

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

## Enabling the Economics of African Languages in Language Policies of South Africa and Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

*Although interest in studying the nexus of language economics and language planning has been increasing, much of it focuses on global languages such as English and how they facilitate speakers' entry into job markets. In contexts where indigenous languages are still breaking into public domains of usage, proficiency in these languages is an important part of speakers' human capital portfolio. The drive to develop and promote indigenous languages has thus become salient in the language policies of African countries. This paper draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical notion of 'language as capital' to discuss the intersection of language policy and language economics in South Africa and Zimbabwe. It examines how post-colonial language policy initiatives in education contribute to the revalorisation of indigenous African languages in a globalising world. We also build on the premise that for African languages to accrue prestige, enabling conditions must be created to foster their use. Language policies thus legitimatise and create opportunities for African languages in the linguistic market, potentially translating this linguistic capital into economic capital for their speakers. However, we argue that language policy proclamations must be complemented by implementation and continuous development of African languages to become attractive for acquisition and use.*

**Keywords:** language economics; language policy; language revalorisation; linguistic capital; marginalisation

### Introduction

Interest in the nexus of language economics and language planning has been increasing (Zhang and Grenier, 2013). However, much of it focuses on how proficiency in one or more of the dominant global languages such as English, French and German facilitates their speakers' entry into job markets (Grin, 2003; Osama, 2019). The term 'economics of language' is attributed to Jacob Marschak, who initially used it to facilitate a discussion of how communication could be maximised at the minimum linguistic input (Grin, 2003; Zhang and Grenier, 2013). Since the introduction of the term into the literature, several strands of research linking language and economics have emerged. However, a few scholars have attempted to discuss the subject in terms of its linkages with language policy, yet language policy is a critical enabler of language valuation or devaluation (Ferguson, 2000; Kamwangamalu, 2016; Osama, 2019). In the African context, where the development and use of indigenous languages in formal public domains is in its infancy, following years of marginalisation occasioned in large part, by colonialism, proficiency in such languages is increasingly becoming an important part of individual speakers' human capital portfolio (Kamwangamalu, 2004; Prah, 2017). The use and commitment to use indigenous African languages as Languages of Teaching and Learning (LoTLs) in education institutions thus increases the potential for their valorisation in the linguistic market. In particular, language policy in education is central to indigenous language valorisation by creating conditions and opportunities under which identified languages can thrive and compete with ex-colonial languages in the linguistic marketplace (Kamwangamalu, 2016).

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Across different levels of education in Africa, indigenous languages are predominantly taught as language subjects or courses but rarely used as media of instruction (Antia and van der Merwe, 2019; Maseko and Siziba, 2023). Consequently, their importance is only considered in relation to their association with African cultures, but rarely as valuable transactional currencies in the formal linguistic marketplace, which continues to be dominated by ex-colonial languages. These ex-colonial languages facilitate upward social mobility and participation in the communities' economic sphere by those who are proficient in them (Kamwangamalu, 2016). Studies have therefore tended to examine the interplay of language policy and economics to shed light on the dynamics of the demand for foreign language skills and the lack of demand for African language competency in the formal labour market in Africa (Kamwangamalu, 2016). Previous analyses of language policies have also been couched on discussing the need for the recognition and use of African languages for their cognitive advantages to learners while potential economic advantages and their ability to facilitate a steady return of profit for their speakers have been marginally treated (Kamwangamalu, 2016).

In light of the historically disadvantaged position of African languages, which has tended to downplay their economic potential, language policies need to appreciate and be responsive to this reality by facilitating their value addition and increasing their transacting potential in the linguistic market. Towards this endeavour, language policies in education institutions are important for several reasons. As Ferguson (2000) notes, the output of one level of education is the input of the next, thus; parents and learners who aspire to ascend the educational ladder from primary school to tertiary level often regard one level as preparatory for the next. As a result, language practices in higher education influence dispositions and attitudes towards language and language practices in lower levels of education. Therefore, when African languages are embraced and valued in higher education contexts, there is a high likelihood of their valuation at lower levels. This partly explains the continued dominance of English and the subservience of African indigenous languages in African education systems (Maseko, 2021). Language in education policies are thus key instruments that influence the transactional value of African indigenous languages not only in education but also in the socio-economic and socio-political context (Ferguson, 2000).

