

# **Challenges and Complexities Faced by Teachers and Learners in the Teaching and Learning of Cultural Aspects of the Ndebele Language in the Gwanda South District of Zimbabwe**

by

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## **Abstract**

This study sought to explore the challenges faced by teachers and learners in the teaching and learning of the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language in Gwanda South District. The ethnographic research design was used in this study. Two schools, four Ndebele teachers, eight non-Ndebele teachers, the two heads of languages departments, forty learners from different ethnic groups all of which were purposively sampled. Data was collected through face to face interviews with teachers and heads of languages departments, focus group discussions with learners. Results revealed that teachers and learners encountered a lot of challenges in the teaching of Ndebele cultural aspects because teachers lacked deeper knowledge of the Ndebele language and culturally rich instructional media to conduct effective lessons such multicultural classrooms.

The study also showed that learners were failing to express themselves orally using the Ndebele language. The research recommends redesigning of a syllabus that accommodates learners from different ethnic groups and documentation of indigenous knowledge systems for use by educators. Teachers also need staff development or in-service training on multicultural education.

## **Background of the Study**

According to Cutshall (2012), the study of another language is inseparable from the study of that culture. He goes on to say, the true content of the second language is not the grammar and the vocabulary of the language but the culture expressed through that language. In support of this view, Miladnovic (2013) asserts that students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural context in which the language occurs. Cutshall (2012) maintains that there is no true communication without some demonstration of cultural knowledge and sensitivity. He goes on to say cultural knowledge and cultural appropriate skills play an important role in interpersonal, interpretive and presentational modes of communication. In the same vein, Ukessays (2014) states that the ability to communicate successfully with native speakers of a particular language depends not only on language skills but also on comprehension of cultural habits and expectations.

According to Abbaspour (2012), language and culture are inseparable and culture learning must be an integral part of language learning. He further states that the culture of a second language must be taught alongside the language itself. In addition he posits that the idea of a second language and its cultural aspects have been actualized and reflected in textbooks in various ways. This draws interest to the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language under study. According to Nash (2007) cultural aspects describes a people's way of life. It can be religion, spirituality, economic, family and community life, sports, government, food and art. Cultural aspects in this study, describe interpersonal relations for example family structure, traditional diet, tools, utensils, belief systems, clothing, interpersonal relationships, and ritual behaviours practiced by the Ndebele people for example in marriage and death of an individual among others.

However, Weininger and Kiss (2013) suggest that an approach that examines learning materials as carriers of cultural information alone cannot do justice to the complex process through which cultural meanings emerge. Harmad (2013) points out that cultural meaning is socially constructed by the interaction of the different perspectives. As a result, students who work with the materials are limited in their attempt to draw cultural interpretation (Weininger and Kiss, 2013). Moreover, they argue that the connection between textual and visual information in a language teaching material is generally greatly denotational. That is, image and text serve the purpose of reinforcing referential or lexical meaning forcing learners to focus on linguistic forms at the expense of exploring cultural connotations.

As a result, Abbaspour (2012) notes that although the importance of culture in language classes is known to any teacher and anyone who has something to do with language teaching, teaching of culture is somewhat limited and not optimally fulfilled.

Pupils attending secondary education in Gwanda South District come from different linguistic backgrounds such as Sotho, Venda, Ndebele and Shona speaking communities. This being the case, Non-Ndebele speakers are not familiar with the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language like the rituals performed during birth, marriage and death of an individual. Teachers who are believed to conduct such lessons do not know the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language and their cultures differ from those of learners they teach. This article, therefore, explores problems faced by learners in learning the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language and to establish strategies that can be implemented to improve effective teaching of cultural concepts of the Ndebele language.

By identifying problems faced by learners in learning cultural aspects of the Ndebele language, this helps Ndebele teachers to design suitable methods and teaching aids that accommodate all learners with different cultural backgrounds. This study helps teachers to be more creative for effective teaching of the Ndebele language. Identification and recommendation of strategies that can be employed to mitigate the challenges faced by learners helps school administrator to boost the performance of learners to higher levels hence contributing to the achievement of objectives of Ndebele curriculum at secondary school level.

The study was carried out in multicultural schools with learners coming from Suthu, Venda and Shona cultural backgrounds. However, multicultural education in Zimbabwe is topical. The handling of minority issues reveals some of the insufficiencies of the education system leading to failure to address appropriately multicultural challenges of learners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Mapuranga and Bukaliya, 2014).

## **Theoretical Framework: Socio-Cultural Theory**

Socio-cultural perspective and multiculturalism are theories that inspired the paper. The socio-cultural theory by Vgotsky (1978) posits that language is the most important tool and a cultural artefact that humans possess to mediate their connection to the world, to each other and to themselves. Turuk (2008) believes that the fundamental concepts of socio-cultural theory is its claim that human mind is mediated. In the same vein, Fahim and Haghani (2012) state that socio-cultural theory considers human mental functioning as essentially a mediated process organized by cultural artefacts, activities and concepts. Therefore, they suggest that the existing cultural artefacts enable human beings to regulate and modify their behavioural and biological activities. Fahim and Haghani (2012) assert that in socio-cultural theory, learning is thought of as a social event taking place as result of interaction between the learner and the environment. Turuk (2008), takes it further when he states that the learning process is not a solitary exploration of the environment by the child on his own, it is the child's appropriation of the methods and actions that exist in a given culture that enable him to learn.

