English for them to be accepted into secondary schools (Boumill & Lee 2021). From secondary school onwards, English is the medium of instruction. Although in 1985 Tanzania decided to replace English with Kiswahili in secondary and higher education gradually, this has never been implemented until now (Boumill & Lee 2021). In Kenya, the mother tongue is used as the language of instruction in the elementary grades (Grades 1-3) and English is taught as a subject. From Grade 4 upwards, English becomes the medium of instruction (Spernes & Ruto-Korir 2018). In Nigeria, English is the official medium of instruction from primary to higher education level (Ozoemena et al. 2021). In Zimbabwe, indigenous languages are expected to be the media of instruction at Early Childhood Development (ECD) level and may be used up to Grade 7. From secondary level upwards, English takes over as the sole medium of instruction. Last but not least, in South Africa, the mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction in Grades 1-3 while English is introduced as a subject in Grades 1 and 2. Learners then shift to English as the language of instruction from Grade 4onwards. Although South Africa has a multilingual language policy, just like in the other countries mentioned above, students are taught in English (Department of Basic Education, 2010). From these examples, it can be concluded that Africa has only, to a limited extent, attended to the decolonisation agenda in primary school. At secondary and higher education levels, indigenous languages are still totally marginalised. However, the expectation

is that all the levels of African education systems should be taught in the mother tongue (Prah 2003). Governments have taken a *laissez-faire* approach towards the project; they have not committed themselves to crafting language policies that genuinely address the promotion of education using indigenous languages.

What triggered this research is that some education systems, especially in universities are still using foreign languages for the teaching and assessment of indigenous languages. Zimbabwe is one such country that has given institutions of higher learning the autonomy of deciding their own language policies in the teaching of indigenous languages. According to Mazuruse and Mberi (2012), the universities have not yet agreed on the medium to use when teaching African languages. Only one university out of the five that offer African languages has boldly introduced local languages as mediums of teaching and learning for African languages. The rest continue to use English. This freedom of choice, however, compromises the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF)'s agenda for the production of uniform qualifications across universities. This study, therefore, is in line with Chiwome and Thondhlana's (1989) call for the use of indigenous languages in the teaching of African languages in Zimbabwean higher education with particular reference to Shona. It targets one state institution that has maintained English as the language for supervision in three Teaching Practice modules despite the fact that teaching and examining in all the other eleven African language subject modules is done through indigenous languages. This discord in policy implementation draws back efforts to promote African languages in education. The study seeks to identify reasons for the continued use of English as the language for supervising student teachers specialising in ChiShona in particular when the Shona language is the official medium of instruction. The study also seeks to investigate the challenges faced by pre-service students and make recommendations towards the promotion of the Shona language in the supervision of ChiShona student teachers. The results can then be applied and generalised to IsiNdebele and XiTsonga, the other indigenous language subjects taught in teacher education at the university.

Bachelor of Education secondary programme and Teaching Practice

Teaching Practice is an integral part of teacher training whereby student teachers experience actual teaching in real learning environments (Kiggundu & Nayimuli 2009). In this four-year Bachelor of Education Secondary Pre-service dual honours teacher development programme, students go for Teaching Practice in their third year of study. During the first two years, they will be at university studying subject content and professional modules that will later help them in their work-related learning. It is in the second year that students are introduced to aspects of Teaching Practice. They go for Home Area Teaching Practice in their first-semester break. During this period, students are limited to observing qualified teachers in their areas of teaching specialisation. In the second semester, in addition to content and professional modules, two

modules that focus on Teaching Practice are added in preparation for third year work-related learning. For those who study African languages, all modules are taught in the respective indigenous languages.

To equip them for Teaching Practice, the Pedagogic Studies module covers syllabus interpretation, scheming, planning, evaluation, how to deliver lessons, the teaching of different topics/language components, teaching methods, media, records keeping, assessment and evaluation, resource mobilisation, time management, class management etc. Zeroing in on the ChiShona subject, these are taught and practiced in Shona. Micro-Teaching, a module where students practise teaching through short teaching sessions and get feedback from their lecturers in order to refine their skills and prepare them for real teaching settings, is again done in Shona but examined in English. When they get to their work stations and schools in the third year, everything is put into practice. For ChiShona, everything is done in Shona under the guidance of a mentor who is a ChiShona specialist. The mentor and university supervisors are expected to supervise the student teachers' work in English. After successfully completing Teaching Practice, students come back for their final year where research on teaching practice experiences is key and is done in Shona. This study, therefore, questions the logic behind the continued use of English in supervision when students are prepared and do practice through the medium of an indigenous language. The three modules in question are Micro-Teaching, University-Based Supervision, and School-Based Supervision.

