Reducing conflict in the language domain: A challenge for diverse learner populated schools in mining towns in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Linguistically diverse ethnic groups settled in mining towns in Zimbabwe where employment opportunities were high. As a result of this economic-motivated migration which engineered a diverse population, conflict in the language domain characterises primary schools that are administered by mines. This study aimed to investigate how conflict in the language domain can be reduced. A phenomenological research design was used. A sample of 38 participants consisting of three school administrators, three School Development Committee (SDC) members, two company managers and thirty Grade 6 learners was purposively drawn. Document analysis and interviews were used to gather data. The study revealed that diverse learner populated schools were besieged by language-based conflict which manifested as hatred, exclusion of some indigenous languages from the curriculum and competition over the indigenous language to be used as the language of instruction or the subject of study. It also emerged that language-based conflict could be minimised not only by teaching and learning languages spoken in and around the school but also by tolerating them.

Keywords: Linguistic diversity, cultural conflict, multicultural education, education plan, diverse learner populated schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict in the language domain is noticeable in the world today especially in nations that are characterised by diversity as well as in institutions that deal with several diverse-oriented countries. In the European Union where linguistically diverse countries come into contact, language-rooted conflict is encountered as member states clash over the predominance of two languages – English and French- in an institution where twenty-four official languages are accepted as working languages (Ammon, 2006; Christiansen, 2006). For instance, it was reported in an article on language conflicts in the European Union that there were regular protests by the German government against being addressed in English (Ammon, 2006). In fact Germans, Austrians, French,

Italians and Spaniards fear that the international standing of their own languages may suffer owing to the predominance of English language. In the United States, a country characterised by linguistic diversity (Banks, 2014), it has been reported that conflict in the language domain is typical. The parents who speak a first language other than English are demanding that their leaders, images, hopes, languages, and dreams be mirrored in the curriculum. In northern Africa, particularly in Morocco, most conflicts occur as a result of differing social status and preferential treatment of the dominant language (Zouhir, 2013). For example, the speakers of Berber and Moroccan Arabic languages compete for the recognition and preferential treatment of their respective languages.

In southern Africa, especially in Zimbabwe, language-rooted conflict is prominent in mining towns (Indabawa and Mpofu, 2006), which became linguistically diverse due to migration. The migrant labourers who came to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) from Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia (now Malawi and Zambia respectively) speak Chewa (Hachipola, 1998). Other dwellers in Zimbabwean mining towns relocated to the mining towns from within. This is the case with the Shona workers who migrated from Mashonaland, Midlands, Manicaland and Masvingo provinces of Zimbabwe and the Ndebele who moved into mining towns from Matabeleland in the Northern and Southern provinces. The Venda and Sotho migrant labourers relocated to mining towns from Matabeleland South Province while the Nambya and the Tonga came from Matabeleland North province.

The mining activities that attracted these migrants include: extraction of an array of minerals such as diamonds, gold, chrome, copper, tin, platinum and coal among others; custom milling; as well as buying and selling. As a consequence of the above-stated economic developments, Zimbabwe now officially recognises the following indigenous languages: Chewa, Chibarwe, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa side by side with English and Sign language (Constitution of Zimbabwe, Chapter 1:06). While the Zimbabwean constitution appears to recognise diverse languages, conflict due to language differences is rampant.

In a recently recorded incident, the Ndebele speaking community in Matabeleland province complained bitterly about the deployment of non-Ndebele speaking teachers in their schools whom they accused of teaching Shona instead of Ndebele (Bulawayo 24 News, 2014). In another incident the same community was baffled by a poster which was written in a language other than theirs (Bulawayo 24 News, 2014). In a Tonga speaking community in Binga District, the Rural District council passed a resolution banning the teaching of Ndebele in Binga schools in a bid to protect their Tonga language, culture and tradition (Sunday News, 2014; Bulawayo 24 News, 2014). Given that the linguistic diversity of Zimbabwean mining community is high and that schools that are characterised by a diverse learner population usually experience language-rooted conflict, the research questions that transpire from the above are; how does conflict in the language domain manifest in diverse learner populated schools? And how can conflict in the language domain be reduced?

Aim of the study

As it is well documented in the literature that conflict in the language domain manifests in diverse learner populated schools (Saxena, 2009:168; Cocodia, 2008:11-12), the study undertook to investigate how language-rooted conflict manifests in diverse learner populated schools with the intention to minimise it. To achieve this aim, the theoretical framework which guided the study needs to be examined.

