

# 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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## 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, Ndaue and English. Maintaining intergenerational transmission of minority languages like Ndaue holds significance for preserving the identity and wisdoms of the Ndaue 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.