This paper delves into the intersection of language policy and economics in South Africa and Zimbabwe. It investigates how post-colonial language policy initiatives contribute to the revitalisation and revalorisation of indigenous African languages and, consequently, their economic value in an increasingly globalising world. The paper extends on the view that for indigenous languages to contribute to sociopolitical and economic development, language policies must be deliberately designed to create economic advantages for their use (Kamwangamalu, 2016). The endeavour to promote equity between previously marginalised African languages and dominant ex-colonial languages has progressively become salient in the language policies of South Africa and Zimbabwe. This drive is enshrined in various pieces of legislation and language policy documents at different levels of education. Because language policies usually have a social, political, and economic orientation (Poon, 2000), they are expected to result in changes in the material living conditions of the speakers impacted by the policy proclamations. By deploying Bourdieu's theoretical notions of language as capital, and the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991), the paper argues that the officialisation and official recognition of African indigenous languages in language policies and language policy documents of South Africa and Zimbabwe can increase opportunities for their use in formal and official domains and foster their value in the linguistic marketplace.

The paper however notes that despite the strides that have been made in language policy, particularly in South Africa, more still needs to be done for indigenous languages to realise their full potential as languages of teaching and learning and, of the economy generally. While indigenous African languages are provisioned for use in various levels of education through various policy proclamations, the implementation of these policies remains a stumbling block. In Zimbabwe, the absence of a comprehensive and documented national language policy to function as a framework and a guide on which institutional language policies could draw is the country's biggest undoing. According to Bamgbose (2003), the absence of a documented language policy does not imply the lack of a policy since policies can be inferred from practices. In any case, the absence of a policy could be a policy in itself. While there is no documented language policy in Zimbabwe yet, there is a visible drive to promote multilingualism through documents and circulars in education, even though such language policy work remains ad hoc and piecemeal. The official recognition of previously marginalised indigenous languages in the amended constitution of 2013 also provides opportunities for their revitalisation. The provisions for the use of indigenous languages as languages of teaching and learning in South African higher education institutions also add to their valorisation and a potential increase in the demand for African language skills in the educational and labour market. The language policy situation of South Africa and Zimbabwe therefore provides interesting cases for comparison. While the South

African approach to language policy has been touted as one of the most democratic in the world (Docrat, 2020), Zimbabwe is yet to record significant progress in that regard despite an enabling constitutional framework that acknowledges and promotes multilingualism.

### **Theorising Language Policies as Catalysts for Linguistic Capital: A Bourdieusian Approach**

This paper draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical notion of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) to explain how post-colonial multilingual language policies of South Africa and Zimbabwe potentially position previously marginalised indigenous African languages as sources of economic capital for their speakers. We show how the legitimisation of indigenous African languages in the language in education policies of the two countries potentially adds to their valorisation and creates an appetite for their teaching, learning and use.

Linguistic capital is a sociolinguistic term credited to a French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1991) describes linguistic capital as a form of cultural capital and the accumulation of a person's linguistic skills that predetermines their social standing as delegated by powerful institutions. He describes cultural capital as a collection of knowledge, skills, and other cultural acquisitions, that are enhanced by educational or technical qualifications (Bourdieu, 1991). The possession of linguistic capital leads to the acquisition and use of other forms of capital and ultimately empowers people who possess such capital in the struggle for social status and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986; 1991). Overall, Bourdieu's theories on capital are useful to explain how skills and resources accumulated by individuals or groups accrue contextually differentiated values and connotations, and that, where those resources are recognised and valued, often for the benefit or enhancement of the lives of the dominant social group, they can be converted into economic capital (Fang, 2011).

In this paper, linguistic capital as a theoretical apparatus is appropriate to understand how language in education policies in South Africa and Zimbabwe enable the accumulation of value by indigenous African languages and facilitate the formation of linguistic capital that can be converted into economic capital, for example, through remuneration for language teaching services in or outside the formal school system. Rather than conceptualising languages in a purely economic sense as being "abstract, asocial, ahistorical, and statistically measurable entities...whose economic consequences for individuals or societies can simply be derived from their intrinsic nature" (Vigouroux and Mufwene, 2020: 1) this paper takes a view of languages as practices grounded in their sociohistorical ecologies (Vigouroux and Mufwene, 2020). From a linguistic sense therefore, the paper concerns itself with the assessment of "some languages as capitals that can outweigh others economically or symbolically" (Vigouroux and Mufwene, 2020: 1). The argument pursued in this paper is that the language policies in education contexts have powerful carry-over effects on present capital formation and that, there is a need to consider current language policies within their historical contexts (Fang, 2011). By situating them in their historical context, it is possible to show that although African indigenous languages have for a long time played second fiddle to ex-colonial languages, their foregrounding in education spaces through multilingual language policies adds to their legitimisation in ways that begin to challenge and dismantle the interests of dominant groups which were served and secured by previous language policy regimes.