Theoretical model

The study is largely shaped by the sabona model. A model differs from a theory in that the former is a simplified version of the latter (Gabrenya Jr, 2003:7). 'Sabona' as an idea and a project was first developed by Galtung in 1996 (Galtung, 2008:51). The concept of 'sabona' which connotes 'I see you' (Trunova, 2011:8), is anchored in the Zulu culture where emphasis on reconciliation is considered fundamental not only for building a peace culture but also for human and societal development (Faldalen et al., 2011:14). Galtung initiated the sabona project, the mission of which is to build a healthy society, through peace culture targeted on both the classroom and the whole school. The peace culture is not only important for solving conflicts but also for preventing their escalation at an early stage (Galtung, 2008:51; Trunova, 2011:8). In other words, the sabona model has as its goal to build schools on a conflict resolving culture inculcated at an early stage (Trunova, 2011:8; Faldalen et al., 2011:14). The sabona model assists the diverse learner populated school to establish and sustain a culture of peace at the early stages of learning. Research reveals that conflict ought to be resolved before it festers. Conflict that is not resolved during the early stages of the development of the child, leads to personal problems in adulthood (Trunova, 2011:8). In this regard, the sabona model targets primary schools for two reasons. First, it is at this stage where a culture of peace can be successfully inculcated into learners. Second, language-induced conflict that learners encounter at school and in the community can easily be resolved at this early stage before it escalates. The sabona model has a clear history, a mission, a tool kit and pilot results which if well understood and implemented, can reduce cultural conflict in schools.

The sabona model consists of a toolkit with seven instruments that go a long way in dampening conflict in the language domain (Trunova, 2011:8). Firstly, there is 'I see you' which involves not only coming into contact with the parties at conflict with one another but listening and understanding them as well. This instrument encourages teachers and diverse learners to be patient with one another. Secondly, there is sabona - to see beyond the means which relates not only to solving conflict without violence but understanding the goals and means of the conflicting parties as well. Diverse learners differ in goals, attitude, and behaviour which the teachers should understand and tolerate. The ABC triangle is the third. It is a basic understanding of the conflict behaviour where misunderstanding of parties (C) influence their feelings and attitudes (A) leading to non-constructive, bad

behaviour (B) (Trunova, 2011:8). The teachers who are familiar with the ABC triangle can easily deal with conflicting parties. Fourthly, there is the transcend method which is basically an overview of possible solutions which conflicting parties aim to turn into a reality satisfactory to them. The fifth tool is the sorting-mat which helps not only to see the negative side of the story but also to focus on the positive side of the past in a bid to map out a positive future. Steps to solutions are the sixth. They draw the whole conflict picture by finding the goals and discussions of all the parties involved. The seventh is the crossroads of reconciliation, the 'ACC principle' (answer, concrete dialogue and change). It prepares learners to handle conflict by training them to explain their motives, means and goals. Apart from that, they are also taught to resolve conflicts by opening for dialogue and accepting change (Trunova, 2011:8).

Teachers operating in diverse learner populated schools can use the sabona toolkit to prevent and resolve language-induced conflict. Any instrument can be utilised to reduce language-induced conflict at any time depending on the nature of the conflict. The sabona toolkit helps both the teacher and the learner to operate peacefully in diverse learner populated schools. The seven-fold sabona tool-kit has the capacity to transform a conflict-ridden learning environment into a peaceful one (Galtung, 2008: 51).

The sabona model has been pilot-tested at a primary school (Sabona school) in Southern Norway in 2005 (Trunova, 2011:8). It emerged from the pilot study at Sabona school that the sabona model (Trunova, 2011:8), is in fact a way of life created at a school because teachers apply its principles both in school settings and in everyday life. Besides that, it is credited for creating a special peace building climate in the classroom and the whole school. For example, a situation where learners fight or call their counterparts bad names because of theft or a dispute at school may call for teachers to use the transcend method (the fourth toolkit) to resolve conflict of this nature by asking the confrontational parties to suggest possible solutions to their dispute. The teachers then analyse the confrontational parties' suggestions and draw steps to solutions (sixth toolkit) and finally engage the concerned parties in an open dialogue where the solutions may be accepted thereby resolving the conflict (seventh toolkit). The sabona model regards both the teacher and the learner as equal partners in their need to be heard, understood and respected. Reiterating this observation on the workability of the sabona model, researchers remark that "sabona helps us to see that all conflicts are at a basic level the same, whether large or small, personal or global ... sabona builds on fundamental respect both for 'self' for 'the others" (Faldalen et al., 2011:14). By emphasising respect for self and for the others, the sabona model gradually constructs a peaceful learning atmosphere at the school. Having been piloted and designed to reduce conflict in primary schools, the sabona model sounds unique in that

it closely applies to primary schools and addresses the language-rooted conflict that diverse learner populated schools face.