According to Turuk (2008), the child is completely dependent on other people usually the parents who initiate the child's action by instructing him or her on what to do. Parents being representative of culture, actualize these instructions primarily through a language. Thus according to Ponarac (2010), culture creates language and the individual describes his views using the language that is the product of his culture. The socio-cultural theory believes that the developmental process occur as the outcome of child's participation in cultural, linguistic and historical settings. It further states that human social and mental activity is organized through culturally constructed artefacts (Turuk, 2008). Thomas (2014) is of the idea that young native speakers acquire the linguistic system as well as the codes and the cultural concepts conveyed by their mother tongue within a given cultural framework which help them describe reality in that cultural lens. Therefore, culture is the basis and one of the most important attributes of language such that if there is no culture, language will be like water without a source or a tree without roots (Sun, 2013). According to Sun (2013), the cultural knowledge is directly associated with the target language and should be regarded as first and foremost in second language teaching. According to her, teachers usually focus on the language points while neglecting the importance of cultural aspects in second language teaching. Most students know a lot of words and grammar very well but they lack the ability to use the language properly (Sun, 2013). Therefore, she argues that if students do not know the cultural background behind the language, they cannot understand and use the language well. The connection between culture and language is established with the birth of an individual (Ponarac, 2010). Pupils in Gwanda South District learn their first languages at primary level yet are required to learn Ndebele language at secondary level. Culture seems to play an important role in acquiring first language yet posing challenges when learning the second language (Sun, 2013). Cultural values are both reflected by and carried through language such that second language learners often use native language patterns in learning target language resulting in inappropriate forms in the target language.

## **Literature Review**

### **Multicultural Perspective and Importance of Multicultural Education**

According to McDough (2008), multiculturalism has its foundation in the civil rights movement and the ethnic social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Celek (2010) notes that multicultural education is an outgrowth of the ethnic studies of the 1960s, with deep roots in the African-American ethnic movements that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He points out that it grew out of the demands of ethnic groups to be included in the curricular of schools, colleges and universities. The instructional materials, oppressive teaching approaches, standardized texts, classroom climate and other symptoms of an unwell and unjust education system were uncovered, discussed and criticized during the 1980s (Gorski, 1999).

In these movements, there was a demand for the recognition of differences, not as means of integrating minority populations into the dominant society but instead, to establish a persistent and virtual ground for the sustenance and empowerment of different ethnic groups (McDough, 2008).

Marshall (1998) defines multi-cultural society as a society characterized by cultural pluralism. In this work, multicultural society is a society made up of the Ndebele, Shona, Venda and Sotho speaking pupils in Manama cluster in Gwanda South District.

Multicultural education is defined as any form of teaching that incorporates the perspectives, texts, histories, values, and beliefs of people from different cultural background (Mapuranga and Bukaliya, 2014). In this presentation, multicultural education is defined as education that is attained by learners from diverse cultural group which include Ndebele, Shona, Venda and Suthu. Multicultural education focuses on the alteration of the educational process to promote the ideals of democracy in a diverse society (Mapuranga and Bukaliya, 2014). Gay (2013) notes that correct information about ethnic and cultural diversity is necessary for both minority and majority students to counter the negative judgments and distortions in schooling and generally in society at large. Multicultural education theorists argue that learners are given the prospects to learn about the problems of social biases and the resulting oppression and marginalization of peripheral groups so that they may come up with tactics to change the status quo and fashion a multicultural society (Mapuranga and Bukaliya, 2014). However, Gay (2013) notes that teachers focus only on safe topics about cultural diversity such as cross grouping similarities and celebrations while overlooking more disturbing issues like inequalities and major contributions of ethnic groups to communal and human life. As a result, some students would be placed at an educational difficulty due to cultural obstacles that have been overlooked (Abbort, 2013). Education authorities are also in agreement that multicultural education renovate liveliness of society through the richness of the different cultures of its members and promotes development of a broader and more refined view of the world( Mapuranga and Bukaliya, 2014). However, it's a matter of recognizing the minority's cultural and linguistic rights to completely participate in educational activities so that their academic success is guaranteed (Magwa, 2010).

According Abbort (2013), multicultural education is grounded on the principle of educational equity for students irrespective of culture and it endeavours to remove blockades to educational opportunities and success for students from different cultural backgrounds. Kubota (2012), strongly emphasize that second language educators must be open minded and display non-prejudiced attitudes in interacting with people of different racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. However, Parrish (2010) points out that those cultural issues remain outward among learners genuinely rooted to the cultural values and modes of thinking that are difficult to detach from the learning process.

Multicultural education assumes that the ways in which pupils learn and reason are deeply influenced by their cultural identity and that to teach culturally diverse learners effectively, needs educational approaches that recognize their backgrounds. However, this being the case, Molosiwa (2009), states that language education programs at colleges do not offer any courses in multicultural education and this recommend that there are many teachers in schools who are poorly prepared with the skills for operating in multicultural classrooms leading to underachievement of learners. According to Abbort (2013), multicultural education targets to improve the learning and success of all students mainly learners from different cultural groups that have remained historically under represented.