Within the context of African languages, Kamwangamalu (2016) elucidates that the legitimisation of African languages to fulfil high-domain functions is subject to three intertwined conditions. These being that; African languages must be accorded prestige and respect through use across all education levels. In addition, proficiency in African languages must be made a prerequisite for government and private-sector employment. This will make the languages more prestigious and valuable, creating desire and an appetite for more people to seek to acquire and learn them. Linking this to Spolsky's tripartite model of language policy; that language policies at all levels of society are a function of language ideologies, practices and management (Spolsky, 2004, 2009), it is possible to explain how the changing beliefs about African languages through their recognition in language policies of South Africa and Zimbabwe can influence speakers' beliefs and dispositions towards them, and ultimately cultivate a desire for their acquisition and use. Even though language ideologies do not in themselves constitute practices, they can influence language practices in that languages which are valued by society are also legitimised in high domains such as education. Conversely, those that are devalued by society are condemned to marginality (Bourdieu, 1991). In the same vein, ideologies can either reproduce or challenge systems of social difference by classifying and ranking speakers of these languages (Bourdieu, 1991).

Previously, linguistic capital as a theoretical lens has been deployed to explain how dominant languages such as English are laden with symbolic capital at a global scale. In this study, we appropriate this notion to discuss how

the value of indigenous African languages is enhanced by deliberate multilingual language policies at various education levels in both countries. However, we acknowledge and accept that the linguistic capital wielded by indigenous African languages is never absolute but is subject to the prevailing socio-political formation. Although the legitimisation of African languages by language policies presents opportunities for their speakers to convert this linguistic capital to economic capital, their symbolic capital remains a far cry compared to that held by English in the two countries. Language ideologies and practices suggest that English remains the uncontested legitimate language that permits unbridled access to social and economic opportunities and that, learning English will still be considered a worthwhile investment in human capital in South Africa and Zimbabwe for the foreseeable future.

### **African Languages and Language Policy in South Africa and Zimbabwe**

The historical context of language planning and language policy in South Africa is profoundly entangled with the country's apartheid past, characterised by institutionalised racism which emphasised racial discrimination and segregation. The apartheid government pursued language policies that promoted Afrikaans and English as the primary languages of instruction at all educational levels, often to the detriment of indigenous African languages (Drummond, 2016; Ndhlovu, 2008). At the end of apartheid in 1994, a new constitutional dispensation was ushered in. Among other imperatives was the need to undo structures of inequality that sustained and were sustained by apartheid. Along with the new constitution, a new language policy was enacted to direct and influence language use. Consistent with the devolved governance system of South Africa, the approach to language planning and policy-making is accordingly decentralised to provide for provincial, regional and institutional agency. Of course, these provincial, regional and institutional language policies must subordinate to the linguistic provisions of the national constitution and broader national language policy goals and obligations (Maseko and Siziba, 2023). This devolved and decentralised approach to language policy has garnered the country international acclaim and commendation for its exceptional commitment to democracy, inclusivity, and progress (Antia and van der Merwe, 2019; Docrat, 2020; Maseko and Siziba, 2023).

South Africa's language policy is outlined in several key documents, including the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA), the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) Act of 1996, the National Language Policy Framework (Department of Arts and Culture, 2003) and the Use of Official Languages Act (RSA, 2012) along with various educational and legal declarations (Docrat, 2020; Docrat and Kaschula, 2015). The documented language policy recognises 12 official languages, including Sign Language, namely Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, and isiZulu. The overarching aim of the language policy is to rectify historical linguistic injustices by promoting the use of indigenous African languages across all domains of society (Department of Arts and Culture, 2003). Consistent with the founding values and ideals of the South African Constitution, the language policy also strives to promote unity within the country's linguistic and cultural diversity, to entrench democracy and foster the protection of language rights, to promote respect for, and tolerance towards linguistic and cultural diversity, to promote multilingualism, to contribute to the elaboration and modernisation of African languages and to foster national economic development (Department of Arts and Culture, 2003).