Literature on conflict in the language domain

Cultural conflict in the domain of language surfaces when certain languages are either bracketed out of the school curriculum or regarded as 'others'. Treating a language as the 'other' is tantamount to excluding it (Saxena, 2009). Regarding a language as the 'other' is as good as declaring it worthless and problematic (Saxena, 2009). More to that, such marginalization reminds the speakers of a marginalized language that they are not worthy of recognition. It is argued that we assign different power to groups by treating some languages as less significant than others (Nieto, 2010). One researcher terms this practice the ideology of exclusion (Nieto, 2010). In fact, when we exclude a language, we do not only throw away the cultural heritage enshrined in it (Eleojo, 2014) but also threaten its existence. The well-being of a group is symbolised by its language be it oral or written. Any threat to one's language has implications for his/her survival. The point here is that language-induced conflict is ignited by relegating a language to an extent that the one who speaks it feels worthless and threatened. The conflict over the exclusion of a language culminates into a stiff competition for the indigenous language of instruction to be used in diverse learner populated schools.

Conflict over the language of instruction is basically a policy issue. The language-policy-in-education stipulates that at ECD level, all mother tongues are media of instruction particularly in areas where they are spoken (Ministry of Education, Sport, Art and Culture, 2006). Notwithstanding the use of first languages as media of instruction in their areas of catchment, the Education Act (2006:28) maintains that the three main languages, namely English, Shona and Ndebele are supposed to be taught on an equal-time basis in all schools up to form two. This makes the scenario in diverse learner populated schools so tricky that schools often violate the language-in-education-policy by rewarding some mother tongues while sidelining others in the same catchment area. Some primary schools end up abandoning the indigenous languages like Shangani, Chewa, Nambya, Tonga, Sotho and Venda that are spoken in their locality. They resort to English and either Ndebele or Shona for school business and socialisation. In some primary schools, ECD learners receive instruction only in English. By so doing, the primary schools stand at conflict with the language-in-education-policy.

Apart from schools contradicting the language-in-education-policy, communication breakdown often ignites fighting and jeering in diverse learner-populated schools. Such conflict can be averted by promoting intercultural communication which is known for enhancing cultural

fluency (LeBaron, 2003:6; Gellman, 2007; Berns, 2010). Intercultural communication embodies familiarity with cultures, how they work and the way they intertwine with our relationships in times of conflict and harmony. It may be envisaged that the staff that operates in diverse learner-populated schools need to master many languages. That means an individual needs to be multilingual. The question that may be asked is 'can an understanding multilingualism quell off language-induced conflict in diverse learner populated schools?' In articulating the value of an understanding of multilingualism in diversity, Berns (2010) points out that it lubricates intercultural communication. That is, communication across cultures becomes viable when diverse cultural groups tolerate and understand one another. Conflict in the language domain can be reduced by an understanding of multilingualism which propels learners to tolerate and respect one another regardless of their differences.

Besides communication breakdown, the language to be taught as a subject of study can be a source of conflict in diverse learner populated schools. It has been observed that preferential treatment of diverse languages has power connotations for their speakers (Nieto, 2010). Thus in a diverse linguistic area, choosing an indigenous language to be taught as a subject of study in school is as good as bestowing power on the speakers of that rewarded language. Such an act has the potential to trigger language-induced conflict. In light of the volatility of linguistically-diverse communities particularly in Africa, Cocodia (2008: 11-12) submitted that one characteristic of the ethnic conflicts in Africa the fact that the African states contain people who originally are not only heterogeneous but as well composed of community contenders who fight to seek power and control over the other. This contention is largely rooted in the language domain where different groups struggle for the recognition of their languages. Languages are found at the centre of the conflicting parties by virtue of the fact that they are carriers of the respective cultures of different groups.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study adopted a qualitative research design which is particularly phenomenological. Phenomenology is a study of the lived, human phenomena within everyday social contexts in which phenomena occur from the perspective of those who experience them (Denscombe, 2010; Gray, 2011; Cohen et al., 2011). Participants' views are critical in phenomenological research since they constitute the data of the study. The thrust of phenomenological research lies in its ability to tease out what the participants think and how they behave (David and Sutton, 2004).

