

Home Language Choices at Former Model C Schools in Democratic South Africa: A Management and Governance Perspective

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Abstract

The Department of Basic Education mandates that students in primary and secondary school acquire a home language as well as at least one first foreign language. African learners are taught English as their home language in the majority of former Model C schools, despite the fact that it is not their mother tongue. Their first additional language is their mother tongue. Former Model C schools appear to have institutionalised home language imposition. The article presents evidence from an investigation into home language choices at former white state schools, as well as a viewpoint on the roles that Department of Education managers and governors should play at the school level to pave the way for fair home language choices at former Model C schools. The data was collected statistically, and the study findings revealed that the majority of learners' mother tongue was isiZulu, but the language was not given as a home language. We decided that the Department of Basic Education should guarantee that African languages are introduced as home languages in former white schools' school curricula.

Keywords: Home Languages, Diversity, Model C schools, Decoloniality, Equity

INTRODUCTION

South African society is distinguished by ethnic and linguistic variety (Mckibben-Green, 2020). Despite this, when the apartheid administration admitted black students to historically white government schools, the apartheid identity of white government schools was retained. This displays itself, among other ways, in the home language choices made available to black pupils in erstwhile white schools in post-apartheid South Africa. African languages are at the bottom of the curriculum in previous white schools (Molate & Tyler, 2020). The use of colonial languages in education and governance is a remnant of the colonial past, which has equated indigenous languages with inferior education (Mckibben-Green, 2020).

Home language options in former white government schools reflect apartheid official criteria for opening former white government schools to other racial groups, as articulated by Piet Clase, then Minister of Education (Christie, 1991). These settings attempted to sustain the ethos and vocabulary associated with the racial supremacy and white privilege agenda. Former white government schools imposed English Home Language on black pupils whose first language was not English in the post-apartheid era. This has the ability to boost English and Western patterns of thought while relegating African languages and cultural backgrounds of black students in their education.

Managers and governors of previously white schools have the authority to establish the groundwork for equitable home language options. Governance is concerned with policy formulation and relates to the SGB's overall control (Loock & Gravett, 2014). The South African Schools Act gives the School Governing Body (SGB) the authority to set the language policy. The Language-in-Education Policy of 1997 sought to correct apartheid's wrongs and ensure parity for all African languages (Molate & Tyler, 2020). Languages taught in a school are part of the curriculum, which is controlled by the principal and overseen by the Departmental Heads, who are members of the School Management Team [SMT] (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2016). In post-apartheid South Africa, the SGBs and SMTs of previously white schools have distinct responsibilities in deciding and executing language policies, opening the way for equitable home language options.

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LITERATURE REVIEW ON LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

When Model C schools were authorised to enrol black students at the beginning of 1991, they were obliged not to ‘alter the conventional values and ethos’ (Christie, 1991, p. 191). There would be mother tongue teaching in either English or Afrikaans. This demonstrates that the apartheid administration aimed to maintain English and Afrikaans as official languages at the expense of other languages, hence safeguarding white culture in education. Language reflects one’s society’s culture and world views, and it may be defined as a collection of beliefs and behaviours in society; language is culture, and culture is language (Panorac, 2010). Language and culture are inextricably linked; there is a strong link between language and socio-cultural identity (Brock-Utne, 2005). The discrepancies between the school’s language and culture and the learner’s language and culture have frequently resulted in educational programmes that have only minor effectiveness in teaching anything other than self-depreciation. The exclusion of African languages from the curriculum of former white schools is harmful to black students; it amounts to an education that ignores their identity and fosters self-deprecation. The political standing of a language in a nation and its general societal standing inside that nation frequently diverge. For instance, while French and English are both recognized as official national languages in Canada, their social standing varies from community to community within the nation (Carne, C., Oostendorp, M. & Baker, A. 2024).

According to Moletsane, Hemson, and Muthukrishna (in Singh, 2004) real school integration that fosters equality of access and educational opportunity for everyone remains elusive in most educational situations in South Africa. Policies and practices in schools and classrooms that are shaped by such understandings of integration as merely welcoming students from different racial groups continue to thrive. Former white schools responded to shifting demography by adopting measures that permitted them to retain the status quo, since African learners are expected to integrate into the school’s current ethos and culture in a way that ignores their own cultural heritage.