2. The concept of supervision in teaching practice

Adenrele (2019:4) defines teaching practice supervision as "a learning-by-doing process that attracts scoring for certification in teacher education programmes" while Ali and Khalid (2015: 427) explain it as involving "guiding, helping, correcting, advising, assessing and even showing the pupil-teacher how to teach better." The two descriptions show that teaching practice supervision is a continuation of the teaching-learning process which entails reflection on the student teacher's competencies and awarding of marks for performance. Although there are different types of models, clinical supervision is the most common and applicable to the case under investigation. In this style, the supervisor and student teacher engage in a face-to-face review of the performance observation cooperatively identifying strengths and weaknesses and suggesting the way forward. After the discussion, the supervisor provides written feedback that should enable the student teacher to:

i. "relate his/her teaching experiences to previous academic training and current professional preparation and practice
ii. use past learning and help himself/herself develop understandings by applying prior experience and knowledge in classroom situations" (Martin & Atteh 2021: 51);
iii. "improve on the necessary skills, competencies, personal characteristics and experiences for full-time teaching after graduation and iv) discover his/her own

> strengths and weaknesses in teaching to consolidate and overcome them respectively" (Adenrele 2019: 4).

Hence, Teaching Practice is strongly connected to the university theory modules and as such, supervision should emphasise taught knowledge and practices and help the student teacher to develop.

3. Literature review

Intellectuals in Zimbabwe are strongly against the continued use of English especially in the teaching of indigenous languages at all levels of the education system. They, therefore, call for the introduction of the respective languages as media of instruction in all institutions of higher learning. Chiwome and Thondhlana (1989) studied the teaching of ChiShona through the medium of Shona and English in high schools and universities and found out that Shona was much preferred over English because of the following advantages:

- the language becomes living, that is, students can actually see the language in wider use;
- it fosters and ensures understanding;
- it has a greater impact because of the absence of communication barriers;
- students experience fewer problems with expression;
- students become creative as they have to improve and create terminology to use in writing;
- using Shona encourages the assimilation of English terms into Shona;
- examples can easily be given in the context;
- rote learning can be avoided because students understand more;
- it encourages the discovery and exploitation of the riches of the language; and
- some topics are better discussed in Shona, for example, topics on cultural studies (Chiwome & Thondhlana 1989: 167).

They, therefore, recommended the use of indigenous languages in their teaching at all levels. Despite their call, the English language has continued to dominate in the teaching of indigenous languages in universities.

Mazuruse and Mberi (2012: 2030) explored the issue of which language(s) should be used for teaching and learning in the Zimbabwean higher education system. Focusing on the teaching of ChiShona, they indicated that only one out of three universities that teach ChiShona has made efforts to use this language in teaching and learning while the other two continue to use English as the medium of instruction. However, in their study, it was revealed that, although the policy of the university in question "categorically states the need for the exclusive use of indigenous languages in the learning of African languages, there is a general tendency to use Shona and English in learning Shona." Lecturers were failing to use Shona exclusively in the delivery of lectures. The researchers therefore recommended the use of the "mother tongue as

this may also lead to its use in the public domain and empower its speakers to participate in the activities of the nation" (Mazuruse & Mberi 2012: 2034).

Gudhlanga and Makaudze (2012), in their study on the promotion of an African language, Shona, as a medium of instruction were concerned about the fact that so many years after independence, all universities except the Great Zimbabwe University still use English as the medium of instruction to teach ChiShona. Up to now, ten years after this study, the situation is still the same. They feel that Great Zimbabwe university students who study ChiShona are more advantaged than their counterparts in other universities where English is used to teach indigenous languages because "they have two experiences of the same concept. Firstly, they are taught the concepts in Shona, a language they are more comfortable with, and then, they read about the same concepts in the English texts. Their grasp of the same concepts is thus made vivid and fairly easy." They thus conclude that it is high time that indigenous languages were taught through the medium of the respective language and this study extends the call to the supervision of work-related learning. The current study challenges the continued use of English in the assessment of ChiShona Teaching Practice Modules and explores the challenges encountered by student teachers.