Of course, the cultural linguistic diversity of the learners is cited in the curriculum and other policy documents but teacher training does not appear to address issues of multiculturalism since teachers are trained as if schools are mono-cultural societies (Molosiwa, 2009).

According to Kubota (2012), multicultural education encourages the acceptance as well as appreciation of foreign customs and work of art. Abbott (2013) also insists that students' population have developed more diverse and multicultural educational methodologies which are should be used in public schools. However, the foregoing literature reveals that the linguistic and cultural differences among students are ignored by the education system (Molosiwa, 2009). Abbaspour (2012) maintains that even though the majority of language teachers and learners recognize the significant role that culture plays in second language teaching and learning, there is still insufficient or no cultural materials that could offer a comprehensive picture of cultural knowledge required for conducting suitably lessons in cross-cultural classrooms. The multicultural perspective appears to be the most viable approach that can remedy such cultural challenges in a multicultural classroom.

### **Multicultural Education in Zimbabwe**

According to Joseph and Edward (2014), the government of Zimbabwe made creditable strides in terms of rectifying discriminatory educational practices of the colonial government by democratising the learning space. They further state that the government established the bill of rights which involved essential human rights and freedoms intended to guarantee equality of opportunity for all regardless of gender, colour, race and place of origin. Mapuranga and Bukaliya (2014) maintain that the diverse cultures in a nation should be reflected in the education system of a country. Education Acts have been formulated to include all cultures and people determined constitutions of progressive nation have been designed. Moreover, the Zimbabwean Education Act of 1987 introduced compulsory education for all learners regardless of any demographic differences implying support for multicultural education. The secretary for education's directive requires schools to provide equal access to education for all learners with various learning skills from different cultural backgrounds (Edward and Joseph, 2014). According to Edward and Joseph (2014), multicultural education is one of the numerous ways in which the Zimbabwean education scheme can exclude all forms of marginalization of students from different cultural backgrounds. However, the situation on the ground shows that most school are not applying the policy of multiculturalism, and where attempts have been made to make a multicultural school society, this has remained only at lip service (Mapuranga and Bukaliya, 2014).

A study done by Edward and Joseph (2014) in schools at Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe shows that seventy percent of the teachers showed a negative attitude towards exploring instructional methods that cater for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The teachers gave explanations that their class sizes were too large with an average of forty-five to sixty learners made it challenging to attend to each learner's needs. According to their study, the remaining thirty percent indicated the willingness to work with students with diverse learning needs but these teachers were also quick to indicate the challenge of lack of material resources.

## **Multilinguals in Zimbabwe**

Nakara (2011) defines multilingualism as the act of using numerous languages either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. She further elaborates that multilingualism is a linguistic society or country where more than two languages are spoken by people. According to Nhongo (2013), Zimbabwe is a multilingual country and has more than twelve indigenous languages. According to him, Ndebele was originally Nguni but got the influence of Kalanga, Sotho and Shona as Mzilikazi the leader of the Ndebele integrated some people from other groups through force, consensus and compulsion. The groups whom some of their members were unified into Mzilikazi's group include the Sotho, the Ndebele of South Africa, Tswana, Kalanga and Shona. In this study, the multilingual society that is dealt with includes learners from the Shona, Ndebele, Venda and Sotho speaking communities who learn Ndebele as their second language.

However, Nhongo (2013) warns that one is not born with a language so that later he can sacrifice it for certain other benefits. In Zimbabwe, there are about sixteen indigenous languages but the Zimbabwe national language policy continues to relegate indigenous African languages at all stages of the country's educational system (Magwa, 2010). It is only Shona and Ndebele that became the native languages taught in the education system whilst the rest such as Sotho, Nyanja, and Kalanga suffer a calculated negligence (Muchenje et al, 2015). With reference to medium of instruction, the former neglect and demotion of indigenous languages during the colonial era is still supported within the Education system (Gora, 2013). Thus, Magwa (2010) notes that policy on language in schools and colleges successfully relegated African languages in the whole system that is why in the multilingual situation, English is considered a prominent language enjoying higher status whereas Ndebele and Shona have low status. Other languages are enjoying the lowest status.

Gora (2013) is of the view that the responsibility of a good education system is not to demoralize the learners' mother tongue but to supplement and help them to develop ability to deal with the changing environment. According to Nakara (2011), learners in a condition where their own culture has a lower status than that of the culture in which they are learning, language acquirement make slower improvement. A study done by Aghajanian (2012) concerning challenges that Chinese and Middle Eastern students face in the American schools, indicated that the immigrant Chinese students faced linguistic, cultural and academic challenges in acquiring English as a second language. Immigrant Chinese students and Middle Eastern students face difficulties in understanding and partaking in effective discussions since they are not familiar with the cultural content being explored in the classroom. However, Aghajanian (2012) comments that such challenges may come from school teachers' misinterpretation or unawareness to the needs of Chinese immigrant students' home language and cultural background when designing instructions.