According to Luthuli (1982), ‘the primary goal of education is the transmission of a society’s culture from its more mature (adult) members to its not yet adult members’ (p. 91). Education is dependent on a people’s identity, which is established by their collective views, convictions, and attitudes hence the implication is that all initial teacher programmes must be designed to equip prospective teachers with these attributes to contribute to realizing social justice and transforming society (Barnett, E. P., & Teise, K. 2024). A people’s education philosophy must be consistent with their living philosophy. It is an ancient debate that it is feasible to provide for cultural variety and parental choice within a single school system for all racial groups in South Africa (Luthuli, 1982). The education provided to students in previous Model C schools communicates white western culture while failing to adapt the life philosophy of the African students who attend these schools.

English As a Home Language In Former White Schools

English is a West Germanic language that originated in early medieval England and has since become a global lingua franca. It gets its name from the Anglia (Angeln) peninsula in the Baltic Sea, which was named after the Angles, one of the Germanic tribes that moved to England. In over 60 sovereign states, English is either the official language or one of the official languages. It is the most frequently spoken language in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand, as well as in parts of the Caribbean, Africa, and South Asia (Wikipedia, 2021).

African languages, English, and Afrikaans are the 11 official languages of the Republic of South Africa, according to Section 6(1) of the Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996). These languages are also taught in South African schools. According to Olivier (2009), any of the 11 official languages can be used as a “home language,” “first additional language,” or “second additional language”. The writers agree with Olivier that all 11 languages can be used as a home language, but only if the specific language used as a home language is the child’s mother tongue. Olivier also indicates that there are instances where learners study languages on a home language level despite the fact that the individual language is just their second or third language. This occurs, according to Olivier, ‘in former white schools (also known as former Model C schools) that have taken in a lot of African language speaking kids’. On the surface, it is clear

that Olivier has found something wrong with the learning of home languages in particular contexts. The debate is whether this is acceptable in all circumstances within the South African education system, notably at former Model C institutions.

A home language is described as 'the language that children are exposed to in their families and communities; it is the language that they use as their primary mode of communication and identifies them with their community' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 16). As evidenced by the fact that many African learners attend old white schools, English is clearly not a home language of African learners. They do not learn it from their parents; they do not use it as their major mode of communication; and it does not help them to identify with their community. Former white schools that have attracted a large number of African students continue to teach English as a home language to these students (Moyo, 2009; Olivier, 2009). Given the difficulty of learning English as a first language as an African student, it seems evident that an African language should be provided as a first language instead of English. Imposing a home language in this manner demonstrates a failure to accommodate diversity and reflects the reality that African languages are still disadvantaged in many ways at former Model C schools. Members of SGBs have rights under the South African Schools Act to impact change in post-apartheid South Africa, but no adequate orientation or training is provided to allow them to execute their rights and functions under the Act. The majority of parents who serve on SGBs are unaware of the Language-in-Education Policy.

Although Olivier (2009) provides reasons for parents to accept English as a medium of teaching, he does not provide reasons for learning the incorrect home language. Knowledge of an international language, such as English, for career purposes does not always necessitate learning it as a home language at the secondary level, even if it is not the child's legitimate home language. Even if the child learns English as a Second Language or First Additional Language, the child's job chances will be preserved as long as the child is taught by a professionally certified English instructor. Olivier's comments on historically disadvantaged schools may be true only if English is not the school's first language. Most Model C schools now have more African learners than other racial groups, and those African learners study English as their first language. As a result, the researchers do not agree with Olivier's ideas, which appear to support studying the wrong home language even at former Model C schools where African learners outnumber all other racial groups and parents pay above-average school fees.

Given the figures of African learners enrolled and the higher-than-average school fees paid, such institutions must aim to teach a valid home language beginning at the foundation level. It is inequitable for minority race groups to study their native tongue at the expense of the dominant race group. According to Brock-Utne (2005), 'when the language one uses in everyday contact is denigrated, for example, not regarded appropriate as a language of teaching at higher levels of schooling, a kid may feel that a part of herself/himself is likewise denigrated' (p. 2). Failure to include African languages as home languages in old Model C schools is a denigration of these languages. According to Brock-Utne (2005), 'when you learn a new language, you also learn a lot about a new society' (p. 2). That may be a beneficial experience, as long as it does not teach you to dismiss your mother language as a component of your own identity.

Learning English as a mother tongue by African learners at previous Model C schools instils white culture and causes them to look down on their mother tongue, developing an interest in communicating in the school's mother tongue rather than their own mother tongue even when they are not at school. The Intercultural Development Research Association states that 'the child's first language is critical to his or her identity' (International Development Research Association, 2000, p.1). Maintaining this language teaches the child to cherish their culture and background, which helps the individual develop a healthy self-concept. Imposing English as a home language on African students at old Model C schools harms their identity. They begin to lose their African identity and begin to behave more like whites, adopting the western culture instilled by white supremacy that prevailed at old Model C schools. Clarke (2009) states that 'the first language, learned at home, is vitally significant and serves as the foundation for all subsequent language development' (p. 9). Clarke emphasises the significance of the child's true home language, rather than the forced home language. Clarke further notes that the preservation of the child's first or home language is especially crucial for the development of a good self-concept and well-being.