Research across Africa has demonstrated the capability of indigenous languages in teaching at all levels of education. In cases where a foreign language is the official medium of instruction, indigenous languages are employed too. For example, Ogechi (2009) investigated the use of English and other Kenyan languages in primary schools. The researcher found out that although in terms of policy, English was the medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards, practice differed as English and indigenous languages complemented each other during the teaching-learning process.

In another study in secondary schools, research has also shown that indigenous languages can be effectively used in the teaching of all subjects in the school curriculum. A study done by Viriri & Viriri (2013) in Zimbabwean secondary schools showed a widespread tendency to use Shona or a mixture of English and Shona by most teachers and learners in all classes and subjects although officially English was the sole medium of instruction.

Reilly (2019) studied language use in Malawian Universities. He focused on how students and staff made use of their multilingual linguistic repertoires in teaching, learning and socializing, their attitudes towards the suitability of particular languages within higher education and the impact this could have on educational policy. Results from his study showed that the universities are multilingual and translanguaging occurs in both social and academic contexts. However, English remained dominant in education whilst Chichewa dominated in social contexts. Participants had negative attitudes towards the sole use of any indigenous language as a medium of instruction but showed positive attitudes towards the use of a multilingual medium of instruction. The researcher proved the prevalence of indigenous languages in teaching and learning at the three levels of education in Africa, a pointer to the great potential in indigenous languages.

The continued use of English as the sole medium of instruction has posed so many challenges in the teaching-learning process (Shizha 2012). In Zimbabwe, where Shizha explored the effect of teaching Science in rural primary schools through English, a second language which is unfamiliar to the indigenous learners in Zimbabwe, he discovered that the "use of English as a medium of instruction in primary schools was the main factor that silenced students in classes" (Shizha 2012: 879). Learners did not participate during discussions because they had not mastered the language of instruction. English demotivated learners and minimized their involvement in learning activities such that teachers ended up doing most of the talking while learners remained passive recipients because they were forced to go through their learning in a language they did not understand and therefore frustrated them. Learner-centered pedagogy was difficult in a foreign language since students were marginalised and silenced by lack of English proficiency. He therefore recommended re-visioning and transforming of the language of teaching in Zimbabwean schools. He says

> education in Zimbabwe should be conducted in indigenous languages in all cycles of the formal education system (primary, secondary and tertiary) and attitudes must be shifted away from overestimating the role of the foreign language (English) as a tool for learning and teaching, and towards a positive recognition of the value and significance of the indigenous languages" (Shizha 2012: 883).

Studies in other countries have also proved that indigenous languages can even be used in the teaching and assessment of all subjects with success. Sugarman and Villegas (2020) report that by Spring 2020, 31 states in the United States plus a district in Columbia offered native language assessments mostly in Maths and Science and sometimes in reading, language arts and social studies among K-12 English learners. These assessments were done in Spanish which is the most prevalent home language among the English Learners (ELs) in most states. Hawaii offers tests in Hawaiian. Michigan, New York and Washington also offered tests in multiple non-English languages. Their report reveals that the native assessments are effective for English learners and those receiving instruction in native languages as the system is designed to ensure equitable access to quality education for all students.

4. Theoretical framework

Decoloniality

This study is anchored on the decoloniality theory which seeks to transform indigenous languages that have been previously marginalised in education. Decoloniality is a project which aims at freeing or liberating the formerly colonised human race from the western colonial dictates. It focuses on the various areas that have suffered coloniality, for example, the domains of culture, the psyche, mind, language, aesthetics and religion of the people who were colonised (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015: 484). The process "confronts Eurocentric ideas and rationalities"

which led to colonialism; coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being." (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021: 83; 2015: 489). On the aspect of knowledge, it emphasises the adoption of indigenous knowledge systems that are non-conforming to the European knowledge tradition imparted through the mother tongue. Thus, in the process of decolonisation, indigenous languages should be appreciated especially as languages of development, learning and determinants of certain ways of living (Mapara, 2023). Africa cannot give a blind eye to the linguistic effects colonialism has had on education, hence it should seek to transform the university language of teaching and learning.