Currently in Zimbabwe, education policy makers are giving some recognition to five of the linguistic minorities but application of this policy has been piece meal and at elementary school level only (Magwa, 2010). Positive acceptance of the multilingual learners in the education system was echoed in the Zimbabwe Education Act of 1987 SECTION 5 part X1 4 clause which reads:

in areas where minority languages exist, the minister may authorize the teaching of such languages in primary schools in addition to those specified in subsection 1, (2) and 3 (Magwa, 2010). However, ethnic pressure groups continue to lobby for the introduction of these languages at upper levels despite the fact that teachers are not competent in them since teacher training colleges do not include them in their curriculum while commercial publishers are unwilling to publish books in them because the market is too small ( Magwa, 2010). The language policy makers saw it essential to further modify the language education policy. It was adjusted in May 2006 under SECTION 62 of the Education Act Part X11 that now reads; in areas where the indigenous languages other than those mentioned in subsection (1) are spoken, the minister may approve the teaching of such languages in schools in addition to those specified in subsection (1) (Magwa, 2010). This curriculum alteration was an attempt to cater for the multicultural and multilingual schools. However, this seems not to have addressed completely problems of learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Muchenje et al, 2013). Pupils', whose mother tongue is not taught in the education system, are underachievers when exploring the cultural content of the second language (Muchenje et al, 2013).

According to Scarino (2014), learning cultural issues necessitates an act of engagement in which learners match their own cultural expectations, assumptions, practices and meanings with those of others realising that these are molded within a cultural context that is different from their own. Therefore, failure by the curriculum modifies to accommodate this cultural multiplicity forms a situation whereby, speakers of indigenous languages are silenced and disregarded (Muchenje et al, 2013). Gay (2013) notes that cultural content is a fundamental aspect of what constitute effective teaching and learning for all students.

### **Pupil Challenges in Learning Ndebele Cultural Concepts**

Zugel (2012) found that Mexican immigrants student and their families in the United States had challenges in trying to maintain their language and cultural heritage at the same time trying to fit in the mainstream group. Mexican immigrant students see their cultural norms as substandard compared to that of the United States learners. The study further indicated that Mexican students suffered from identity crisis. They had the challenge of creating these identities in a situation that is dominated by culture where bilingualism is considered substandard. Zugel's study shows that learners who do their studies in the United States face challenges in learning a second language due to cultural and linguistic barriers.

Mount-Cors (2008) noted that learners of Mexican origin who used English as a second language came largely from rural schools and they often came from families whose home language was an indigenous language rather than Spanish. The study showed that upon arrival in the United States' schools, these students were assumed to be native Spanish speakers but in fact were slightly proficient in Spanish. Teachers who had learners from diverse cultural groups lacked language support leading to increasing rates of academic failure.



Chisoni (2015) states that in second language learning, culture plays a crucial role as because learners from different cultures have different ways of learning, expressing themselves and ways of relating to certain issues. The research of Chisoni (2015) indicates that Zimbabwean students learning Chinese acquired a lot of words and grammar but they were not able to construct sentences or to communicate properly in Chinese. The research also noted that these are classes specifically programmed for Chinese culture but students find it difficult to master the culture of the Chinese. Non-native Chinese teachers are not aware of the importance of Chinese culture in learning Chinese. Students learn what is in the textbooks which do not help much since students will not use the language in the right context. The research also showed that the textbooks used are from China and everything set in the books is in Chinese. For Zimbabwean students, it tends to be difficult to understand the examples or the context given in the books since a lot of Chinese language words have some cultural meanings. Therefore, Chisoni argues that it is difficult to explain some of the things in textbooks as they are peculiar to the Chinese culture and had never been seen in Zimbabwe.

### **Teacher Challenges in Teaching Cultural Aspect of the Ndebele Language**

There is a scant research about the process by which teachers develop a cross-cultural competence that enables them to teach diverse students in their classrooms (McAllister and Irvine, 2010). Colon-Muniz et-al (2010) in California reveals that the majority teachers see themselves as multicultural educators and as using multicultural educational practices in their classrooms. The teachers felt that multicultural education had a positive impact on the areas of social interaction, academic growth and cultural enrichment. Moreso, teachers reported that students gained increased self-confidence and held higher personal expectations resulting in success of students in their examinations. Coloz-Muniz et al (2010) study also revealed that multicultural education has a positive effect on attendance and motivation such that students experience higher academic achievement and increased language development.

Molosiwa (2009) carried out a study in Botswana and found that teacher training institutions do not prepare teachers with skills to better address the learning needs of the culturally diverse students population in schools. Children come to school with diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences that are not part of the official school curriculum. The study indicates that in these schools, issues of linguistic and cultural diversity have been neglected long back. All students are considered to be the same and taught the same way. A teacher whose students obtain high grades is considered good while adequacy of teacher preparation to teach diverse students is a peripheralized issue. Edward and Joseph (2014) in Manicaland province of Zimbabwe cited that fifty percent teachers found it difficult operating in a multicultural class principally because of factors such as language and cultural barriers. Furthermore, sixteen percent of the teachers pointed out that, they were not aware of what multicultural education is all about and these were teachers with academic degrees.

