

# The Effects of Cultural Erosion on Indigenous Language Development at the Early Childhood Level in Multicultural Societies in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of Chimanimani Area

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90300112>

Received: 17 February 2025; Accepted: 26 February 2025; Published: 03 April 2025

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of cultural erosion on indigenous language development among Early Childhood Development (ECD) children in the Chimanimani area of Zimbabwe. A mixed-methods approach was employed to explore the interplay between cultural practices, language use, and educational contexts. Findings reveal a significant decline in indigenous language use, attributed to factors such as globalization, media influence, and changing parental attitudes. The study underscores the importance of cultural practices and beliefs in fostering language acquisition and emphasizes the need for community-driven initiatives to promote indigenous language preservation. Recommendations include integrating indigenous languages into ECD curricula, developing culturally appropriate teaching materials, and fostering intercultural understanding. By addressing the challenges posed by cultural erosion, this research contributes to efforts to sustain linguistic diversity and cultural heritage in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** early childhood education, indigenous languages, linguistic diversity, cultural sustainability, multicultural societies, Zimbabwe.

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood development plays a crucial role in shaping one's lifetime learning trajectory and cultural identity formation. During the early years, children rapidly acquire language skills that lay the foundation for cognitive advancement and social functioning. In linguistically diverse societies, supporting the development of indigenous tongues alongside mainstream languages holds importance for nurturing cultural diversity and preserving ethnic heritages.

Zimbabwe represents a multicultural African nation characterized by a range of Bantu ethnic groups, each possessing unique languages, traditions and knowledge systems. While English serves as the official language, many Zimbabweans speak local dialects such as Shona, Ndebele, Kalanga and others in their day-to-day lives. To promote inclusiveness and empower marginalized populations, early childhood programs aim to foster young children's proficiency in both home languages and English. Chimanimani district exemplifies Zimbabwe's linguistic diversity, housing communities that speak Shona, Ndaou and English. Maintaining intergenerational transmission of minority languages like Ndaou holds significance for preserving the identity and wisdoms of the Ndaou people. However, sociocultural changes associated with modernization and urbanization threaten the viability of indigenous tongues. Younger generations increasingly interact through dominant languages at school and online rather than local dialects passed down by elders for centuries.

This study sought to examine the impacts of such dynamics on language development among preschool-aged children in Chimanimani. Specifically, it aimed to understand trends in home language usage and investigate challenges surrounding integration of ethnic tongues into early education. Findings aim to offer timely insights into supporting multilingualism and cultural continuity from the early years. With appropriate interventions, marginalized linguistic heritages could be strengthened to thrive alongside mainstream dialects for a future of inclusion and diversity.

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## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The issue of indigenous language retention in the face of social and economic changes has been a concern in Zimbabwe for decades. As a young nation that gained independence in 1980 after a long colonial history, Zimbabwe is still navigating its linguistic and cultural identity. On a personal level, having grown up in a peri-urban community where younger generations were losing proficiency in the local tribal language, researcher witnessed firsthand the intergenerational disconnect this caused.

Several recent studies have documented the phenomenon of language shift occurring across Zimbabwe. Dube and Ndlovu (2022) examined linguistic diversity trends and found an increasing preference for dominant languages among youth, even in traditionally minority-language areas. Their analysis of census and survey data from 2002 to 2022 revealed a significant decline in the number of people reporting non-English home languages. Similarly, Moyo (2021) attributed the drift away from indigenous tongues to urban migration patterns, which uprooted families from tight-knit rural communities that traditionally upheld their linguistic and cultural practices.

Specific research has also focused on the Chimanimani region. Through ethnographic fieldwork, Mavhiza, Munyanyi, & Zenda, (2021) explored the fluid nature of ethnic identities in the border towns situated between Shona, Nda, and English communities. They observed younger Nda expressing ambiguous attachments due to code-switching between languages on a daily basis. Similarly, Nkomo (2023) conducted a linguistic landscape analysis of signage in public spaces, noting the prominence of Shona and English at the expense of the Nda mother tongue.

Internationally, studies have linked language loss to detrimental impacts on cultural continuity and psychological well-being. UNESCO (2021) highlighted the disproportionate effects on historically marginalized populations without proactive support for minority language development. Similarly, Ezeocha (2022) argued the devaluation of indigenous epistemologies threatens group cohesion and identity. Early childhood remains a critical developmental stage when language and cultural identities are formed through social interactions (UNESCO, 2022). In multilingual regions worldwide, maintaining indigenous tongues has been shown to benefit well-being by validating lived heritage and boosting self-esteem (Wright, Chen, & Ahmed, 2020; Kimathi, Njoroge, & Musau, 2023). However, globalizing influences threaten linguistic diversity, especially for minoritized communities (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2020). Nowhere are these challenges more pronounced than in Sub-Saharan Africa, where rapid urbanization accelerates language shifts (Ademola, 2021; Ogina, 2023).

Zimbabwe represents a multicultural milieu harboring diverse Bantu ethnicities, each with unique linguistic traditions (ZimStat, 2022). While the constitution protects linguistic rights, recent analyses caution that dominant languages overshadow others without proactive cultivation (Chikunya & Ndlovu, 2022; Chitiyo, Nyathi, & Mhlanga 2023). Chimanimani exemplifies national dynamics, housing Nda, Shona, and English populations in close proximity yet unequal prestige (Mavhiza, Munyanyi, & Zenda, 2021). Research highlights impacts on identity formation, yet sparse data exists on early childhood development (ECD) ramifications in such multilingual communities (Nkomo, 2023).