Also central to this language policy is the principle of "parity of esteem," which underscores the commitment to treat all languages equitably (RSA, 1996). However, the full benefits of this decentralisation of language policy decisions for historically marginalised African languages have not been realised, as English and Afrikaans continue to prevail as the primary languages of instruction, government, and commerce in most contexts (Docrat, 2020; Makalela and McCabe, 2013; Mkhize and Balfour, 2017). Docrat and Kaschula (2015) argue that constitutional provisions in sections 6(1) and 6(2) which are designed to promote language equality by mandating government prioritisation of historically marginalised African languages are undermined due to insufficient clarity on their implementation. The vaguely worded and escapist clauses in the constitution often result in their discretionary implementation (Docrat, 2020; Maseko and Siziba, 2023).

As intimated previously, language policies across all levels of education in South Africa are guided by the principles of the national constitution which unequivocally proclaims the right of all citizens to access education in the official language(s) of their choice in public education institutions. At lower education levels, language policy is governed by the South African Schools Act (Department of Basic Education, 2013) which prescribes conditions and determinations for language use in public schools. Notably, the Act empowers school governing bodies to lead the crafting of language policies in schools. Similarly in higher education, all public institutions have been mandated by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to enact institutional language policies that promote

multilingualism by mainstreaming indigenous African languages in teaching and learning (DHET, 2020). While the Department of Basic Education (DBE) mandates schools to foreground the use of learners' home language (L1) as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LOTL) during the early grades while also incrementally facilitating access to additional language(s), the DHET has left the precise mechanics of language policy crafting and implementation to individual institutions.

At lower levels, the DBE (2013) makes proclamations that:

- All learners shall be offered at least one approved language as a subject in Grades 1 and 2.
- From Grade 3 onwards, all learners shall be offered their LOLT and at least one additional approved language as a subject.
- All language subjects shall receive equitable time and resource allocation.
- Learners must choose their LOLT upon application for admission to a particular school. Where a school uses the LOLT chosen by the learner, and where there is a place available in the relevant grade, the school must admit the learner.
- Where no school in a school district offers the desired language as a medium of learning and teaching, the learner may request the Provincial Education Department (PED) to make provision for instruction in his/her chosen language. The PED must make copies of the request and make it available to all schools in the relevant school district.
- The PED must keep a register of requests by learners for teaching in a language or medium that cannot be accommodated by schools.
- It is reasonably practical to provide education in a particular LOLT if at least 40 learners in Grades 1 to 6 or 35 learners in Grades 7 to 12 request it in a particular school.

For public higher education, the DHET has also mandated all higher learning institutions to individually formulate language policies that commit to advancing multilingualism and prioritising previously marginalised African languages as the Languages of Instruction (LOIs) within higher education institutions. The DHET policy recognises that language has historically acted as a barrier to accessing higher education, given that teaching and learning have primarily occurred in English and Afrikaans despite the majority of learners being speakers of indigenous African languages (Drummond, 2016). Consequently, all South African universities have developed language policies in response to this directive, aiming to contribute to the broader transformation agenda (Rudwick, 2018). Towards this endeavour, several universities' language policies foreground the intellectualisation of African languages for use in teaching and learning as their over-arching goal. Of course, this is notwithstanding the controversy surrounding the insinuation by the term 'intellectualisation of African languages' that African languages are inherently backward and incapable of use in academic contexts for knowledge generation and dissemination (Khumalo and Nkomo, 2022). However, some universities have fared better than others in achieving this goal. Notably, the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) has been projected as a torchbearer of African language intellectualisation, following its bold and unapologetic commitment to develop and implement IsiZulu as an academic language and the introduction of a compulsory IsiZulu module for speakers of other languages (Kamwendo *et al.*, 2014; Prah, 2017; Rudwick, 2018; Zungu, 2021). Although some scholars have criticised this move as exclusionary in its disregard for the cosmopolitan nature of the UKZN (e.g., Rudwick, 2018), it has been celebrated by many scholars as an important step towards the revalorisation of IsiZulu and its promotion as an academic language (Kaschula and Maseko, 2014; Khumalo and Nkomo, 2022). Similarly, the language policy of the North-West University (NWU) identifies the intellectualisation of Sesotho and Setswana as one of its goals. The NWU language policy defines language intellectualisation as:

*[a] language planning programme whereby the university's African languages of choice are developed and implemented to be languages for administrative, teaching and research purposes, but in particular to measures designed to ensure the scholarly use of the languages in such a way that it fosters the academic self-respect and values regardless of language preferences (NWU, 2022: 1).*

Although the above definition reverberates with Khumalo and Nkomo's (2022) problematisation of 'intellectualisation,' it is the intention of the policy that is of interest in this paper. To this end, we note that the language policy's commitment to elevate Sesotho and Setswana to academic languages alongside English and Afrikaans is a welcome development. Several other universities have also committed to promote African languages

spoken within the confines of their locations. The point we are making here is that following the DHET's directive on language policy, all public universities in South Africa have each crafted a language policy and identified at least an African language for promotion and use in teaching and learning. Each of these universities has scored successes and suffered setbacks. In particular, most university language policies have been criticised for presenting rosy ideals that cannot be implemented and for being replete with caveats and conditions that result in discretionary implementation (Docrat and Kaschula, 2015; Drummond, 2016) while also insulating university authorities from accountability and associated implementation imperatives (Kaschula, 2016; Maseko and Siziba, 2023).

The above notwithstanding, in South Africa, language policy proclamations across educational levels remain important enablers of the economics of African languages by providing for their use in spaces hitherto reserved for English and Afrikaans (Kamwangamalu, 2004). Although language policy discourse in South Africa rarely frames these as minority languages, the historical context under which the languages have existed points to their minoritisation, especially in education. By definition, a minoritised language is one whose value is not recognised on the interactional scene by speakers of sociolinguistically dominant languages (Kasbarian, 1997). Languages are minoritised when their speakers possess little or no political power and influence in a territory (Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty, 2008). Discerning from this conceptualisation, most indigenous languages in South Africa are minoritised as they suffer diminished use in high-ranking domains such as education. In particular, they have not been widely used as languages of teaching and learning at various levels of education, contrary to the demands of language policy provisions (Drummond, 2016; Makalela and McCabe, 2013; Maseko and Siziba, 2023; Ndhlovu, 2008). This notwithstanding, the language policy framework provides opportunities and space for indigenous languages to thrive in education, for children to learn in their home languages, and for speakers of these languages to partake in language teaching work.

In Zimbabwe, the complexity of language policy discourse stems from the absence of a comprehensive, formally documented national language policy, upon which institutional language policies could be predicated (Kadenge and Nkomo, 2011; Maseko, 2021). Consequently, language policy in the country is inferred from language practices and a multitude of legislative measures within the domains of education, media, and the legal framework (Nkomo and Maseko, 2017). Notably, in 2013, the Zimbabwean government ratified a new constitution, officially recognising 16 languages, including English and Sign Language. To this end, Section 6 of Chapter 1 of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) headed 'Languages' makes the provisions that:

1. The following languages namely Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, sign language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda, and Xhosa, are officially recognised languages of Zimbabwe.
2. An Act of Parliament may prescribe other languages as officially recognised languages and may prescribe languages of record.
3. The State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must –
  - a. ensure that all officially recognised languages are treated equitably; and
  - b. take into account the language preferences of people affected by governmental measures or communications.
4. The state must promote and advance the use of all languages used in Zimbabwe, including sign language, and must create conditions for the development of those languages.

Further to the above, the constitutional provisions commit to ensuring that citizens' rights to use their language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice are upheld and respected. These rights are therefore expected to extend to all domains of life, including education.

In the absence of a formalised language policy therefore, the linguistic provisions in the new constitutional framework have assumed pivotal significance as a point of reference for language planning and policy initiatives in Zimbabwe (Maseko, 2021; Nkomo and Maseko, 2017). Before the enactment of the new constitution, language in education policy primarily drew guidance from the Education Act of 1987, which underwent various amendments over time, thereby serving as a foundational reference point for language planning (Kadenge and Nkomo, 2011; Maseko, 2021). Within this educational context, the language in education policy elucidates the management of multilingualism within the classroom. Section 62 of the Education Act amendment in 2006, specifically in part (XII) titled "Languages to be taught in schools" outlines these specific provisions and stipulations:

1. Subject to this section, all three main languages of Zimbabwe namely Shona, Ndebele and English shall be taught on an equal time basis in all schools up to form two levels.
2. In areas where indigenous languages other than those mentioned in subsection (1) above are spoken, the minister may authorise the teaching of such languages in schools in addition to those specified in subsection (1).
3. The minister may authorise the teaching of foreign languages in schools.
4. Prior to form one, any one of the languages referred to in subsection (1) and (2) may be used as medium of instruction, depending upon which language is commonly spoken and better understood by the pupils.
5. Sign language shall be the priority medium of instruction for the deaf and the hard of hearing.