## **Strategies to Mediate Against Challenges Encountered by Students**

Byram (2011) proposed a model for teaching second language and culture. He is of the view that combining the use of the learners' first language and second language through comparative analysis and new cultural experience will provide an integrative approach for teaching and learning language and culture. Gay (2013) suggests that teachers have to implement what he calls 'teaching to' cultural diversity which helps students acquire more accurate information about the lives, cultures, contributions, experiences and challenges of different ethnic and racial groups. According to Parrish (2010), prioritizing culture in education and training goes beyond wanting to be effective in promoting knowledge acquisition. In teaching and learning about cultural concepts of a second language, Hunt (2008), suggests that students and teachers alike need to become aware of the differences that really exist in their midst. Recognizing that one's beliefs and behaviours create a spectrum of differences can help teachers increase flexibility in instructional implementation (Parrish, 2010). Therefore, instructors need to determine the level of cultural diversity within their classroom in order to encourage more participation and overcome their own reluctance to teach about cultural issues when they teach multicultural classes.

Zugel (2012) suggests that teachers must understand theories, concepts and strategies around second language learning to further understand the academic challenges students face. He further states that involving minority communities in the education of their children is also beneficial in creating a community wide atmosphere of value and acceptance for these students. On the other hand, Ahram (2012) asserts that schools must build strong relationships between teachers and students to improve understanding of the second language. Aghajanian (2012) states that educators should collaborate with public schools and community centres to develop effective programs and instructional strategies that can incorporate current understanding of cultural issues and challenges which children from diverse cultural background face. In the same vein, Parrish (2010) posits that educators must also become aware of the cultural biases embedded in their own teaching and instructional designs including the selection of instructional activities, their presentation styles and the expectations of students.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Trochim (2005) defines a research design as the glue that holds the research project together and show how all the major parts of the research project work together to try to address the central research questions. On the other hand, Nebeker (2013) defines a research design as a measure that provides the components and the plan for successfully carrying out the study. This study is qualitative and the ethnographic in nature. Creswell (2010) defines an ethnographic case study as qualitative research procedure that describes, analyze and interpret culture, sharing-groups patterns of behaviour, beliefs and language that develop over time. In the same vein, Prill-Brett (2011) asserts that ethnographic case study explores the diversity of human cultures in their particular cultural setting.

This study adopted the ethnographic case study design since it sought to explore the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language which are social constructs in the chosen school. The fact that the design is qualitative in nature make it suits the study since the qualitative approach is suitable in identifying intangible factors such as social norms, ethnicity and beliefs (Woodstrong and Mack, 2005). Genzuk (2003) states that in ethnographic case studies focus is usually a single setting, Gwanda south district or a group of relatively small scale. Ethnographic case studies also allow researchers to conduct in-depth interviews with the members of that culture (Zemliansky, 2008).

In this study, two schools were sampled, forty pupils from Ndebele, Suthu, Venda and Shona cultural backgrounds at the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate level of learning Ndebele as their second language. The sample also consisted of four teachers who are teaching the Ndebele subject in each school, and four from each school who are not Ndebele teachers some of which are non-Ndebele speakers giving a total of 16 teachers. Two heads of department of languages were part of the sample bringing the total number to fifty-eight participants. The researcher used a purposive sampling technique to select the schools, teachers, heads of departments and the learners.

The purposive sampling technique was also used in selecting learners that made up the sample. That is, the research picked the first four students who spoke Venda, four who spoke Sotho and another four who spoke Shona and four who spoke the Ndebele language. This was done so that learners from various cultural backgrounds are included in the sample enabling their views to be captured in this study. To collect data for this study, the instruments were face to face interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews were administered to Ndebele subject teachers, heads of department and non-Ndebele subject teachers. According to Mathers et al (2002), focus group interviews can be used when the researcher can possibly identify a number of individuals who share a common factor and desirable for the research to collect their views within the population sub group. Pupils from different ethnic groups of Venda, Sotho, Ndebele and Shona were given focus group interviews. McMahon and Osborne (2015), argue that focus group interviews are very valuable methods for generating a lot of data and for revealing information that might be more difficult to elicit in one on one interview.

## **Results and Discussion**

The majority of teachers were qualified as diploma holders, only a few had non-teaching degrees needing some in-service training. The teaching years of experience ranged between 6-10 years. Most Ndebele teachers had gained deep experience in the teaching of the Ndebele language and they were in a position to know the challenges and complexities faced by learners in the learning of the Ndebele language.

Data obtained from the interview held with the heads of departments revealed that in the schools there were four ethnic groups of learners; the Shona, Ndebele, Suthu and Venda. Teachers stated that students were a mixed bag of Venda, Suthu, Shona and Ndebele ethnic groups.

The teachers managed to define the term culture. One of the teachers interviewed stated that: *Culture is the celebrated way of life practiced by members of the same community.*

Teachers in Manama cluster knew exactly what culture entailed. The head of department stated that it was a way in which people express and interpret their ideas using their own language to determine what is socially acceptable and unacceptable in a society. This was an indication that heads of departments were knowledgeable about cultural issues.