Several recent studies provide useful context regarding the phenomenon of indigenous language shift in Zimbabwe. Chikunya and Dube (2022) conducted a longitudinal analysis comparing national census data from 2002, 2012, and 2022. Their findings showed a gradual decline in the proportion of Zimbabweans reporting an indigenous language as their primary home language, with Shona decreasing from 69.8% to 68.5% and Ndebele from 16% to 14.5% over this period. They attributed this trend largely to rural-urban migration and exposure to dominant languages in urban areas.

In an ethnographic study focused on Chimanimani, Mavhiza, Munyanyi, & Zenda, (2021) interviewed 50 members of the Nda ethnic group ranging from youth to elders across the district. Through thematic analysis of these interviews, they found younger Nda expressed ambiguous attachments to their indigenous cultural identity due to frequent code-switching between Nda, Shona, and English in daily life. Elders expressed concern that this fluid approach could undermine the transmission of Nda traditions to younger generations.

Nkomo (2023) conducted a linguistic landscape analysis of 200 signs, artifacts, and place names in public spaces across Chimanimani. A quantitative evaluation found that while all three languages were represented, Shona comprised 40.2% of the items observed, and English 37.8%, substantially more than Ndau at only 22%. Interviews with 35 community members suggested this imbalance corresponded with a shift in generational language preferences favoring dominant codes over Ndau.

These studies provide critical context on the loss of indigenous languages in Zimbabwe over recent decades. However, further research is still needed to specifically examine impacts in early childhood settings and communities like Chimanimani to fully address this issue.

### Statement of the Problem

Early childhood programs in Chimanimani district face ongoing challenges in supporting diverse linguistic and cultural needs due to socioeconomic changes eroding indigenous heritages. This study aims to address this issue by exploring how early education curricula and teacher training can be enhanced to strengthen additive multilingual approaches within existing resource constraints. Developing culturally-sustaining solutions responsive to community realities could help maintain intergenerational transmission of minority languages like Ndau, while still fostering development in mainstream tongues. This has the potential to sustain linguistic diversity and cultural identities from the early years in Zimbabwe's multicultural society.

### Research questions

1. How does cultural erosion impact the use of indigenous languages among ECD children in Chimanimani?
2. What are the specific cultural practices and beliefs that influence indigenous language development in Chimanimani ECD settings?
3. How do the interactions between different cultural groups in Chimanimani affect the transmission of indigenous languages to ECD children?
4. What strategies can be implemented to promote indigenous language use and preservation in ECD settings within the multicultural context of Chimanimani?

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research study are

- ✓ To investigate the extent of cultural erosion affecting indigenous language use among ECD children in Chimanimani.
- ✓ To identify key cultural practices and beliefs that support indigenous language development within Chimanimani ECD settings.
- ✓ To examine the dynamics of language interaction between different cultural groups in Chimanimani and its impact on indigenous language transmission.
- ✓ To develop recommendations for promoting indigenous language use and preservation in ECD settings within the multicultural context of Chimanimani.

### Definition of Terms

#### Early childhood development (ECD):

"Early childhood development (ECD) refers to the emotional, cognitive, social, and physical development of children from birth to age eight" (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2020).

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### **Indigenous language:**

An indigenous language is a language that has developed traditionally within an ethnic community and is transmitted from one generation to another" (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS], 2021).

### **Cultural erosion:**

Cultural erosion refers to the gradual loss or weakening of cultural identity, traditional cultural practices, values and knowledge through intergenerational cultural disruption or assimilation into a dominant culture (Omenya, 2020).

### **Multicultural society:**

A multicultural society has multiple ethnicities, religions or cultural traditions within a single nation where minority groups maintain their cultural identities and customs" (Boundless Sociology, 2022).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **How does cultural erosion impact the use of indigenous languages among ECD children in Chimanimani?**

Cultural erosion, often linked to globalization and modernization, continues to significantly impact indigenous language transmission. Recent studies emphasize linguistic imperialism, a phenomenon where dominant languages displace indigenous tongues. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2020) have revisited these themes, highlighting how education systems and media perpetuate the dominance of global languages like English at the expense of local languages. In Chimanimani, Zimbabwe, similar dynamics emerge, with English and Shona gaining prominence in schools and public spaces, thereby marginalizing indigenous languages among Early Childhood Development (ECD) children (Moyo & Chikunya, 2021).

Research on language vitality reinforces the importance of domains like home, education, and media in maintaining indigenous languages. According to UNESCO (2022), the consistent use of heritage languages within families and communities is critical for intergenerational transmission. In Chimanimani, however, reduced use of indigenous languages in these contexts has been linked to a gradual decline in linguistic proficiency among younger generations (Nkomo, 2023).

Cultural practices such as storytelling, oral traditions, and songs remain vital tools for language acquisition and transmission. Recent studies by Mapuranga et al. (2021) emphasize the role of these practices in fostering language development among children. However, in Chimanimani, the erosion of such traditions—often replaced by digital and modern entertainment forms—may impede the development of indigenous language skills in ECD learners.

Berry's (2021) updated acculturation theory underscores the interplay between cultural identity and language preservation. ECD settings that integrate indigenous cultural practices and linguistic traditions are better positioned to sustain heritage languages. Conversely, environments dominated by mainstream cultural norms risk marginalizing indigenous languages, further contributing to their decline (Ademola, 2023).

Loss of traditional practices also threatens the continuity of language transmission. Skutnabb-Kangas (2020) warns of this risk as communities increasingly assimilate into dominant societal norms. Research by Chikunya and Ndlovu (2022) in Zimbabwe highlights how rural-urban migration disrupts intergenerational transmission, with younger populations perceiving indigenous languages as less relevant to modern life. In Chimanimani, studies indicate similar trends, where linguistic shifts correspond with ambiguous cultural identities among Ndau children (Mavhiza et al., 2021).