Population

For this study, the population comprised 18 operational mining

Table 1. Population.

Category	Number
Operational mining towns	18
Company managers	18
Primary schools administered by mines	25
School administrators	75
SDC members	125
Grade 6 learners	2000

towns, 18 managers of mining companies, 25 primary schools from which 125 SDC members, 75 school administrators and 2000 Grade 6 learners were considered (Table 1). All the 25 primary schools host a diverse learner population.

Sample, sample size and sampling procedures

The researchers used multi-phase and purposive sampling techniques to select the sample for this study. The former involves selecting the sample in stages (Cohen et al., 2011). The researchers resorted to multi-phase sampling because they found it critical in sampling the mining towns and primary schools that are administered by mines before choosing the participants. Thus multi-phase sampling permitted the researchers to locate the participants' context before choosing them. For this study the sampling process was done in two phases:

i) In phase one (Table 2), the operational mining towns and the primary schools that they administer were selected.
ii) In phase two (Table 3), the participants for this research were drawn from the primary schools that host a diverse learner population as well as company management. The details of the sampling procedure are as follows:

In phase one, three mining towns were selected on the grounds that they house at least three ethnic groups apart from being operational. The researchers also selected three primary schools administered by mines, one from each of the three selected mining towns. The three targeted primary schools were preferred because they deal with a diverse learner population. Thus purposive sampling technique was used to choose the sample in phase one. It has to do with researchers choosing the participants whom they judge to be appropriate for the study (Cohen et al., 2011). From sample 1 above, sample 2 was chosen.

In phase two, a sample of 38 (1.7%) participants from three primary schools and company management was purposively selected. Three school administrators, three SDC members and two company managers were judged by the researchers to be key informants in as far as language-induced conflict in a diverse learner population is concerned. Thirty Grade 6 learners were selected on the grounds that they were mature enough to explain the language-based conflict that they encountered in diverse learner populated schools. It was through multi-phase and purposive sampling techniques that the sample for this study was selected.

The participants in the current study hailed from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Table 4).

Research instruments

Two research instruments were used to gather data for this study. These included document analysis and interviews. An official

Table 2. Population and sample by operational mining town and their primary schools.

Target group	Population	Sample (Sa 1)	Percentage (%)
Operational mining towns	18	3	16.7
Primary schools	25	3	12

Table 3. Population and sample of sample by participants.

Target group	Population	Sample of sample (sa 2)	Percentage
School administrators	75	3	4
SDC members	125	3	2.4
Company managers	18	2	11.1
Grade 6 learners	2000	30	1.5
Total	2218	38	1.7

Table 4. Participants by linguistic background and location.

Participant	School	Linguistic background
School administrator	A, B and C	Shona
SDC Member	A	Ndebele
SDC Member	B	Shona
SDC Member	C	Chewa
Company Manager	A	Chewa
Company Manager	C	Shona
Grade 6 Learners 1, 5, 6 and 10	A	Shona
Grade 6 Learners 2, 3 and 4	A	Ndebele
Grade 6 Learners 7	A	Chewa
Grade 6 Learners 8 and 9	A	Tonga
Grade 6 Learners 1, 2, 3 and 4	B	Chewa
Grade 6 Learners 5, 6, 7 and 8	B	Shona
Grade 6 Learners 9 and 10	B	Ndebele
Grade 6 Learners 1, 2 and 3	C	Shona
Grade 6 Learners 4,5 and 6	C	Shangani
Grade 6 Learners 7,8 and 9	C	Chewa
Grade 6 Learner 10	C	Ndebele

document namely the minutes of parents' meetings was meticulously analysed in order to locate incidences of language-based cultural conflict in three primary schools. Face-to-face interviews were done with three school administrators, three school development committee members and two company managers. For Grade 6 learners three focus group interviews were used.

RESULTS

Document analysis data

One document, the minutes of the 2014 parental meeting, was analysed as indicated in Table 5.