5. Methodology

This research used the qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning people construct, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam 2009).Thus, it helps researchers in investigating challenges associated with phenomena such as the use of English in assessing students specialising in ChiShona as a taught subject and suggests the way forward. ChiShona was selected on the basis that it was the only indigenous language studied at the time the study for this article was carried out, although IsiNdebele and XiTsonga are also offered.

This article is a case study in design. Flyvbjerg (2011: 301) defines a case study as "an intensive analysis of an individual unit..." Informed by this definition, the study selected a single state University in Zimbabwe as the focal point of its research. The design enabled the researchers to describe, analyse and interpret real life experiences, thus exploring the use of African languages as media of assessment in the teaching of indigenous languages in higher education with the aim of gaining new knowledge which would inform policy development (de Vos et al. 2011). The case study design is criticised for providing little basis for scientific generalisation, hence, researchers used "the presentation of highly descriptive, detailed research findings, with adequate evidence" in the form of quotes from participants in interviews and document analysis to enhance the transferability of research results (Maxwell 2005: 16, cited in Merriam 2009). Therefore, the information from this study is applicable to all Zimbabwean teacher training institutions.

The study used both Shona and English languages to mediate the interview processes to allow participants to freely express themselves and grasp concepts. Interviews are defined as "a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participant questions to collect data and to learn about the ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours of the participant" (Maree and Pietersen, 2007: 87). Through these interviews, the researchers were able to solicit information on the use of English versus Shona in the assessment of Teaching Practice in African languages

directly from the participants. Two semi-structured interview schedules were drafted for ten out of twenty-six ChiShona student teachers and two coordinators, one for Teaching Practice and the other one for the ChiShona section. These enabled the researchers to gather in-depth and complete information so as to gain a detailed understanding of the issue under study.

Interviews with coordinators were conducted face-to-face. They were interviewed because the Teaching Practice Coordinator was the rich source for Teaching Practice issues whilst the ChiShona Coordinator was the person answerable to section issues.

Indigenous language student teachers were involved because they were on the ground and directly experienced assessment practice in teaching African languages through a foreign language. Student teachers were interviewed over the phone as they were dotted around the country and the researchers could not access each one of them physically. No major problems were encountered except that the researchers could not get in touch with a few student teachers in time.

Document analysis was engaged as the second instrument to gather data for this study. It can be explained as a research method of analysing written, verbal or visual communication texts (Elo and Kyngas, 2008: 107). The technique was adopted in this study to analyse twenty Teaching Practice reports in order to examine the challenges posed by the language of assessment. It was advantageous as it gave direct access to information without interference from the supervisors and assessors, thereby enhancing objectivity (Kerlinger 1986). The researchers were able to determine the advantages of using African languages over a foreign language in the assessment of indigenous languages.

Student teachers who participated in interviews were randomly sampled to ensure that every population member had an equal chance of being selected and also to make sure that research findings approximate results for the entire population. The Teaching Practice coordinator and ChiShona subject coordinator were purposively sampled as key players. The first set of ten analysed reports was randomly selected and the other ten were purposively selected for comparison with the first batch of reports.

The study considered important ethical issues. Permission to carry out the study was sought from the Teaching Practice Office. Student teachers were fully informed of the purpose of the study, and they volunteered to participate. Since some of the issues under discussion were sensitive, confidentiality and anonymity were emphasised and the researchers protected participants from any harm by using pseudonyms to hide their identities. Participants therefore contributed honest and reliable opinions (Wiles et al. 2006).

6. Findings

Reasons for the continued use of English

English has enjoyed the dominant role in the supervision of student teachers studying indigenous languages for over a decade now even though all the other modules are taught and examined through the respective languages. Reasons for the continued use of English in the supervision of students specialising in ChiShona on work-related learning were sought from the Teaching Practice coordinator and the ChiShona Section coordinator referred to as Participants 1 and 2 in the text.

From the interviews, it was indicated that supervision was easy for assessors when conducted through the same language for all students considering that student teachers specialised in various subjects most of which were taught through English. Participant 1said:

> *The use of English across subjects including Indigenous languages makes the supervisors' work a bit easy in that they will not have to switch from one language to the other as they supervise students in different learning areas.*

These results concur with the observation by the South African Department of Basic Education that even in the countries that have promoted the use of indigenous languages, African language speakers prefer foreign languages over theirs (Department of Basic Education 2010).