Scholars have also noted the broader community impacts of cultural and linguistic erosion. Studies show that diminished engagement with heritage languages undermines group identity and cultural continuity. Kimathi et

al. (2023) found that positive attitudes toward indigenous languages and cultural plurality are essential for revitalization efforts. Similarly, Wright et al. (2020) argue that celebrating linguistic diversity fosters stronger connections to cultural heritage, providing a sense of belonging among younger generations.

Recent fieldwork offers localized insights into these phenomena. For example, Allard and Young (2022) conducted research among Inuit families and found that reduced traditional engagement led to confusion among youth regarding their cultural and linguistic identities. In Zimbabwe, Nkomo's (2023) study of linguistic landscapes in Chimanimani revealed how the dominance of Shona and English signage correlates with a decline in the use of Ndaou, especially among children in ECD contexts.

Mixed-methods approaches provide a more nuanced understanding of community-based realities. Moyo and Chikunya (2021) surveyed families in Chimanimani and documented how localized revitalization programs such as Ndaou language clubs and storytelling workshops bolstered linguistic pride and use among children. These grassroots efforts demonstrate the potential for inclusive, pluralistic approaches to counter the negative effects of cultural erosion.

### **What are the specific cultural practices and beliefs that influence indigenous language development in Chimanimani ECD settings?**

Cultural practices and beliefs remain deeply intertwined with language transmission. For instance, oral traditions, storytelling, and songs are critical for fostering language learning (UNESCO, 2021). In Chimanimani, traditional practices such as folktales, proverbs, and oral histories continue to serve as significant tools in promoting indigenous language development among ECD children. Recent studies emphasize that storytelling, when integrated into early childhood settings, enhances not only linguistic but also cognitive and cultural development (Smith et al., 2022).

Berry's (1997) acculturation theory, as revisited by Guo and Zhang (2021), reinforces that maintaining cultural identity is intricately linked to language preservation. In ECD settings, valuing and promoting indigenous cultural practices has been shown to positively impact language acquisition. For example, in Chimanimani, efforts to integrate Ndaou cultural traditions within early learning environments could strengthen indigenous language transmission. However, where mainstream cultural norms dominate, the process of acculturation risks diluting indigenous language practices (Gao et al., 2023).

Multicultural environments offer both opportunities and challenges for language transmission. Grosjean's (1982) work on bilingualism, further expanded by García and Wei (2020), highlights how exposure to multiple languages can enrich linguistic diversity while also posing risks of language shift if one language dominates. In Chimanimani, interactions between diverse cultural groups, including through education and migration, influence the equilibrium between indigenous and other languages. Fishman's (1991) concept of language attitudes, reaffirmed in contemporary studies (Pérez Báez et al., 2023), suggests that if indigenous languages are perceived as less prestigious or practical than dominant languages like English, children are likely to adopt the latter. Understanding and addressing community attitudes toward Ndaou and other local languages is vital for safeguarding linguistic heritage in Chimanimani.

Storytelling traditions play a pivotal role in indigenous language transmission. Among the Ndaou community in Chimanimani, oral histories and folktales remain critical in passing cultural knowledge and language across generations. Research by Sibanda et al. (2021) highlights that integrating storytelling into ECD curricula reinforces the value and relevance of indigenous languages. Similarly, traditional music and songs encapsulate cultural beliefs and identities. For instance, studies by Moloney and Xu (2020) in indigenous Australian communities demonstrate how incorporating traditional songs into early education fosters cultural continuity. In Chimanimani, Ndaou lullabies, hymns, and dirges offer opportunities for language socialization from an early age, as evidenced in recent research (Mtetwa et al., 2022).

Intergenerational respect and community-centered pedagogies further influence language development. Recent case studies in Zimbabwe (Nyathi & Moyo, 2023) document how elders teaching through observation, imitation, and hands-on activities contribute to effective language transmission in Ndaou language nests. These culturally



anchored practices contrast with more formal, teacher-centered approaches that may alienate young learners from their heritage.

Indigenous occupations and rituals equally contribute to linguistic socialization. Activities like storytelling during cattle herding or ceremonies such as *Mhuri YeNjanja* (a girl's coming-of-age ritual) enhance community pride and reinforce cultural knowledge systems expressed through Ndaou (Mapuranga et al., 2020; Chigwedere et al., 2023). These practices serve as critical anchors in ensuring the continuity of both language and cultural identity among ECD learners in Chimanimani.

### **How do the interactions between different cultural groups in Chimanimani affect the transmission of indigenous languages to ECD children?**

Multicultural settings offer both opportunities and challenges for language transmission. According to García and Wei (2020), bilingualism can be highly beneficial, fostering cognitive and social advantages, but it can also lead to language shift if one language becomes dominant. In Chimanimani, interactions between diverse cultural groups may influence the delicate balance between indigenous and other languages among ECD children.

Recent research highlights the critical role of language attitudes in maintaining linguistic diversity. Fishman's (1991) foundational theory, revisited by Pérez Báez et al. (2023), underscores that perceptions of language prestige and utility significantly impact language maintenance. If indigenous languages such as Ndaou are perceived as less prestigious or relevant compared to dominant languages like English, children are more likely to adopt the latter. Understanding these attitudes within Chimanimani's multilingual context is essential for assessing their effect on language transmission.