The document analysis data of School A revealed that there was a spirit of hatred prevailing between the parents and the SDC leadership. This could be the reason for the remarks by the chairperson that the parents were at liberty to fully express their views. The motive behind this remark could be either that the chairperson was trying to mitigate hatred by allowing people to fully express their views or that he was allowing people to fully express their views as a way to isolate and identify those who opposed the current administration and authority. Another remark where the chairperson discouraged finger pointing indicated that there was language-rooted conflict manifesting at School A which had escalated to an uncontrollable level. The manifestation of conflict in the language domain was

Table 5. Summary of the remarks and recommendations from the document analysis data.

School A	School B	School C
How language conflict manifests in diverse learner populated schools:	**How language conflict manifests in diverse learner populated schools:**	**How language conflict manifests in diverse learner populated schools:**
• The SDC consisted of nine members four of whom were Shona speaking while five spoke Ndebele.	• The SDC has nine leaders of Shona origin.	• There are nine SDC members two of whom were of the Chewa origin while seven belonged to the Shona ethnic group.
• The chairperson remarked that parents should be at liberty to fully express their views.	• Highlights on the pass rate of the school indicate that the school was excelling.	• The chairperson addressed parents in Shona.
• The chairperson remarked that parents should not allow the spirit of hatred between themselves and those in leadership.	• The chairperson addressed the parents in Shona.	• Chairperson urged parents to unite and focus on the development of the school.
• The chairperson addressed the parents in Ndebele.	• The remarks were silent about diverse nature of the school.	
• One parent requested that the minutes that were read in Ndebele should be read again in Shona.		
• The chairperson discouraged finger pointing.		
• The parents complained about the plummeting Grade 7 pass rate which fell from 42% n the previous year to 37% in 2014.		
Reducing conflict in the language domain	**Reducing conflict in the language domain**	**Reducing conflict in the language domain**
• Parents were encouraged to be at liberty to express themselves in order to kill the spirit of hatred.	• The parents urged to be supportive of the school initiatives.	• The parents were encouraged to unite for the purpose of developing the school.
• Reading the minutes of the previous meeting in both Shona and Ndebele indigenous languages.		
• The ethnic composition of the leadership should be diverse.		

evident. One parent demanded that the minutes that had been read in Ndebele be read in another indigenous language, Shona. The reason behind such a request could either be that the parent did not understand Ndebele or that the member was protesting against the use of one indigenous language while excluding others. In this case Ndebele had been used while Shona, Chewa and Tonga were left out.

For Schools B and C, the remarks that were recorded in the minutes of the parental meetings were silent about language-related conflict although it was there. Language-induced conflict could be propelled by mere silence about the existence of other languages.

Interview data

Three school administrators, three SDC members, two company managers and thirty learners were interviewed

in order to establish how conflict that manifests in the language domain could be reduced.

Views of school administrators

School administrators were asked to respond to the question; how do language differences contribute to conflict in the school? The school administrator of school A had this to say:

> *You find that kuti vanoita Shona vanoda kuti Shona iitwe. Vane vana vavo vanoda kuti Shona iitwe. Vanoita Ndebele vanoda kuti Ndebele iitwe zvokuti zvinotopa a lot of conflict izvozvo.* Meaning those who lobby for Shona to be taught in the school, want their children to do Shona at school. Those who advocate for the teaching of Ndebele in a diverse learner populated school

want their children to do Ndebele at school. That friction causes a lot of conflict.

In this case, the issue that matters in a diverse learner populated school pertains to indigenous languages that that should be used as the language of instruction to learn other subjects and those that should be taught as the subjects of study. At School A, there was tension between the Ndebele and the Shona parents about the languages that should be taught at the school. The parents of Ndebele origin strove to have their language rewarded in the diverse learner populated school in the same manner the Shona did. The community leaders reported the matter to the District Office accusing the school administrator of attempting to impose Shona in an area they claimed to be a territory for the Ndebele. The school administrator indicated that the Ndebele community leaders feared that Shona would supersede Ndebele once it was introduced. In light of the experience of the school administrator of School A, the language-induced conflict manifested in form of the competition over the indigenous language that should be taught as a subject of study in a diverse learner populated school. On top of that, the ethnic groups were scared to lose their identity through the exclusion of their languages.