In addition to linguistic provisions in the Education Act, the constitution's official recognition of 16 languages in 2013 marked a significant milestone. For the first time, it formally acknowledged Zimbabwe's rich linguistic diversity (Nkomo and Maseko, 2017) (Maseko, 2021; Nhongo and Tshotsho, 2021). Read together with various ministerial circulars on language use and the language in education policy, the constitutional provisions on language create an enabling legal framework to support the use of previously marginalised languages such as Nambya, Ndau, Kalanga, and Tonga in official and formal domains and challenge the longstanding economic dominance and hegemony of English, Shona and Ndebele. This has been a subject of cultural and political contestation since the 1987 Education Act (Maseko and Mutasa, 2019; Nhongo and Tshotsho, 2021).

Before 2013, language policy in Zimbabwe primarily revolved around English, Shona, and Ndebele, with varying degrees of emphasis in education. The new constitution has catalysed and consolidated the teaching and learning of previously designated minority languages within their respective linguistic communities. For example, having been re-energised and buoyed by the recognition of their language, leaders of the Tonga community in Binga district have even advocated for the complete exclusion of Shona and Ndebele from the school curriculum in Binga to allow space for the Tonga language (Nkomo and Maseko, 2017). Consequently, Tonga is the first of the former minority languages to be examined at 'A' Level and to be introduced in higher education institutions such as the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), Midlands State University (MSU), and Lupane State University (LSU) (Maseko and Mutasa, 2019; Mumpande and Barnes, 2022). Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) also set a precedent by collaborating with South African universities to offer degree programmes in Tshivenda and Sesotho, both of which are Zimbabwe-South Africa cross-border languages. The teaching of these languages in higher education potentially valorises them and creates an appetite for their acquisition thus increasing their demand in the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991). Further, this creates employment for those involved in African language teaching thus potentially endowing these indigenous languages with the privileges and prestige previously associated with the English language. To turn this triumphalism associated with these language policy milestones into tangible economic benefits, however, there is still a need for significant investment in their promotion and development to enable their use in all domains of education, politics, and the economy.

### **Implications for the Economics of African Languages**

The post-colonial language planning and policy initiatives of both South Africa and Zimbabwe have been skewed towards redressing the marginalisation of indigenous African languages, a consequence of colonialism and apartheid in the case of South Africa and colonialism in the case of Zimbabwe. In particular, language in education planning is deliberately calibrated to foreground and emphasise the use of indigenous languages to enhance their economic viability and bring them to parity with ex-colonial languages. As the foregoing argues, languages that are valued by education systems tend to accrue linguistic capital that enables them to compete in the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991) and thus endows their speakers with economic capital through engaging in remunerable services that include language teaching (Grin, 2003; Kamwangamalu, 2004). Although South Africa is a much younger democracy than Zimbabwe, it has developed a vibrant language planning culture, characterised by a devolved approach to language policy making. The commitment to promote mother tongue education at the lower school levels by the DBE and the directive by the DHET for public universities to formulate explicit language policies that promote multilingualism in the country's indigenous languages is particularly telling. That universities have also conformed with the DHET directive to infuse African languages in teaching and learning, as has happened in the UKZN is revealing of the extent to which language policy can influence the valorisation of African languages. However, as noted by some scholars (e.g., Kamwangamalu, 2004; 2016), the availability of a language policy is not a guarantee that African languages will be valued. However, it is certainly a key ingredient in their legitimisation

because language policies are binding documents that must be respected and adhered to (Maseko and Siziba, 2023).