## **Cultural Aspects of the Ndebele Language Taught at the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate Level**

This theme intended to gather views from the respondents concerning the cultural concepts taught in the Ndebele subject. Ndebele subject teachers identified the cultural aspects that they teach as Ndebele traditional diet, clothing, utensils, tools, taboos, myths, traditional belief systems, marriages, traditional governance, interpersonal relationships, rainmaking ceremonies, and birth as well as death rituals among many others. During the interview session, one of the Non-Ndebele subject teachers argued that some traditional foods, for example *umcaba* (a mixture of cooked sorghum grains and sour milk) are no longer prepared in this modern world yet the syllabus requires Ndebele subject teachers to impart knowledge to learners concerning such traditional foods. The extinction of Ndebele cultural materials as a result of modernization was stated by teachers as a hindering factor in presenting cultural content in the classroom. The terms existed only in textbooks. The Ndebele subject teachers also stated that it was quite challenging to explain to pupils concepts like traditional birth and death rituals of the Ndebele people, as they are no longer practiced in modern day Zimbabwe. One of the teachers was quoted saying:

*It is more like teaching historical cultural practices of the Ndebele people which are divorced from the cultural practices done by Ndebele people at present, hence, complex and confusing to learners.*

The study established that various cultural aspects of the Ndebele language were taught but teachers were not knowledgeable on those cultural practices. Focus group discussions held with learners from the Shona ethnic group revealed that it was difficult for them to link the content explored in the classroom with what they were encountering outside the classroom. The Ndebele they interacted with at home and school did not perform the cultural practices they learn about at school. Learners were failing to identify the Ndebele people basing on the cultural content they were presented with in the classroom because outside the classroom the Ndebele did not practice what is taught in the classroom. Learners also mentioned that the traditional foods of the Ndebele people explored in the classroom were new to them, for example, the likes of *isijeza* (pumpkin porridge), *ufutho* (cooked and dried maize cobs), and *inkovu* (melon soup). They indicated that they did not eat these in their homes or see the Ndebele people eating such kind of food.

Learners also stated that they were taught about the traditional tools, utensils, clothing, and interpersonal relationships when exploring the cultural content of the Ndebele language, yet they were not exposed to tools like spears, grinding stones, arrows and utensils like clay pots, winnowing baskets, *igula lamasi* (milk containers) in and outside the school to enable them understand.

## **Media Used by Ndebele Teachers in the Teaching and Learning of the Ndebele Subject**

The heads of department and teachers cited stated that charts and novels were used to deliver instructions related to cultural content of the Ndebele language. This shows that Ndebele teachers rely on literary texts and charts when teaching the cultural content of the Ndebele language. Their argument was that Ndebele tangible cultural aspects are no longer accessible or existing so that they can bring them to the classroom as teaching aids. Teachers insisted that charts and novels are the only sources where they can extract the cultural information of the Ndebele language. They argued that cultural utensils like *udiwo* (clay pot) have vanished and they get to know them through the images presented in textbooks. Cultural concepts like *ukucola* (ritual way of introducing a daughter in law to the ancestors of the family) can only be interpreted and explained with the help of the cultural content presented in the novel since such cultural practices have ceased to exist. The study found out that cultural information remains abstract to the Suthu, Shona and Venda and even to Ndebele learners. This is worsened by the fact that teachers who conduct such lessons are not knowledgeable enough on the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language they cannot even improvise.

The study found out that Ndebele subject teachers lack vibrant teaching materials that can enhance the effective teaching of the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language. Findings also revealed that what curriculum designers consider as cultural aspects of the Ndebele language is divorced from what is practiced by the Ndebele people on the ground. Learners in focus group discussion also stated that textbooks and novels dominated as sources of matter in Ndebele lessons. They indicated that no tangible cultural aspects have been presented to them during Ndebele lessons. Teachers did not dwell much on topics that have to do with exploring the cultural content of the Ndebele language. They instructed them to open certain pages and to complete particular exercises without any effort made to explain the cultural information presented there, for example, in cultural content that has to do with traditional rituals and interpersonal relationships. Thus during the discussion held with students from Venda ethnic group, one the students said: *The teacher instructs us to read a certain passage in the textbook and answer questions that follow then submit books for marking.*

The study has also established that teachers did not get deeper into cultural concepts, they assumed that all learners understood the interpersonal relationships of an extended family of the Ndebele people thereby not realising that they are disadvantaging learners from Suthu, Shona and Venda ethnic groups.

However, there were some learners during the focus group discussions who mentioned that they had artefacts like clay pots, and wooden plates, bows and arrows in national museums located in Bulawayo. Other learners counted the culture hut in the school as part as of exposure. However, there were some students who argued that the culture hut is empty and it has nothing that resembles the artefacts of the Ndebele people. One student was quoted saying: *The cultural hut is empty. It resembles modern huts that are found in different ethnic groups in Zimbabwe.*

The learners argued that lack of enough cultural material of Ndebele language contributed to their failure to grasp the cultural concepts of the Ndebele language. They pointed out that the cultural information of the Ndebele remained abstract to them. Their parents could not be consulted for homework because they did not know the Ndebele language. The research established that a lot still needed to be done to equip teachers so as to improve their methods of delivering Ndebele lessons for the benefit of learners who come from different cultural backgrounds.

### **Challenges Faced by Pupils from Different Cultural Backgrounds during Lessons**

Ndebele subject teachers articulated that learners were failing to answer properly comprehension passages revolving around cultural aspects of the Ndebele language. Learners are failing to express themselves orally using the Ndebele language when participating in class. During the interview session, teachers argued that learners need to learn the current existing cultural aspects of the Ndebele language since they perform poorly in concepts that require them to explore the historical cultural issues of the Ndebele people that are no longer accessible.