The school administrator of School B revealed that the language differences caused communication breakdown. She had this to say:

> Like here our main language is Shona but sometimes we may have children who may transfer in who are Ndebele speakers. So they take time to be comfortable with the Shona language. One child might not understand what the other one is saying and so they may clash. It's not anything very serious but you can find them arguing.

This situation shows that breakdown in communication generates tensions among learners. An interesting case involves parents and learners of School C. The school administrator of school C indicated that some parents at the school preferred to have their ECD learners receive instruction in English only while others opted for a mixture of English and Shona. As a result of such language differences, the school established the two ECD classes, A and B where the former received instruction only in English while the latter used a mixture of English and Shona. The language-related conflict cascaded to learners where it was reported that those who received their instruction only in English, looked down upon their counterparts who learned in English and Shona. In the words of the school administrator of school C, those who used English as the only medium of instruction tended to shout *no Shona no Shona no Shona here!* Meaning Shona has no place here. The learners who were shouted at felt out of place. They at times withdrew their participation from classroom activities.

Views of SDC members

The SDC member of school A confirmed the school administrator's experience of tension between the Ndebele and the Shona parents. He revealed that the parents always demanded to be addressed in their language. He had this to say:

> I have experiences that when addressing parents at a meeting with SDC and parents here, there is a time when you try to address them in the other language some other parents would say *asizwa thina, abanye sithi hatisi kunzwa taura neShona or hai khuluma lesiNdebele.* This translates to mean, "we do not understand you, please speak in Shona," others shouting "speak in Ndebele."

This shows that the parents in diverse learner populated schools desire to be addressed in their languages. Language-induced conflict festers the moment someone uses one indigenous language without recognizing others. While there is evidence of language-rooted tension between Shona and Ndebele parents at School A, conflict manifested differently at school B. The SDC member of school B indicated that the Chewa parents around the school found themselves without choice but to speak the dominant Shona language. She said:

> *kana akanganisa anoedzesera zvokuti vamwe vanotonzwa kuti ava amai vanotaura asi Shona yavo yakarereka asi vanokurumidza kuvanzwisisa,* meaning, the Chewa people in this community try to speak in Shona though they struggle to do so. The people in the area understand their situation and attempt to derive meaning from the non- standard Shona spoken by the people of Chewa origin.

In this case, the Chewa parents grapple with the Shona indigenous language every time they interacted with the Shona people. Similarly, the learners of Chewa origin at school B struggled with the concepts and also grappled with the Shona language. The statement by the SDC member of school B showed that the Chewa parents struggled to communicate in Shona. The conflict was not vocalised perhaps because the Chewa are a minority but it affected their interaction on a daily basis.

Views of company managers

The company manager of school A felt that there was language conflict in the school. He actually said:

I think at the moment all our primary school there is language conflict there. There are too many Shona speaking teachers than the Ndebele ones so there I think there is conflict.

The manager thought that language-induced conflict was propelled by lack of an ethnic match among the groups in the community, learners and the school staff. This view was also discussed in the analysis of documents. The company manager of the mine that was responsible for school A attributed the low pass rate in Ndebele at the school to lack of an ethnic match between the staff and the learners. He reported that Shona teachers who taught Ndebele language at school A lacked the proficiency to do so. As a result, they were blamed for the low Ndebele pass rate prevailing at the school. In connection to the poor performance due to the incompetency of the Shona teachers the Company Manager responsible for school A said:

Most of the Ndebele students from Grade 1 to Grade 7, they fail Ndebele language because some teachers are not versed in the language that they are teaching at the primary school.

The participant meant that the Shona teachers who dominated school A were not competent in teaching Ndebele resulting in a poor performance in the subject. In other words, there was a belief that Ndebele language should be taught by Ndebele teachers who are believed to be versed with it.

Views of learners

They revealed various avenues through which language-induced conflict permeates diverse learner populated schools. The eminent avenue through which conflict in the language domain penetrated a diverse learner populated school was communication breakdown due to language differences. The L10SA (learner number 10 of school A) actually said:

kunamwe nyaya yekuti kana muNdebele anataura zvisinganzwiki nomuShona, muShona obva afunga kuti muNdebele ava kumutuka vobva vazotanga kurwa. Meaning if a Ndebele speaking learner utters something beyond the comprehension of the Shona counterpart, then the Shona speaking learner assumes that his Ndebele counterpart is mocking him. They end up fighting.