Interactions between cultural groups can have both positive and negative impacts on the intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages to ECD learners. Skutnabb-Kangas's (2000) findings on language shift, recently corroborated by Hough and Skutnabb-Kangas (2021), reveal that minority languages often face decline when economic opportunities and social interactions favor dominant languages. This pattern holds when minority groups reduce the use of their ancestral tongues in critical social contexts, such as education and public life.

However, recent studies emphasize that cultural interactions do not inevitably result in language loss if communities adopt additive multilingualism. Kheir (2021) found that among migrant populations in East Africa, fostering pride in heritage languages while simultaneously embracing dominant languages strengthened the multilingual capabilities of younger generations. In Chimanimani, similar dynamics are at play. Research by Moyo and Ncube (2022) showed that Ndaou families experience ambivalence about cultural identity due to frequent code-switching between Ndaou, Shona, and English amid urbanization and educational changes. Nevertheless, community-centered approaches such as Ndaou language nests, as highlighted by McCarty et al. (2023), have emerged as powerful tools for reconnecting youth with their cultural heritage through immersive indigenous language experiences facilitated by elders.

Cultural erosion poses a significant threat to traditional practices that support indigenous language learning among young children in Chimanimani. Practices such as oral storytelling, folktales, music, and dance risk fading without deliberate preservation efforts. Recent studies by Sibanda and Dube (2022) found that younger Ndaou generations increasingly struggle to engage with ancestral musical traditions due to limited intergenerational learning opportunities. Focus group discussions with families in Chimanimani have revealed concerns about how diminished storytelling traditions undermine cultural continuity and reduce Ndaou language proficiency in young learners. Without deliberate revitalization strategies, youth may begin to perceive Ndaou as irrelevant to modern life, a challenge Aworawo (2021) also warned about in similar African contexts.

The formation of language attitudes through intercultural interactions further shapes transmission rates. Surveys of caregivers in multicultural settings, such as those conducted by Nyathi and Moyo (2023), suggest that positive perceptions of multilingualism can enable children to maintain proficiency in both indigenous and dominant languages. Conversely, in contexts where external influences dominate, heritage languages risk being devalued, consistent with Pérez Báez et al.'s (2023) recent applications of Fishman's theory. Classroom observations in

Chimanimani could reveal how pedagogical approaches influence these dynamics. For instance, teaching strategies that prioritize external cultures over local traditions may undermine heritage language learning, whereas community-centered approaches like those advocated by McCarty et al. (2023) affirm the value of pluralism and indigenous knowledge systems.

### **What strategies can be implemented to promote indigenous language use and preservation in ECD settings within the multipopulation. Tontext of Chimanimani?**

Language revitalization efforts often emphasize the importance of community participation and empowerment (Fishman, 1991; García & Flores, 2022). In Chimanimani, involving parents, caregivers, and community members in initiatives to promote indigenous languages such as Ndaou is critical for success. Recent research underscores the need for bilingual education as a strategy for language maintenance and revitalization (Skutnabb-Kangas & Hough, 2021). Integrating indigenous languages into ECD curricula not only supports their preservation but also strengthens cultural identity among young learners. Developing culturally responsive teaching materials and equipping teachers with training in indigenous language pedagogy are key strategies for fostering successful implementation.

In multicultural settings, addressing the challenges posed by linguistic diversity requires fostering intercultural understanding and respect. Recent studies by Banks (1993), revisited by Gay (2020), highlight the role of multicultural education in promoting diversity and inclusion. In the Chimanimani context, creating ECD environments that celebrate all languages and cultures can contribute to the preservation of indigenous languages while promoting harmony among different cultural groups.

There is international consensus on the developmental benefits of linguistic diversity. UNESCO (2022) emphasizes that language-sensitive approaches enhance children's cognitive, social, and emotional growth, which lays the foundation for long-term academic success. Similarly, research by Wright et al. (2021) associates the maintenance of minority languages with stronger sociocultural identities and psychological well-being into adulthood. However, rapid globalization and urban migration threaten the intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages (Hough & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2021; Moyo & Sibanda, 2023).

In the African context, studies have observed a decline in the use of indigenous languages as urbanization increases. Aworawo's (2021) updated research on language shift in West Africa notes that migration often accelerates the adoption of dominant languages while displacing vital cultural knowledge systems. Within Zimbabwe, Ndlovu and Chikanda (2020) found that official language promotion policies often failed to mitigate linguistic shifts effectively in practice. Specifically, studies in Chimanimani by Mtetwa (2022) and Nyathi et al. (2023) highlight the complexities of identity negotiation but note the limited focus on ECD-level language practices.

International best practices continue to emphasize the need for linguistic inclusiveness and diversity in early learning. Recent studies by García et al. (2022) reaffirm the benefits of additive multilingual education models, which optimize heritage language retention across generations. However, challenges related to implementation remain, requiring community-centered approaches tailored to local cultural nuances (Moloney & Xu, 2021; Pérez Báez et al., 2023).

Overall, the literature underscores the critical role of linguistically sensitive ECD programs in countering the pressures of global monolingual standards. However, to fully empower marginalized voices, policies must embrace grassroots dynamism and prioritize culturally sustaining pedagogies (Ibrahim & Johnson, 2023; McCarty et al., 2023). This study aims to contribute to empirical knowledge that supports the development of such pedagogies within Zimbabwe's evolving language landscape.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A mixed-methods approach was employed to comprehensively investigate the intricate relationship between cultural erosion and indigenous language development within Chimanimani's Early Childhood Development (ECD) settings. Surveys were used to collect quantifiable data on demographics, behaviors, and attitudes from

a sample population through standardized questionnaires. Surveys are recognized for enabling the collection of data from large samples, facilitating statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Focus groups were conducted to elicit qualitative insights into participants' views and experiences through moderated discussions. Such discussions are effective for exploring diverse perspectives, as participants build on each other's responses (Krueger & Casey, 2020).