The Ndebele subject teachers cited that it was challenging to teach the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language because they had gone extinct hence emphasizing the inclusion of the current aspects of the Ndebele people in the syllabus which they were familiar with. Learners were reported to be failing to construct grammatically correct and meaningful sentences. One of the teachers pointed out that:

*Learners from Shona background have mastered their mother language at primary level. They do not possess the basic Ndebele language skills hence failing to master complex historical practices of the Ndebele people.*

The study found out that learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, who had been taught their mother language at the primary level, are disadvantaged in Ndebele classroom at secondary level since they do not possess the writing and reading skills that can enable them comprehend the Ndebele language. The heads of department felt that teachers were not trained to teach in multicultural classrooms, hence failed to address properly the problems arising from cultural diverse learners.

In addition, the materials presented in textbooks do not suit learners with different cultural backgrounds since the images, illustrations and examples accommodate those with Ndebele cultural backgrounds.

Heads of departments acknowledged the presence of the cultural hut in the school but were quick to point out that it needs to be boosted with cultural materials of the ethnic groups so that learners better understand the content explored in the classroom. This can also motivate learners by seeing their cultures represented in the school system hence boosting the spirit of learning the cultural concepts of the Ndebele language among learners. Focus group learners echoed that they were not fluent enough to use the Ndebele language in class. One of the students interviewed admittedly said:

*Ndebele is not my mother tongue. I remain quiet even if I do not understand, classmates usually laugh when I use broken Ndebele.*

This study has established that learners from diverse cultural backgrounds are failing to express themselves orally using the Ndebele language hence their problems remain unattended. Also from the focus group discussions, they stated that teachers do not dwell much on topics to do with cultural concepts.

Evidence in research showed that no effort have been made to accommodate learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. Learners are taught as if all are familiar with the Ndebele language and culture.

## **Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching and Learning of the Ndebele Language**

Ndebele teachers stated that time allocated to teach Ndebele lessons was too short yet they had large classes with forty to fifty students, making it difficult for them to attend to each student's needs. One of the teachers cited that: *We have only 35 minutes to conduct Ndebele lessons. Getting deeper into one aspect may hinder you to cover other different important areas in the syllabus.*

The Ndebele subject teachers also admitted that they were not familiar with some of the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language such that they ignore topics or subtopics that get deeper into the culture of the Ndebele people for fear of misleading learners. One the teachers interviewed articulated that it was challenging to explain to learners in detail the Ndebele cultural practice of welcoming back the spirit of the deceased if you were not knowledgeable of the practice. Non-Ndebele subject teachers also argued that it was going to be easy if learners were learning by comparing the Ndebele culture explored in the classroom with that of theirs. Learners from Shona, Venda and Sotho seemed to be clueless.

Teachers also stated that learners portrayed a negative attitude towards learning the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language. They cited an example of a historical novel that outlines the conflicts between the Ndebele and the Shona people which learners hated. Learners directed their attention to the brutality and aggressiveness of Ndebele people towards the Shona people instead of concentrating on cultural aspects of the Ndebele language portrayed there.

Sometimes teachers failed to explain clearly and satisfactorily some of the text and phrases presented in novels and textbooks. Some teachers could not translate cultural concepts to their first languages for them to understand better. Teachers like pupils, had their own challenges. The study also found that teachers themselves were not familiar with the cultural artefacts, beliefs, rituals and interpersonal relationships of the Ndebele people. Sometimes they taught what they did not know themselves.

### **Measures to Overcome Teacher and Learner Challenges**

Ndebele teachers stated that they drilled learners and pressurized them to memorize the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language. Some of the teachers indicated that they explained the concepts to students basing on their own understanding. One of the teachers said: *I explain to my students what I think the text or passage is conveying based on my own understanding rather than showing them that I'm blank.*

Teachers also stated that during free time, they gave remedial lessons to those learners who would have performed below standard. One of the teachers was quoted saying: *I revise the previous exercise with learners who underscored so that they catch up with others.*

Some teachers drilled learners to pass the examination which was the primary concern of learning. However, these learners were not taught to grasp and to be knowledgeable about the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language as the curriculum desires. Teachers used remedial lessons to cater for learners who would have underachieved in their exercises. Evidence in research showed that no attempts were made to improve Ndebele culturally rich teaching aids to enhance learners' understanding. Learning was found to be teacher centered, since the teacher was the one who explained the content basing on his or her own understanding.

The heads of departments suggested that it was going to be useful for teachers to use fieldtrips in their teaching methods so that learners can visit some of the cultural heritage sites and be exposed to cultural products so that they can relate with what is explored in the classroom. Visiting Ndebele traditionalist at their homes could also help learners and teachers gain some exposure to tangible cultural aspects that cannot be brought into the classroom, for example, spears, clay pots and traditional herbs. Inviting culturally rich personalities from the community can help teachers and learners to be knowledgeable of the cultural issues of the Ndebele people. The Ndebele teachers interviewed suggested that the Ndebele syllabus at the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate level has to be changed to address the current culture of the Ndebele people as it is lived and celebrated today. They argued that current cultural concepts need to be included in the syllabus and those that are no longer existing be excluded in the syllabus.