The same result was echoed by L6SA who indicated that misunderstandings that are caused by communication breakdown usually culminate into fighting.
The language-induced conflict that diverse learner populated schools encountered were believed to be emanating from the parents. L6SA articulated:

Vanenge vaine magrudge ekuti may be kana kuti maparents haawirirani dzimwe nguva saka vana vanenge vave kuitiranawo magrudges emaparents vobva vati handidi kukuona wakagara padhuze neni kana kuti handidi kukuona uchitamba neni. Meaning, there are times when learners take up grudges that their parents have at home, let's say parents hate one another. The learners end up holding the same grudges such that they ban their classmates from sitting close to them let alone play with them.

This view was confirmed by L1SA who gave the same example. L1SB of Chewa origin confessed that some learners refused to sit next to her. She was isolated because of her language which was different from the others.
Learners revealed their feelings towards the teachers who gave examples, instructions, or songs in an indigenous language other than theirs as follows:

L6SA: I feel angry
L18SA: I feel angry
L5SA*: ndonzwa kutsamwa* meaning I feel irritated
L4SA: I feel angry
L3SA: I feel angry
L6SB: I feel unhappy
L4SB: I feel sad
L2SB: I feel …, I feel sad
L10SB: I feel unhappy
L1SB: I feel unhappy
L9SC: I feel sad
L8SC: I feel very upset because I cannot understand the language
L7SC: I feel very shock
L2SC: I feel very upset
L7SC: I will be surprised

Although 15 (50%) learners used similar words to express their dissatisfaction with teachers who side-lined their mother languages, the feelings against such practice were extremely strong. The other 15 (50%) did not show animosity towards language exclusion because their languages were rewarded in the school.
Conflict in the language domain can escalate to unprecedented levels as it manifests in the diverse learner populated schools. L6SC of Shangani origin had this to say:

You find pupils shy to speak their languages because some laugh at them. You find that if you speak Shangani they come around and say he is speaking Shangani, he is talking in

Shangani. Someone end up shy to speak his or her language.

Thus learners who attempted to interact in their minority languages were often denigrated and they end up shunning their mother tongues.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of findings from document analysis data was done in connection to the ideas derived from the sabona model. It emerged from the analysis of the document that language-induced conflict manifested in diverse learner populated schools in the form of hatred. The parents hated one another and as indicated by the learner number 6 of School A, the hatred by one ethnic group towards another is normally inherited from the grandparents who were intolerant of other ethnic groups. In cases where the indigenous languages were not validated, hatred escalates. This result confirms the third instrument of the sabona model namely the ABC triangle (Trunova, 2011:8) which states that misunderstanding parties influence their feelings and attitudes leading to non-constructive, bad behaviour. In this case the traces of hatred recorded in the minutes of the parental meeting at school A is a form of non-constructive, bad behaviour which must be corrected.

The indication in diverse learner populated schools that the authorities were silent about other languages prevailing in the area is in fact a form of exclusion. The spirit of hatred that was recorded at school A could perhaps be ignited by the exclusion of other languages from school business. This is why Nieto (2010:1) reports that the different power is assigned to groups by treating some languages as less significant than others. It is through differential treatment of languages that the spirit of hatred is created and compelled.

The suggested recommendations on how to reduce conflict in the language domain can be discussed in light of the seven instruments of the Sabona model. The sabona model advises teachers operating in diverse learner populated schools to listen and understand conflicting parties (instrument 1), solve conflict without violence (instrument 2), analyse possible solutions and take steps to solutions with a balance of both negative and positive sides of conflicting parties (instruments 4, 3 and 6) and finally encourage the conflicting parties to engage in dialogue in order to bring about a positive change. From the document analysis data, the parents who hated one another due to language differences could be listened to and understood (instrument 7) without engaging in violence. Thus they are encouraged to engage in dialogue (instrument 7). The probable solutions to hatred and exclusion are analysed (instrument 4). In doing so, the positive and negative aspects of hatred and exclusion (instrument 5) are

deliberated until agreed steps are taken (instrument 6). From the document analysis data the following steps were taken with the aim to reduce conflict in the language domain: dialogue where members were encouraged to fully express themselves, engaging an interpreter to translate minutes from one indigenous language to another, emphasizing team spirit and unity of purpose as well as creating child friendly groups that facilitated dialogue in the diverse learner populated schools. The steps that were taken helped to quell off language induced conflict in diverse learner populated schools.