Thematic analysis was used to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns within the qualitative data, providing a detailed and nuanced understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Classroom observations allowed for the collection of contextual data through non-participant observation and detailed field notes, capturing authentic interactions within ECD settings (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2020). This mixed-methods design integrated qualitative and quantitative data, methods, and techniques, ensuring a holistic perspective by offsetting the weaknesses of individual methodologies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021). Triangulation further enhanced validity by cross-verifying findings from multiple methods, data sources, and perspectives, strengthening the study's trustworthiness (Flick, 2022).

Table 1: Demographics of participants

Category	Frequency	Percentage	Remarks
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	4	40%	Selected based on the need for gender diversity in the sample.
Female	6	60%	Reflects the gender distribution in the local teaching workforce.
<b>Age Distribution</b>			
21-30 years	2	20%	Reflects younger teachers starting their careers.
31-40 years	5	50%	Majority in this age group, indicating a more experienced workforce.
41-50 years	2	20%	Represents teachers with substantial teaching experience.
51+ years	1	10%	More experienced teachers with potential for greater community knowledge.
<b>Professional Qualifications</b>			
Certificate/Diploma	3	30%	Entry-level qualifications; common among teachers with less experience.
Bachelor's Degree	6	60%	Indicates a higher level of qualification.
Master's Degree	1	10%	Represents a highly qualified teacher in the sample.
<b>Teaching Experience</b>			
0-5 years	3	30%	New teachers with fewer years of classroom experience.
6-10 years	4	40%	Reflects teachers with moderate teaching experience.



11-15 years	2	20%	Experienced teachers with deep community ties.
16+ years	1	10%	Very experienced teachers who have witnessed significant educational changes.

The study employed a purposive sampling technique, selecting 10 teachers from a pool of 50 teachers based on specific criteria that reflected their experience and role in early childhood education within the Chimanimani area, ensuring that participants were well-positioned to provide valuable insights into the effects of cultural erosion on indigenous language development. The criteria for teacher selection included gender diversity to capture a wide range of perspectives, with a slight skew toward female teachers (60%), in line with trends in Zimbabwe's teaching workforce (Mhlanga & Munetsi, 2023); a mix of age groups, primarily those aged 31-40 years (50%), which is consistent with findings that mid-career educators are deeply involved in community dynamics and language preservation (McCarty, 2020); varied professional qualifications, with 60% holding bachelor's degrees, a reflection of the trend in Zimbabwe's urban and peri-urban settings, though the inclusion of diploma and certificate holders (30%) highlighted challenges related to teacher qualifications in engaging with the complexities of indigenous language development (Gonçalves et al., 2022); and a range of teaching experience, with 40% of teachers having 6-10 years of experience, suggesting their involvement in curriculum adaptation and language policies, while the inclusion of teachers with 0-5 years (30%) and over 16 years (10%) experience provided insights into the evolving perceptions of cultural erosion across generations (Ibrahim, 2023). This purposive approach, targeting teachers with diverse professional backgrounds and levels of experience, allowed for a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities in indigenous language preservation in Chimanimani, contributing to the broader field of language revitalization by linking community dynamics, teacher training, and cultural erosion (Fishman, 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select 30 learners from a pool of 200, ensuring a representative sample of children from various backgrounds within the Chimanimani area. The selection criteria included age range (5-7 years), with a focus on learners attending Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers, as they are at the critical stage for language and cultural development. The purposive approach allowed for the inclusion of children who were most likely to provide relevant insights into the effects of cultural erosion on indigenous language development at the early childhood level, ensuring a comprehensive and contextually meaningful sample. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select 30 learners, ensuring a representative sample of children from various backgrounds within the Chimanimani area. The selection criteria included age range (5-7 years), with a focus on learners attending Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers, as they are at a critical stage for language and cultural development. This approach aligns with recent studies emphasizing the importance of early childhood as a formative period for language acquisition and cultural identity formation (Moloney & Xu, 2022). The purposive sampling method allowed for the inclusion of children who were most likely to provide relevant insights into the effects of cultural erosion on indigenous language development at the early childhood level, ensuring a comprehensive and contextually meaningful sample.

Surveys were administered to a sample of caregivers and educators to gather quantitative data on language usage patterns, demographic information, and perceptions of cultural change. This quantitative approach offered a broad overview, identifying trends and patterns in the community's language use. The survey tool was carefully designed through a multi-step process to ensure reliability and validity. Initially, a draft questionnaire was developed based on relevant literature and expert input from linguists and educators (Bryman, 2022). A pilot study was then conducted with a small subset of caregivers and educators to test the clarity, relevance, and consistency of the questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Feedback from the pilot led to necessary refinements, ensuring that the tool effectively captured language usage patterns, demographic data, and perceptions of cultural change. To enhance validity, the final survey incorporated both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to allow for measurable comparisons (De Vaus, 2021). Data collection was carried out systematically, with respondents selected through stratified sampling to ensure representation across different demographic groups (Fowler, 2022). This rigorous design and validation process strengthened the credibility of the findings by minimizing biases and ensuring the accuracy of the collected data.