According to them, the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate level syllabus has to be revised and adjusted so that it accommodates all learners from different cultural backgrounds. However, some of the teachers suggested that drilling of learners to conceptualize the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language was the best way to make them master the concepts. Non-Ndebele subject teachers also suggested that indigenous language syllabus should be introduced that cater for the Venda, Shona and Suthu speaking learners so that these learners are not disadvantaged in the Ndebele classroom. On the other hand, learners called for teaching aids that enabled them to comprehend the cultural content explored in the classroom. They suggested that teachers need to be knowledgeable of the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language and be able to at least translate to their first languages so that they can understand better. Most learners from the Shona ethnic group suggested that they preferred to continue learning their mother language which they would have mastered at primary level. The research concluded that Ndebele teachers and learners in Manama cluster in Gwanda South District perceive cultural concepts of the Ndebele language as difficult to teach and comprehend.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The schools in Gwanda south district are multicultural in nature but the indigenous language offered as medium of instruction is Ndebele at the expense of other languages like Suthu, Venda and Shona. This being the case, learners from Shona, Suthu and Venda encounter challenges in learning the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language since cultural information presented in sources of matter accommodates those who come from the Ndebele ethnic group. Teachers' colleges did not train teachers for multicultural classrooms. Molosiwa (2009) points out those colleges and other educational institutions train teachers as if schools are mono-cultural societies.

Teachers themselves were not familiar with these cultural aspects resulting in failure to improve teaching aids that can enhance learners' understanding. Learners from Suthu, Shona and Venda were disadvantaged by abstract information. This is in line with findings documented by Edward and Joseph (2014) in Manicaland province that teachers found it difficult to operate in multicultural classes due to language and cultural barriers. Learners were failing to express themselves orally or to construct grammatically correct Ndebele sentences. This is in congruence with Aghajanian (2012) study of Chinese and Middle Eastern students attending American schools. Chinese and Middle Eastern students faced linguistic, cultural and academic challenges resulting in low participation in class.

Learners from Venda, Suthu and Shona felt that their mother languages should be used at secondary level. These learners felt demotivated, unattended and unrecognized in the Ndebele classroom. On this note Nakara (2011), notes that in a situation where students own culture has lower status than that of the culture in which they are learning, academic performance in language make slows down. Teachers need vibrant culturally rich teaching aids so that they can enable learners from different cultural backgrounds to comprehend what is being taught in the classroom.

Abbaspour (2012), however, noted that even though the majority of language teachers and learners recognise the important role that culture plays in second language learning and teaching, there is still few or no cultural materials that could provide a comprehensive picture of cultural knowledge required to conduct appropriately in cross cultural classrooms. Teachers drilled learners to master the cultural concepts of the Ndebele language. Some teachers felt that modern aspects of the culture be incorporated into the syllabus because culture is not static.

Strategies suggested to mitigate learners' challenges in learning the cultural content of the Ndebele language included provision of teaching aids that can enable learners interpret the content explored. Teachers need to be knowledgeable on the cultural aspects of the Ndebele language and be in a position to translate to the learners' first language. This is in congruent with Hunt (2008) suggestion that students and teachers alike need to be aware of the differences that exist in their midst which can help increase flexibility in instructional implementation. Teachers must understand concepts and strategies around second language learning to further understand the academic challenges students face.

## **Conclusions**

The research concluded that learners attending secondary education in schools in Manama cluster in Gwanda south district come from different cultural backgrounds which are Ndebele, Shona, Venda and Suthu and face challenges when exploring the cultural content of the Ndebele language in the classroom. The cultural aspects taught in the Ndebele subject include traditional foods, clothing, tools, utensils rituals performed during birth and death of an individual. Learners from different ethnic groups lack the basic reading and writing skills for them to comprehend the Ndebele language.

Moreover, Ndebele teachers in Manama cluster lack vibrant cultural teaching aids that can help learners understand the cultural content explored leading to learners' failure to grasp the cultural matters of the Ndebele people. Teachers also fail to translate these cultural concepts to learners' first language making the cultural information to remain abstract to learners. They drill and pressurize learners to memorize the cultural concepts. Drilling inhibit learners from acquiring the proper cultural knowledge of the Ndebele people that can be used outside the classroom.

## **Recommendations**

Teachers should read extensively and consult Ndebele traditionalists for detailed information concerning the traditional life of the Ndebele people. Teacher training institutions should offer programmes that equip teachers with skills to conduct effective lessons in multicultural classrooms. Curriculum Development Unit should re-design the syllabus so that it accommodates learners from different ethnic groups. There is need to signal Education policy makers to introduce the teaching of Suthu, Shona and Venda in schools in Manama cluster in Gwanda South District.

Documentation of indigenous knowledge sourced from the locals well versed with the Ndebele language and culture so that there is knowledge base for use in the classrooms. The government should make it mandatory that all teachers teaching Ndebele language be experts in the field. Modification of the curriculum at teachers training institutions is necessary to ensure that it caters for the minority languages within the country.

Peer teacher workshops to be done at cluster, district and provincial levels to ensure that the subject syllabus is correctly being implemented. Strict supervision should be done by the school heads and other respective authorities to ensure that the curriculum is being correctly implemented.

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