Children who have the option to keep their first language can continue to grow cognitively while studying English as a second language. It is worth noting that, according to Clarke's argument, English is learned as a second language alongside the child's mother tongue as the child's first or home language. As a result of Clarke's reasoning, previous Model C schools should have allowed African pupils to acquire African languages as home languages rather than imposing English, which is not their actual home language. The home language issue at old Model C schools is a prime illustration of unfairness since languages are not treated equally.

Moyo found the following when doing a study on the teaching of English Home Language to non-native English learners: (a) Learners who shared a mother tongue, notably isiZulu, used it 'informally among themselves in the classroom'; (b) "The participatory potential of the classroom was occasionally hindered by the majority of learners' weak English communication abilities; and (c) the students failed to grasp the English phrase "you don't have your priorities right". Aside from the problems of studying the incorrect home language that African learners face, their culture is compromised when English is presented as a home language rather than an African language. Moyo (2009) observed this as well, stating, 'a concerning factor, however, was the continued disregard of the culture of the township learners in the curriculum by offering their home language as an additional language, and by not including more elements of their culture in the classroom, even if mediated in English' (p. 81).

The study found that African learners suffer a lot when it comes to acquiring English Home Language skills. The researcher reveals, based on personal experience as an invigilator during examinations at a former Model C school, that African learners who take English at the home language level struggle with vocabulary when they have to understand instructions and answer questions on literature and comprehension tests. They even try to get help from the invigilator. These observations should not be surprising given that English is not these students' native language.

According to Moyo (2009), African learners who study English at the home language level experience significant problems in their learning. According to the National Policy governing the program and promotion, a student must pass a home language in order to advance to the following grade or level. Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 (DBE, 2013). As a result, many African students who study English at the home language level at old Model C schools fail English and must repeat the grade. Managers of former Model C schools are not in a position to be responsive to the curriculum demands and diverse interests of African learners as members of a distinct racial group because of the racial groupings to which they belong. Only through transforming the management teams of these schools in accordance with the Employment Equity Act can managers capable of turning the situation around emerge at former Model C schools.

Language-In-Education Policy

The Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 was the attempt of the South African Government to introduce an equitable language policy in the schooling system. Its goal was to achieve diversity and multilingualism (Mckibben-Green, 2020). According to Potgieter and Anthonissen (2017), the core idea of LiEP was to keep home languages alive because it necessitated the inclusion of new languages as subjects. The implementation of the LiEP has encountered problems that school management and governors need to overcome via collaborative effort. The challenges manifest themselves in factors that impede LiEP implementation, such as a lack of resources, parents' lack of appreciation for the concept of choice enshrined in LiEP due to the perception that African language schooling was one of their educational disadvantages, and the apartheid legacy of linguistic segregation, which emphasised the improvement of proficiency in English (Mckibben-Green, 2020).

According to Potgieter and Anthonissen (2017), English is seen as a sign of education, wealth, internationalism, and freedom, and as a result, schools cater to the preferences of parents who are frequently uninformed about English language issues. School Governing Bodies can gather cash to offset a lack of resources in order to properly implement LiEP. However, while a lack of resources is a problem in most

schools, it is not a problem at former Model C schools due to the excessive school fees paid by parents. The primary problems facing the implementation of LiEP at former Model C schools appear to be managers' attitudes toward school-level reform and parents' opinions and requests about English language matters. Education managers at all levels of the DBE, as well as education experts within the DBE, have the ability to collaborate in addressing the challenges to LiEP implementation, notably parental attitudes.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The home language choice conundrum may be effectively addressed at former white state schools provided the SGBs and SMTs, respectively, adhere to equality and diversity principles while adopting and executing the language policy. The linguistic difficulty at former white schools arose, among other things, as a result of colonialism; consequently, decolonial ideas would give an appropriate strategy to addressing this dilemma.

Diversity

Tenas (2012) describes diversity as 'people of different colours, nations, faiths, and sexes joining together to form a group, organisation, or society' (p. 1). A diverse organisation, according to Tenas (2012), welcomes differences in people and 'recognises that people with varied origins, talents, attitudes, and experiences contribute fresh ideas and views' (p. 1). Former Model C schools are learning institutions that should acknowledge that not only English or Afrikaans should be recognised as home languages in a diverse country like South Africa. Former Model C schools should include African languages as home languages to guarantee the prevalence of diversity and inclusivity. Diverse organisations use diversity to make their offerings more relevant and approachable. Learners' exposure to pupils who are different from themselves, as well as the innovative ideas and problems that such exposure brings, leads to better cognitive abilities, including critical thinking and problem-solving (Wells et al., 2016).