To explore the sociocultural complexities surrounding language transmission, focus group discussions were held with a diverse group of participants. To explore the sociocultural complexities surrounding language transmission, focus group discussions were carefully designed, tested, and validated to ensure the credibility of the findings. A semi-structured discussion guide was developed based on relevant linguistic and sociocultural literature, with input from language experts and educators (Krueger & Casey, 2022). The guide was piloted with a small group of participants to assess question clarity, cultural sensitivity, and effectiveness in eliciting meaningful responses (Morgan, 2021). Based on feedback, refinements were made to enhance coherence and reduce potential biases. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation across age, gender, and linguistic backgrounds (Barbour, 2022). Discussions were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed using established qualitative analysis techniques, ensuring the reliability of interpretations. This rigorous process strengthened the validity of the data by capturing in-depth insights into language transmission while minimizing researcher bias. These discussions provided rich qualitative data, capturing lived experiences and perceptions of cultural erosion's impact on indigenous languages. Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's updated framework (2021), identified recurring themes and insights from the qualitative data.

Classroom observations were systematically designed, tested, and validated to enhance the credibility of the findings. A structured observation checklist was developed based on established frameworks for language use in Early Childhood Development (ECD) settings, incorporating input from language experts and educators (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The tool was piloted in a small number of classrooms to assess clarity, relevance, and consistency, leading to refinements that improved reliability (Mertens, 2022). Observations were conducted using a non-intrusive approach, ensuring that classroom dynamics were not disrupted. Data collection followed a structured protocol, with researchers documenting interactions, instructional methods, and student engagement with indigenous languages. Triangulation with survey and focus group findings strengthened validity by providing a comprehensive understanding of language transmission in ECD settings (Yin, 2022). This rigorous approach ensured that the collected data accurately reflected real-world language practices, minimizing observer bias and enhancing research credibility. This mixed methods approach provided a robust foundation for the study, enabling the researchers to explore the complex interplay between cultural erosion and indigenous language development in Chimanimani with depth and breadth.

### **How does cultural erosion impact the use of indigenous languages among ECD children in Chimanimani?**

The study's findings reveal a significant decline in indigenous language use among Early Childhood Development (ECD) learners, with English and Shona increasingly dominating linguistic interactions. This trend aligns with theories of linguistic imperialism, as proposed by Phillipson (1992) and further expanded by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), which argue that dominant languages systematically displace indigenous languages through educational policies, media influence, and socio-economic incentives. The survey results, which indicate that 63% of children primarily communicate in English, substantiate the assertion that indigenous languages are losing their functional utility in everyday life, reinforcing previous research on language shift in multilingual societies (Ndhlovu, 2023; Mapuranga et al., 2022). The statistical significance of age in determining language preference, as identified in the chi-square analysis, underscores how younger generations are becoming increasingly detached from their linguistic heritage, a phenomenon also noted by McCarty (2020) in her study on indigenous language endangerment.

Findings from focus groups further illustrate that linguistic erosion is not only a result of explicit policy decisions but also a byproduct of broader globalization and urbanization trends. Participants attributed shifts in language use to increased media exposure, economic aspirations, and the dominance of English-language educational content, echoing research by Ndlovu et al. (2022) on the role of digital media in shaping linguistic choices. Similarly, Moloney & Xu (2022) found that globalized learning environments tend to marginalize minority languages by prioritizing standardized linguistic practices that align with economic mobility. The case of Chimanimani, discussed by Chitiyo et al. (2023), further supports these findings, highlighting how community-level linguistic adaptation is often insufficient in counteracting systemic language loss without robust institutional support.

Another key concern raised in teacher interviews and focus groups was the lack of structured pedagogical support for multilingual instruction in ECD classrooms. Teachers expressed difficulty in balancing indigenous language inclusion with curriculum expectations, mirroring Ibrahim's (2023) argument that educational frameworks often fail to accommodate linguistic diversity effectively. One teacher explained, *"I try mixing languages, but it's hard without proper guidance. The curriculum doesn't prepare us to support all backgrounds equally."* This aligns with García et al. (2021), who advocate for translanguaging pedagogies such approaches that integrate multiple linguistic resources flexibly to bridge the gap between policy and practice in multilingual education. However, current policies in Zimbabwe continue to reinforce monolingual norms, making it difficult for teachers to implement localized language preservation strategies (Moyo & Chikwe, 2020).

The research also confirms the intergenerational nature of language shift, a finding consistent with the work of Aworawo (2020) and Ogina (2021), who highlight how economic and technological advancements accelerate the decline of indigenous languages. One participant noted, *"Kids now communicate more with phones than people, and it's affecting how they learn."* This sentiment aligns with McCarty's (2020) study, which emphasizes that technological proliferation and reduced intergenerational language transmission are primary drivers of indigenous language decline. Similarly, Kuna & Ndhlovu (2024) argue that market-driven language policies, which privilege English for economic reasons, lead to community-level shifts where parents actively encourage English use to enhance their children's employment prospects.

Despite these challenges, focus group participants strongly advocated for a community-centered approach to linguistic preservation, arguing that top-down policy initiatives alone are insufficient without active engagement from local stakeholders. This recommendation is supported by Ibrahim (2023), who contends that indigenous language revitalization efforts must be tailored to local socio-cultural contexts to be sustainable. Moreover, findings from Moloney & Xu (2022) suggest that effective multilingual education requires direct input from communities, ensuring that linguistic interventions are culturally responsive and adaptable to localized needs.

### **What are the specific cultural practices and beliefs that influence indigenous language development in Chimanimani ECD settings?**

Focus group discussions and classroom observations underscored the pivotal role of oral traditions, storytelling, and songs in transmitting indigenous languages among Early Childhood Development (ECD) children in Chimanimani. These cultural practices provided a rich linguistic environment, fostering language acquisition and development. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interactions and cultural tools in cognitive and linguistic development. Similarly, research by McCarty (2020) and Hornberger (2020) highlights the significance of culturally embedded learning methods in sustaining indigenous languages. However, the encroachment of modernization and urbanization has led to a decline in these traditional practices, negatively impacting indigenous language transmission. This observation echoes Grenoble and Whaley's (2021) findings, which indicate that globalization accelerates language shift by replacing indigenous linguistic domains with dominant languages.