The findings from the interview data on the manifestation of conflict in the language domain revealed that schools tended to bracket out indigenous languages like Tonga, Chewa and Shangani which they regarded as 'others'. Thus schools treated them as inferior languages that barely were relevant to the curriculum. Participants recognized the existence of the dominant Shona and Ndebele languages. They could only acknowledge the so called other languages after a probe. At school B, the Shona speakers expected the Chewa in the school and the community to converse in Shona. This is a form of exclusion. Conflict was induced by treating the languages as others (Saxena, 2009; Nieto, 2010; Eleojo, 2014).

Conflict over the language of instruction and/or the language as a subject of study was indeed a policy issue. It emerged that parents clashed over the language of instruction particularly at ECD level. At school A, the Ndebele strove to block the introduction of Shona at the school fearing that Shona would gradually supersede Ndebele once it was introduced. At school C, some parents preferred the use of English only as a medium of instruction at ECD level while others opted for the indigenous language, Shona. In the light of this finding, it was observed that one- language-only or English-only mentality often created conflict and tension in multilingual classrooms (Li and Martin, 2009:208). ECD learners at school C where English and Shona were concurrent media of instruction for two separate classes A and B respectively tended to mock one another when they mixed at school. The former ECD class at times denigrated its latter counterpart by shouting 'no Shona, here' meaning Shona was an abomination in their class. In this way, language-induced conflict manifested in diverse learner populated schools.

Still on manifestation of conflict through the language-in-education-policy, diverse learner-populated schools offered instruction in only one mother language when the aforesaid policy required them to adopt mother languages in the catchment area of the ECD school (Ministry of Education, Sport, Art and Culture, 2006). In addition, the Education act (2006) stipulates that the main languages of Zimbabwe; namely English, Shona and Ndebele shall be taught on an equal time basis in all schools. Most schools do not follow this policy because of scarcity of resources that is they neither have the funds to pay for interpreters nor enough multilingual teachers.

They are at conflict with it perhaps because the government declares policies without providing for the resources required in implementing them (Ndamba, 2013; Chimhundu, 2010).

Apart from exploring language conflict manifesting through the language-in-education-policy, conflict in the language domain manifested via the communication processes. The breakdown of communication often ignited fighting and friction in schools. Due to language difference, learners at school B often clashed and argued as result of breakdown in communication. Berns (2010) argues that intercultural communication should be lubricated in order to reduce cultural conflict.

Participants indicated that groups pushed for the recognition of their respective languages in schools in mining towns. As groups strive for recognition of their languages (Zouhir, 2013: 271) conflict is induced mainly due to the preferential treatment of the dominant language which forces the disadvantaged one either to die out or to lose space. This result tallies with a study on language situation and conflict in Morocco where it emerged that the Arabization policy which declared classical Arabic as an official language at the expense of Berber triggered conflict by Berber leaders who reacted by successfully pushing for the recognition of their language (Zouhir, 2013: 271). In connection with cultural groups striving for the recognition of their languages, there was an outcry by communities in Matebeleland region of Zimbabwe against teaching of Shona in Ndebele-dominated communities and Ndebele in Tonga-dominated northern parts of Matabeleland (Bulawayo 24 News, 14 September 2014). The discussion revealed that conflict in the language domain manifests in diverse learner populated schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that a *language centre* should be established not only to preserve languages but also to cater for learning and training needs of the school staff, learners and the community. An understanding of multilingualism should be fostered in teachers who deal with diverse learner-populated schools. It was also recommended in the study that schools should implement the sabona model which emphasizes peace building. In other words schools need to ground all learning on a peace building culture.

CONCLUSION

The article explored avenues through which language-induced conflict manifests in diverse learner populated schools. In examining conflict due to language difference, the sabona model, guided the study. It emerged that conflict in the language domain manifests in diverse learner populated schools via clashes over the indigenous languages to be taught as the subjects of study in schools, the violation of the language-in-education-policy, exclusion of certain indigenous languages from the school curriculum and communication breakdown. It was suggested from the study that diverse learner populated schools could minimise language-rooted conflict by establishing a language centres for learning diverse languages, staffing schools with diverse, culturally-competent and ethnically matching resource persons and implementing the sabona model. Diverse learner populated schools should take heed of the suggested recommendations in order to reduce the language-rooted conflict they are facing.

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