Due to large numbers of student teachers in schools, some supervisors preferred to give feedback to their students at once in groups. Using English would 'cater' for all. Participant 1 added:

> *When supervisors go out on teaching practice, they supervise a sizeable number of students each, so using one language, English, enables them to engage in group reviews after observations. Thus, allowing them to move to the next schools in time.*

This was done despite the fact that Teaching Practice supervision is a continuation of the teaching–learning process which should take place in the official medium for students to benefit. Subjects should continue to be 'taught' in the official media used at the university during the Teaching Practice period. Providing feedback in groups therefore disadvantaged indigenous language students.

One reason that featured in both participants' responses was that ChiShona student teachers were not always supervised by the specialists who were comfortable with Shona terminology but lecturers from other subjects who had negative attitudes towards the use of Shona were also engaged.

Participant 1 indicated:

> *Student teachers practising ChiShona are many and spread all over the districts so if we use Shona in supervision, the specialists will be overwhelmed by the work because*

> *generally other lecturers have a negative attitude toward the use of Shona. By using English, lecturers from other subjects can help with supervision.*

Participant 2 confirmed:

> *We always have a large number of students in Teaching Practice and as specialists, we are few considering that students are in various districts too so lecturers from other sections who are used to teaching in English help us. As I see it, they don't have the right attitude towards the use of Shona.*

From the two responses, the researchers concluded that what was being prioritised was mere completion of supervision for certification at the expense of quality. How the process was done and the results of the exercise were not considered. The key teaching practice supervision elements of "guiding, helping, correcting, advising and even demonstrating how to teach better" were missed because supervisors were not proficient in the language of instruction and had a negative attitude towards its use (Ali & Khalid 2015: 427). From the responses, it was again deduced that English was preferred to include lecturers from other subjects in the supervision exercise because it had incentives.

Participant 2 had this to say:

> *I also think that the use of English was mainly meant to accommodate our colleagues from other subjects because Teaching Practice supervision has incentives. Using Shona would obviously kick them out because not all are familiar with the Shona linguistic terminology.*

This is despite the fact that Teaching Practice is the practical aspect of teacher education where student teachers "put theories and principles of education which they learnt in their university coursework into visible and tangible classroom performance" (Mutende 2017: 51). When the language of university learning and practising is not preferred in favour of 'insignificant factors', then the whole process is compromised.

Participant 1 also highlighted that English was used to cater for External Assessors. She said:

> *External assessors are selected from any language because Zimbabwe is a multilingual society. He/she can have Ndebele, Tsonga or Nambya as a first language, not Shona so English is neutral.*

This response defeats the purpose of promoting indigenous languages in a bid to decolonise higher education. Shona, Ndebele and Tsonga external assessors can be engaged in their respective areas of specialisation if the university is to produce quality teachers who can also safeguard African cultures. What interested the researchers is that after probing the coordinator, it was revealed that there has never been an external assessor solely for Teaching Practice but for individual subjects. The above response only points to the negative attitude among stakeholders towards the use of indigenous languages in the teaching and assessment of their subjects.

Although both participants were aware of the university policy on the teaching of African languages, they were reluctant to apply it in work-related learning. Participant 1 replied:

> *The scenario has never been questioned so the Teaching Practice office has not seen anything bad about it. If the ChiShona section had raised the issue, the office could have tasked them to prepare the proper instrument.*

Upon enquiry on why the section had allowed supervision of its students in a foreign language for quite so long when they were expected to implement the university language policy, Participant 2 replied:

> *That area has been overlooked for too long I admit, mainly because it is coordinated in another office. We will look into it as a section.*

Since all aspects of the assessment instrument were taught in Shona, it implied that the terminology was there. What was lacking is the commitment from the lecturers to prepare an instrument that could enhance quality supervision. This study agrees with Martin and Atteh (2021:50) who believe that Teaching Practice is a "very vital aspect of teacher education which needs full cooperation from the university authorities, tutors/lecturers, student teachers and cooperating schools in order to achieve its purpose". In this regard, responsible stakeholders should act together and give the issue the attention it deserves in order to produce quality ChiShona teachers.

Challenges faced by ChiShona student teachers

Interviewed student teachers raised quite a number of challenges they were facing due to the use of English during supervision.