Participants emphasized the critical influence of parental attitudes and beliefs on children's language acquisition. Parents who exhibited a strong appreciation for indigenous languages were more likely to utilize them in the home environment, creating a supportive linguistic ecosystem for their children. This finding aligns with Berry's (1990) acculturation theory, which posits a strong correlation between cultural identity and language preservation. Furthermore, studies by Fishman (1991) and García et al. (2021) demonstrate that intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages is most effective in households where parents consciously reinforce linguistic heritage. However, the study found that many parents, particularly in urbanized areas, favored English and Shona over minority indigenous languages, perceiving them as more valuable for socioeconomic mobility. This mirrors the observations of Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), who argues that linguistic imperialism contributes to the marginalization of indigenous languages through economic and educational incentives.

The findings illuminate the complex interplay between cultural practices, parental attitudes, and indigenous language development. The erosion of traditional practices, coupled with shifting parental attitudes, presents significant challenges for the maintenance of indigenous languages in the ECD context. These results are consistent with research by Chitiyo et al. (2023), who identify cultural disengagement as a primary driver of

linguistic attrition in multilingual societies. Moreover, Dube and Moyo (2021) emphasize the role of digital media in reshaping children's linguistic exposure, a concern echoed by participants who noted the dominance of English-language television programs and social media content over indigenous linguistic inputs.

Additionally, the study's findings reinforce the necessity of educational interventions that integrate indigenous languages within formal learning environments. McCarty (2020) and Ogina (2021) advocate for context-specific bilingual education models that respect linguistic rights while addressing the realities of linguistic diversity. The lack of teacher preparedness in multilingual instruction, as noted in this study, further exacerbates linguistic erosion, echoing the concerns of Hornberger (2020), who identifies inadequate teacher training as a major obstacle to effective multilingual education.

In summary, this study contributes to the broader discourse on linguistic erosion and indigenous language development by demonstrating how cultural shifts, parental attitudes, and educational policies intersect to shape language transmission in ECD settings. The findings strongly suggest that without targeted interventions—such as culturally responsive pedagogy, parental language awareness programs, and policy-driven linguistic revitalization efforts—indigenous languages in Chimanimani and beyond will continue to face existential threats. Future research should explore community-driven strategies for strengthening indigenous language transmission and examine the long-term effects of language loss on cultural identity and cognitive development in young learners.

### **How do the interactions between different cultural groups in Chimanimani affect the transmission of indigenous languages to ECD children?**

The study highlighted the significant influence of language attitudes in Chimanimani, aligning with Fishman's (1991) work on language shift and the role of community attitudes in shaping language use. One participant expressed, *"In our community, some see Ndaou as just for old people. The youth want to learn English and Shona instead."* This perspective reflects broader trends where younger generations increasingly perceive indigenous languages as less valuable compared to dominant languages like English and Shona. Such shifts are largely driven by educational, social, and economic pressures (Moyo & Dube, 2021; Ndlovu, 2023). Recent studies confirm that societal modernization and globalization significantly influence attitudes toward indigenous languages, ultimately shaping language choices and accelerating language shift (Gonçalves et al., 2022; Mhlanga & Munetsi, 2023). These findings reinforce Fishman's (1991) argument that language attitudes are central to understanding the erosion of indigenous languages in communities like Chimanimani.

However, while negative attitudes toward Ndaou threaten its intergenerational transmission, evidence of cultural resilience also emerged. One participant explained, *"We are proud to teach our children about where we come from through Ndaou stories and songs. This helps keep our culture alive."* This statement highlights the role of indigenous cultural practices in sustaining language use, aligning with arguments made by Bamgbose (2011) and Kamwendo (2016) that community-based language efforts can counteract linguistic decline. Such expressions of linguistic and cultural pride affirm aspects of cultural continuity despite the dominance of other languages.

The coexistence of multiple languages in Chimanimani aligns with Grosjean's (1982) conceptualization of bilingualism, illustrating both the benefits and challenges of multilingual environments. A key challenge was expressed by a focus group participant who stated, *"When our children go to school, the teachers only want to use Shona. We lose the chance to practice Ndaou."* This highlights a potential trade-off observed in multicultural settings: while bilingualism fosters access to new opportunities, it can also hinder heritage language maintenance when dominant languages receive institutional support while indigenous languages remain marginalized. These findings resonate with Fishman's (1991) argument that community perceptions and institutional language policies significantly shape language shift.

By integrating Grosjean's (1982) and Fishman's (1991) perspectives, this study provides a nuanced analysis of how language interactions influence indigenous language maintenance. The findings also align with recent research on linguistic erosion and indigenous language development, such as Mumpande (2020) and Chiwome & Mutasa (2022), which emphasize the impact of education policies and social mobility aspirations on language



use. The discussion underscores the complexity of linguistic dynamics in Chimanimani, highlighting the interplay between societal attitudes, institutional language choices, and cultural resilience in shaping the future of Nda.

### **What strategies can be implemented to promote indigenous language use and preservation in ECD settings within the multicultural context of Chimanimani?**

The study's findings highlight the promise of engaging community elders and implementing intergenerational teaching approaches in preserving indigenous languages. Focus group discussions underscored the value participants placed on opportunities for elders to share stories, songs, and customs with children in their mother tongue. One elder expressed, *"When the young ones learn our way through language, it makes me happy to pass down our culture."* This aligns with Fishman's (1991) argument that intergenerational transmission is essential for language maintenance. Additionally, recent studies affirm that integrating indigenous knowledge systems into language education strengthens cultural continuity and enhances language retention (Ndlovu, 2023; Gonçalves et al., 2022).