Equity

Equity is an ethical notion that denotes social justice or fairness and is based on distributive justice principles (Braveman & Gruskin, 2003). This suggests that the primary goal of equity is to promote justice or fairness for previously marginalised groups in society. Managers and governors at the school level should collaborate to promote language equity to the point where African languages are incorporated as home languages in the curriculum of former Model C schools.

Decoloniality

Beyond the boundaries of colonial administrations, the long-standing patterns of power that arose as a result of colonialism govern culture, intersubjective connections, and knowledge creation (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). These long-standing patterns of dominance, referred to as coloniality by Maldonado-Torres (2007), continue to constitute a danger to South African education. Decoloniality theorists, according to Christie and McKinney (2017), pose a forceful challenge to delink education from the intersectional disparities of coloniality and move towards an alternative vision of human life. Decolonial theories shed light on the social relations of former white state institutions that were protested by a wave of student demonstrations in 2016 and beyond. Long after their student populations had diversified, the demonstrations revealed the normative persistence of the traditionally white constituents' cultural and linguistic ethos (Christie & McKinney, 2017). The decoloniality theory gives a lens through which to see the home language challenge of former white schools, leading to the profound knowledge required to address this issue.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers collected quantitative data in order to analyse the home language options at former white state schools. The qualitative technique was appropriate for examining home language choices because it allowed the researchers to look at how this phenomenon manifested itself in previously white schools (Busetto et al., 2020). Home Language preferences were gathered through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the administrators, instructors, and learners of 10 former white schools in the KwaZulu-Natal region. Random sampling was used to choose the ten previously white state schools. Document analysis was also used to obtain quantitative data from the district office on former white state school

students. The researchers were able to present a quantitative picture of the student population and the pattern of home language selections in previously white schools thanks to quantitative data (Creswell, 2009).

FINDINGS

According to the statistics, black students outnumber white students in the selected schools. This is consistent with Moyo (2009) who stated that students abandon township schools to attend previous Model C schools.

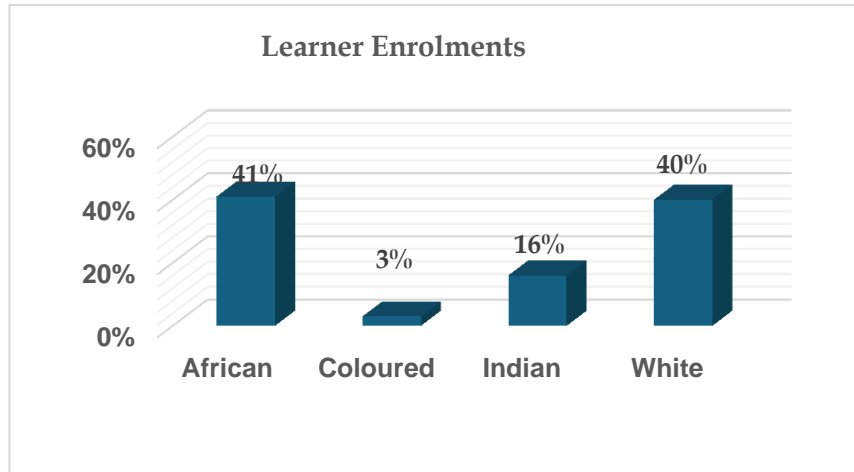


Figure 1: Learner enrolments at the former Model C Schools

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African	Coloured	Indian	White
41%	3%	16%	40%

The majority of learners' mother tongue was isiZulu; however, the language was not listed as a home language. The students had no other option for a home language and were forced to learn English because it was the only one taught by the school. This was the group of black students whose first language was isiZulu.