All of the student participants indicated that being introduced to another language only during supervision was the greatest challenge. For example, Participant B said:

> *Being supervised in English on its own is a challenge to us because we are used to Shona as the only language of learning ChiShona. It brings confusion when you will be expecting to continue in the language of the subject. You become disoriented.*

Participant E questioned:

> *Why can't we be supervised using Shona and then English in the other subject? We are doing everything in Shona and when qualified we are expected to teach the subject in Shona again.*

All participants indicated that because of the foreign medium, they could not meaningfully contribute, argue, and participate during discussions after the observations. This was because the language of the subject was different from the assessment language. Teaching Practice is developmental as the student should keep on learning and advancing as the supervisors continue coming for assessment. This can only happen when the language used is motivating.

There can never be the perfection of ChiShona skills when they are not explained in the most appropriate language.

Participant C explained:

> *Even if we want to explain what we have learnt as expectations of the subject, we cannot because there is nowhere they are written in Shona.*

Participant I: *I just listen to them explaining their observations.*

Participant F added:

> *Vamwe vacho havatombodi chero kuisa zviShona kuti unzwisise saka ini ndonyara chero kuzobvunza neShona pandisina kunzwisisa.* [Some of them do not even code-switch to Shona to see to it that I have understood. I am shy to ask for clarifications in the Shona language].

The issue of using English throughout the supervision process was also identified during the analysis of reports. It was noticed that nine out of the ten reports used English as a sole medium of assessment. Only one written by a ChiShona specialist used Shona in key areas, especially on weaknesses and suggestions. This implied that only one student out of the ten benefitted to a certain extent and for others, the supervision was just procedural because language plays a pivotal role in the production and transmission of knowledge (Shizha 2012).There cannot be meaningful supervision when students are not comfortable with the language of learning when the option should be their first language or mother tongue.

Participant J raised a very pertinent issue when he said:

> *The supervisors write their reports in English but the suggestions should be effected in Shona. How can I improve because I don't have good translation skills? I just file the crit and ignore it as long as I get a good mark.*

When supervisors use English in both verbal and written reports for a subject that should be taught through an African language in the university and secondary school, is the aim of producing quality teachers being promoted? Why not use the indigenous language which they use in everything to do with the subject? Juxtaposing Shona terms with English ones or writing Shona comments can help the students. This will even improve their proficiency in the language. To make matters worse, it was observed that these students did not have translation courses throughout their programme. The students, therefore, did not make any effort to translate those supervision crits to make sense out of them. Even if they could try and translate, Shona does not have one-to-one equivalence with English in all dimensions, hence, the meaning could be distorted.

All the participants agreed that the interpretation of the assessment instrument during the preparation of records and lessons in order to meet its expectations was a challenge. For example, Participant F said:

> *In our work, we are guided by the crit so when preparing all my ChiShona records and lessons I refer to the instrument on how I should do it and the areas emphasised. The aspects are many so they need a constant reference so that I don't forget. It's a challenge because they are written in English.*

This instrument disadvantaged indigenous language students while giving those teaching the other subjects taught in English an upper hand. ChiShona students were taught these issues in Shona at the university. The assessment instrument should have been couched in Shona to remind them of the standards whenever there was a need. When expectations are communicated in a language foreign to the subject, then it ceases to be a guiding document.

Findings also pointed to the fact that mentors had negative attitudes towards the assessment instrument written in English because it demanded translation skills. Student teachers A, B, H, E, D and G raised this concern. Their responses revealed some acts of unprofessionalism that were triggered by the unwelcome instrument. For example, Participant A said:

> *Mamwe ma*Mentor *haasununguki ne*crit *racho, vanongozoti iwe nyora ivo vo*signer. [Some of the mentors are not comfortable with the instrument. They will ask you to write the report for yourself and will only sign].

Participant D reported:

> *Vamwe vanoti* University *yenyu inotipa basa apa kutozonyora neChiRungu*. [Some say your university is giving us a lot of work, and why writing (the crit) in English?]

This was reflected by the scoring in supervision reports. Matching university–based and school-based reports were then analysed to compare grades. The table below provides the information.

Table 1: University and School-based marks for ChiShona student teachers.