Classroom observations further revealed that lessons incorporating storytelling resulted in greater child engagement compared to rote memorization of vocabulary alone. This finding supports the work of McCarty (2020) and García et al. (2021), who argue that culturally responsive pedagogies rooted in oral traditions enhance both linguistic and cognitive development. The effectiveness of intergenerational sharing in reinforcing cultural continuity is also consistent with Kamwendo's (2016) study on indigenous knowledge transmission.

Investing in teacher training for culturally responsive pedagogies emerged as another key recommendation. The study found that 80% of surveyed educators believed they could better support bilingual development with appropriate training. One teacher noted, *"We want to respect all children here, but it is hard without knowledge of each community."* This finding aligns with Skutnabb-Kangas' (2000) argument that effective bilingual education requires teacher preparedness and sensitivity to linguistic diversity.

Focus group participants emphasized the need for educational approaches that respect indigenous knowledge systems rather than imposing external norms. Follow-up interviews revealed that communities were willing to collaborate in planning curricula that reflect local ways of knowing. This reinforces recent scholarship advocating for place-based, community-centered pedagogies in language education (Moloney & Xu, 2022; Ibrahim, 2023). Providing resources and training for such approaches can build educator capacity for supporting linguistic diversity. Additionally, creating feedback loops between schools and indigenous communities can help ensure cultural relevance remains central to teaching methodologies (Moyo & Dube, 2021).

Bilingual education emerged as a central strategy for promoting indigenous language use. Participants strongly advocated for the integration of indigenous languages into the Early Childhood Development (ECD) curriculum, echoing Skutnabb-Kangas' (2000) assertion that bilingual education is critical for language maintenance. Recent studies confirm that well-structured bilingual programs support both linguistic and cognitive development in young learners (Moloney & Xu, 2022; Ibrahim, 2023).

The development of culturally appropriate teaching materials was also identified as essential for fostering engaging and effective learning environments. This finding is in line with García et al.'s (2021) research on multilingual pedagogies, which highlights the importance of instructional resources that reflect students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Ensuring that indigenous languages are actively used in learning materials can counteract language shift and reinforce their value in formal education settings.

Creating inclusive ECD environments that value all languages was another recurring theme in the study. This aligns with Banks' (1993) concept of multicultural education, which emphasizes the importance of diversity and inclusion in fostering social cohesion. Participants noted that supportive environments for all languages not only aid in language preservation but also promote intercultural understanding. These findings align with recent research emphasizing the role of inclusive education in maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity in ECD settings (McCarty, 2020; Moyo & Dube, 2021).



## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impacts of cultural erosion on indigenous language maintenance from an Early Childhood Development (ECD) perspective in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe. The findings revealed that socioeconomic transformations have diminished the intergenerational transmission of minority languages, such as Ndaou. The formal education system faced integration challenges, primarily due to standardized pedagogies that overlook the grassroots dynamism and local language practices in rural communities. These challenges are consistent with previous research, which has highlighted the tension between formal education systems and indigenous language preservation (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; García et al., 2021). Stakeholders emphasized the importance of community-directed adaptations, advocating for locally-tailored curricula that reflect indigenous knowledge systems and language. This approach would empower marginalized voices through culturally-sustaining solutions, aligning with Fishman's (1991) assertion that language maintenance depends on local community engagement. The study's findings resonate with recent literature, which stresses the role of community involvement in language revitalization efforts (Gonçalves et al., 2022; Ndlovu, 2023).

The recommendations of this study call for a multi-faceted approach to addressing the challenges identified. First, the integration of a locally-tailored curriculum that recognizes and values indigenous languages is critical for ensuring the inclusion of minority languages in educational settings. This recommendation is consistent with the work of Mhlanga and Munetsi (2023), who emphasize the need for culturally responsive curricula that reflect the lived realities of diverse communities. Teacher capacity building is also essential, as the study found that educators were often ill-equipped to support bilingual development. The development of training programs that focus on culturally-sustaining pedagogies would better equip teachers to navigate the complexities of multilingual classrooms. This is echoed in the research of Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), who stresses the importance of teacher preparedness in promoting bilingualism and language maintenance.

Furthermore, empowering families as stewards of minority traditions is a crucial recommendation. Involving parents and caregivers in language preservation efforts, as suggested by the study's findings, aligns with the work of Fishman (1991), who highlights the importance of intergenerational language transmission facilitated by families and communities. Ongoing partnerships between schools and indigenous communities, as suggested by participants, are necessary to ensure that the cultural relevance of educational practices remains central to language policies (McCarty, 2020; Ibrahim, 2023). In addition to these recommendations, the study underscores the need for teachers to be equipped to manage increasingly multicultural classrooms. Given the rising diversity in schools, a focus on intercultural competence and multilingual teaching strategies will be essential in supporting the needs of all learners. This aligns with Banks' (1993) concept of multicultural education, which advocates for inclusive teaching practices that recognize and value cultural diversity.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the field of indigenous language maintenance and early childhood education by providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by communities in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe. By proposing concrete solutions, such as community-led curriculum adaptations, teacher training, and family engagement, this study adds to the growing body of research on culturally-sustaining pedagogies and language revitalization (Gonçalves et al., 2022; Mhlanga & Munetsi, 2023). The recommendations offer a coherent framework for combating language erosion in Zimbabwe's multi-ethnic population, promoting multilingualism, and fostering cultural inclusion for holistic early childhood development.

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