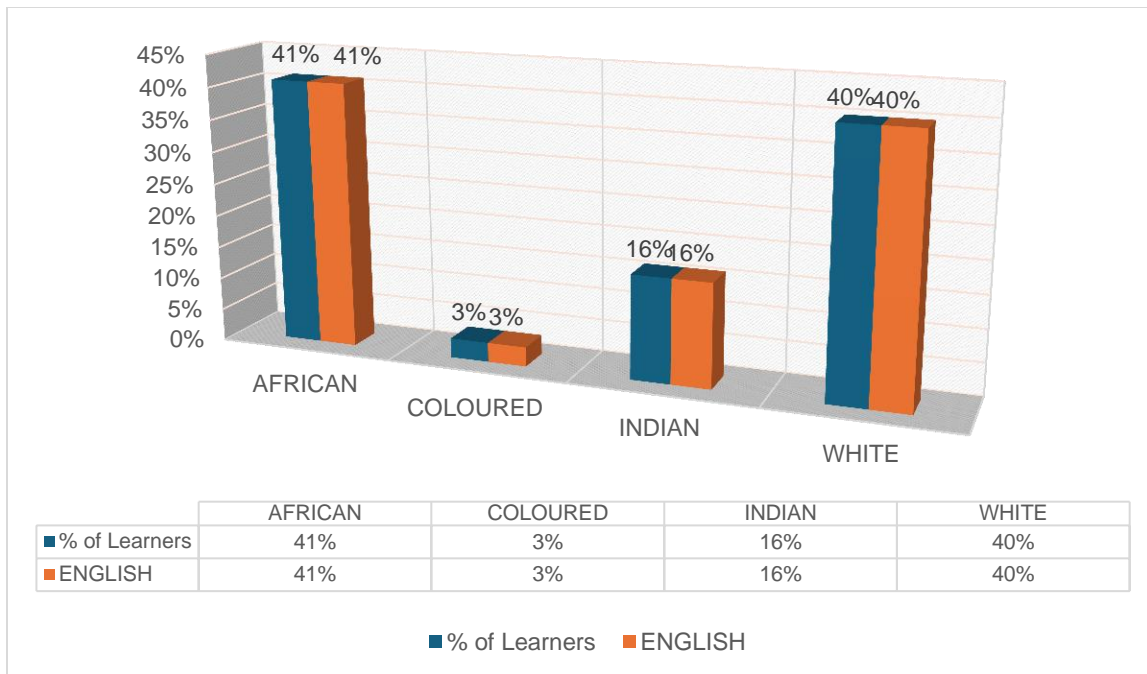


Figure 2: Learner enrolments shown in percentage according to home language choices.

Table 2: Learner enrolments shown in percentage according to home language choices

	% of learners	Home Language
African	41%	ENGLISH
Coloured	3%	ENGLISH
Indian	16%	ENGLISH
White	40%	ENGLISH

Former white schools’ school fees can fund the costs of incorporating an African language as a home language into the school curriculum.

Table 3: Race group of educators at the of sampled former Model C Schools

POSITION	Post Level	RACE GROUPS			
		African	Coloured	Indian	White
Ordinary Educator	PL1	12%	2%	16%	70%
Departmental Head	PL2	6%	0%	27%	67%
Deputy Principal	PL3	0%	0%	7%	93%
Principal	PL4	10%	0%	10%	80%

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

African students did not learn their mother language as a home language in earlier Model C schools, and there are racial disparities in the educators hired in the schools. White educators make up the bulk of the teaching staff more than any other race group; however, when compared to the race group with the biggest population numbers, the number of black African educators does not align with the number of black African students. According to the Human Rights Commission report (Vally & Dalamba, 1999), it was expected that as more black students attended formerly all-white schools, the number of black SGB members and black workers would increase, but this expectation was not met. The issue of black teachers’ under-representation in historically white schools has not been unnoticed in the democratic age.

There are more black African students than other racial groups enrolled. However, whites hold the majority of executive roles in former Model C schools and constitute the vast majority of SGB members. The proportion of black African parents who are members of SGBs is smaller than the proportion of African learners enrolled.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department of Basic Education should ensure that African languages are taught as home languages in former white schools. Specific training should be offered to enable SGBs to develop language policies that advocate for the inclusion of African languages as the home languages that students in multiracial state schools can choose. The Department of Basic Education should establish a policy framework for monitoring language policy development by SGBs and home language management by SMT's at the school level.

CONCLUSION

According to Mabela, M. L., & Ditsele, T. (2024) in many ways, language is a representation of an individual's identity. Any typical person has this innate talent, which they utilize to explore their customs and experiences, communicate their opinions and ideas, and improve their community and the laws that govern it. According to Barnett, E. P., & Teise, K. (2024) on Rawls (1971), justice is about fairness or equity. Accordingly, as the foundational idea of justice, fairness concerns avoiding bias. Justice as fairness also points to the moral powers that people have, that relate to their sense of justice and for a conception of the good. The legacy of apartheid inequity which did not have justice has resulted in systematic home language imposition in erstwhile white schools. These manifests itself in the circumstance in which English is a superior language to be learned as a home language by learners whose home tongue is an African language, weakening the learners' true home language. The Department of Basic Education, School Governing Bodies, and School Management Teams all have unique roles to play in turning this situation around, as mentioned under the subheadings of this report.

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