Participant	University-based supervision marks	School-based supervision marks
A	71	81
B	57	76
C	68	80
D	53	75
E	60	76
F	74	84
G	62	82
H	60	78
I	62	76
J	69	80

As displayed in Table 1, university-based marks were generally depressed while school-based were unreasonably high. The language question seemed to have been playing a role in both assessments. The two groups of marks suggested that indeed supervisors may not have been comfortable with the language of instruction and of assessment respectively. For mentors, it could have been due to lack of training on the university's English assessment tool especially because those who came through teacher training colleges were taught ChiShona through the sole medium of the language. For university lecturers, incompetence in the official medium of the subject was the main reason for giving depressed marks. According to Martin and Atteh (2021:53), "supervisors who passed through colleges of education are not properly qualified to operate as supervisors without special training offered to them to become professionals." When there is a lack of training and a mismatch between the language of teaching and that of assessment, then the issue of producing quality teachers becomes a cause for concern.

The lack of consensus on the part of supervisors in dealing with similar issues in ChiShona was pointed out by the student teachers. This was caused by their different interpretations of the instrument in relation to ChiShona documentation and lesson delivery. For example, Participant B complained:

> *Nemumwe wangu wandinoteacher naye tinoita tose marecords asi patakaonekwa documentation akapiwa 76% navamwe lecturer ini ndikapiwa 64% navamwe zvichinzi you are confusing terms asi ndoo zvatakadzidziswa mumwe wangu ndoo zvaari kutoitawo.*[With my colleague who also practise ChiShona at this school, we share notes and do record keeping together. When we were assessed, she was given 76% by another supervisor whilst I was awarded 64% by mine citing that I was confusing terms. This is what we were taught and this is what the other student is doing.]

This means that the language of assessment, among other things, brought about unfair measurement, disorientation, lack of confidence in supervisors and lack of uniformity in students' academic and professional preparation among ChiShona student teachers hence, the possibility of producing various kinds of teachers.

Participant G pointed out the issue of comments that were not informative. Analysed supervision reports revealed the same since some marks obtained by students did not match the remarks while some comments did not give enough detail as to why supervisors gave such marks. She said: *some of the comments are just one sentence per section saka handizozivi zvekugadzirisa.* [Some of the comments will be just one sentence so I don't know what I am supposed to work on to improve].

Her observation was confirmed in two reports. The comments were sketchy making it difficult to deduce how the assessors arrived at the awarded marks because they could not properly describe what they saw in the documents and what transpired during the lesson mainly because non-ChiShona specialists are limited in terms of the linguistic terminology used by students.

Here is one example from the documents: "The teacher is progressing very well but needs to work on Detailed Lesson Plans (DLPS) evaluation to make them more reflective 69%." Here is another similar comment: "The teacher is quite promising, but should have aims in the schemes of work and encourage students to write corrections always 62%". These depressed marks that are against largely positive comments may be a result of the discord between the language of documentation and lesson delivery and that of assessment. In his study of the challenges faced during teaching practice at a university in Kenya, Mutende (2017: 51) also found that summative assessment grades were lower than what the formative assessment comments suggested regarding the quality of student performance. As a result, students were left demotivated by the scores which compromised their final grades. Although the contributing factors may be different in the two universities, this seemed to be a common practice in Teaching Practice.

7. Conclusion

The researchers concluded that the marginalisation of African languages in the university is still a challenge. Although the university had made a bold decision to teach indigenous languages through respective languages, applying the policy in the assessment of work-related learning is taking too long. The current research revealed a mismatch between policy and practice since students specialising in indigenous languages were being supervised in English despite the policy calling for the use of the respective languages. This was mainly because university supervisors preferred to use one language across subjects for convenience. Some of these supervisors had a negative attitude towards the use of Shona because they were not comfortable with the Shona terminology. As a result, the use of English in supervising students who specialised in African languages compromised the quality of assessment and mentorship. Understanding and participation of student teachers during assessment was limited and some experienced negative attitudes from mentors who are not ChiShona specialists. The key Teaching Practice supervision elements of "guiding, helping, correcting, advising and even demonstrating how to teach better" were missed (Ali & Khalid 2015: 427). Hence, this compromised the quality of the product – the teacher thereafter. It was also observed that the quality of teaching during work-related learning and after qualification is directly linked to the quality of supervision during Teaching Practice. Therefore, to enhance quality in the teaching practice of indigenous language subjects and the product of the process, the study recommends realigning practice with policy and the adoption of respective languages as media of supervision. The use of indigenous languages in the teaching and learning not only of the respective languages but across curricula must be appreciated for meaningful business in higher education to take place.

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