In Zimbabwe, language planning and policy have remained centralised, top-down, and ad-hoc activities. Despite the amended Constitution of 2013 which should act as a foundational document for national, and subsequently, institutional language policies, the country still relies on the language policy in education as contained in the Education Act as being the only comprehensive document on language policy. However, the provisions for mother tongue education in the early grades of primary education also remain unimplemented, with education institutions electing to use English as the language of instruction throughout all levels (Maseko, 2021; Nhongo and Tshotsho, 2021). Despite the opportunity for African language valorisation presented by the Education Act, ideologies of English as the only language that can facilitate upward social mobility and offer economic benefits are prevalent and are certainly going to subsist for some time. Just as is the case with South Africa, the awareness of the social political and economic power of English by black students further exacerbates these ideologies and the demand for English (Kamwangamalu, 2004). Even the political elites and the intellectuals appear to have an affinity for the English language to the point where African official languages are essentialised as identity markers for the less educated subaltern (Ndhlovu, 2008). Bamgbose (2003: 423) has shown how this view of English presents it as a 'recurring decimal'. This mathematical expression is thus used to explain the problem of English preponderance in education and how its pervasiveness impacts the recognition and use of African languages in high-function domains (Bamgbose, 2003). The hegemony of English and the negative attitudes towards African languages are thus the bane of language policy implementation in both South Africa and Zimbabwe.

However, this is not to downplay the importance of language policy in enabling the economic potential of indigenous African languages. What is probably needed, as noted by Kamwangamalu (2004) is to treat the failure to use African languages successfully alongside ex-colonial languages as a "marketing problem" (Kamwangamalu, 2004: 138). Applying the marketing mix analogy to language policy, he argues that all marketing involves putting the right product (product policy) at the right place and moment (distribution policy), at the suitable price (price policy) resulting in consumer demand by using the most effective means (promotion policy) (Kamwangamalu, 2004: 138). In other words, policy proclamation has to be complemented by the development of these indigenous languages to a level that they can become attractive for acquisition and use, based on their empirically proven utility and value. An example of these benefits would be access to job opportunities facilitated by proficiency in African languages. In the case of South Africa, this is what has put English and Afrikaans ahead of indigenous languages, and in the case of Zimbabwe, English, in the linguistic market.

Apart from crafting language policies that commit to embracing and fostering the use of African languages, it is also imperative to create a market for their meaningful and profitable use that will turn into economic benefits for their users rather than being confined to association with cultural and identity preservation. In the case of Zimbabwe, there is a need to facilitate and promote the use of indigenous languages throughout all levels of education. For now, the language in education policy restricts their use as media of instruction to the primary school level unlike in South Africa where they are provisioned for use as languages of teaching and learning in universities in response to the DHET's language policy directions. When African languages are used at all levels of education, there will likely be an increase in demand for their language teaching skills. This might constitute one of the many incentives for learning African languages. In Zimbabwe, there is a need to complement the constitutional provisions on language with a clear and elaborate documented language policy that will spell out how languages will be used in various domains. To this end, there is a promise by the government of the so-called 'Second Republic' to deliver a national language policy soon. Notably, the appointment of a National Languages Advisory Committee (NALAC) by the Minister of Youth, Sports, Arts and Recreation in 2022 to oversee the drafting of a national language policy is an important development towards realising that promise. For South Africa, the bane of the documented language policy is a lack of implementation (Docrat, 2020; Dyers and Abongdia, 2015; Mkhize and Balfour, 2017). However, as the paper has argued, language policy initiatives in both countries can be key enablers of the economics of African languages.

## **Conclusion**

This paper examined the interplay of language policy and language economics in South Africa and Zimbabwe. It focused on how post-colonial language policy initiatives potentially contribute to the revalorisation of indigenous African languages. We deployed the notions of 'language as capital' and 'the linguistic market' (Bourdieu, 1986; 1991) to discuss how the officialisation and deliberate foregrounding of African languages and multilingualism by



language policies in various levels of education will likely result in increased opportunities for their use in formal domains and enhance their transactional value in the linguistic market. In the South African context, the commitment to promote mother tongue education at both the lower and higher levels of education by the DBE and DHET respectively is an important step towards this endeavour. In Zimbabwe, the study has shown that the absence of a comprehensive national language policy tends to complicate the enacting of institutional language policies, particularly in higher education. As such, language policy is inferred from the linguistic provisions in the new constitution and the Education Act. In the South African context, language policies in various levels of education need to be complemented by robust implementation if African languages are to realise their full economic potential and facilitate a steady return of profit for their speakers. In Zimbabwe, the constitutional provisions on language should be complemented by a clear and elaborate language policy spelling out how languages will be used in various domains. Despite these pitfalls, the paper has argued that language policy initiatives in the two countries are critical enablers of African language economics.

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