

## An Analysis of Attitudes in the Teaching and Learning of “A” Level Chishona Grammar: A Case of “A” Level Schools in the Chirumanzu District of Zimbabwe

Dr. Mazuruse Mickson\*, Munyangana Richard M

Department of Curriculum Studies, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

*\*Corresponding Author: Dr. Mazuruse Mickson, Department of Curriculum Studies, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe*

### ABSTRACT

The teaching and learning of “A” Level ChiShona grammar has been met with mixed feelings. This paper investigates the attitudes of Zimbabwean teachers and students towards the teaching and learning of ChiShona grammar at Advanced level (‘A’ level). The paper also attempts to discover the attendant impact these attitudes have on the conceptualization of the ChiShona grammar component. Research findings indicate widespread negative attitudes from teachers, students and even administrators towards the teaching and learning of ChiShona grammar. The writers are going to focus on findings of a research conducted on five secondary schools in Chirumhanzu District which teach “A” Level ChiShona grammar. Tables, graphs and pie charts are going to be used to present the findings gathered on the five secondary schools. Prominent scholars view the teaching and learning of “A” Level ChiShona grammar as an easy task which should not deter students and teachers. Nyota (2012) and Chimhundu and Chabata (2007) are some of the renowned scholars who regard the teaching and learning of “A” Level ChiShona grammar as a mundane task which should not be mistaken as something laborious and a mammoth task. The study recommends the need to change people’s mindsets and attitudes towards the conceptualization of the grammar component in learning language.

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In Zimbabwe, ChiShona is a national language spoken language by at least 75% of the population followed by Ndebele which is spoken by up to 16.5 % and English only accounts for 3.5 % of the population (Hachipola, 1998). However, Zimbabwe has inherited a colonial language system which has seen positive attitudes towards English language more than indigenous languages like ChiShona. In the Zimbabwean social spheres, very few people are still very proud of speaking ChiShona without code mixing and code switching with English. Some of them may go to the extremes of confessing that they cannot read and write ChiShona efficiently because it is too difficult. For these and other reasons, indigenous languages like ChiShona have been relegated to the fringes of people’s imagination since they are perceived as relatively unimportant in people’s lives.

In education, candidates are failing to score quality grades in Chi Shona, let alone a mere pass in the subject at “A” Level. Mudzanire and Mazuruse (2013:11-12), blame this poor

performance on acute attitudinal prejudices towards the subject. They argue that, “When people are dispossessed of their will to do anything, there is no bidding; they are bound to fall for attitude determines altitude, that is, how far one can go. Ambition, resolve, and the energy with which one applies themselves in any engagement stem from their attitude.” These sentiments and actions prompted the writers of this article to undertake a research on students and teachers’ attitudes towards the teaching and learning of grammar since lack of proficiency in the language and negative attitudes towards its use may be a clear indication of negative attitudes in the teaching and learning of grammar. According to Nyaungwa (2013:155), “Attitudes are very important...because, if attitudes are not considered, accommodated and interpreted correctly, they have dire consequences; especially when they have something to do with decisions affecting people’s lives. Nyota (1999) asserts that, one of the aims of teaching ChiShona grammar is to cultivate the love of language on the side of the students. This entails that, if ChiShona grammar has not been taught expertly and if the students

and teachers look down upon the teaching and learning of the subject it may lead to lack of interest and pride towards the language and this has been an urge to the writers of this article to undertake a study of five schools in Chirumhanzu District.

In a book review entitled, **Demystifying “A” Level Grammar**, Nyota (2012) is celebrating the publication of Magwa (2012) (ed)’s book entitled **Dudziramutauro reChiShona: Bhuku romudzidzi: Danho re “A” Level** where she is elaborating that the book will wipe out the fear which usually grip teachers and students of “A” Level ChiShona grammar when it comes to teaching and learning of the subject. The book review shows that, the problem of fear and negative attitudes towards ChiShona grammar is caused by misconceptions, myths and untruths about this component of ChiShona. Learners end up developing unnecessary labels and stereotypes on grammar because of these minor misunderstandings which can be rectified by using books like Magwa’s **Dudziramutauro reChiShona: Bhuku romudzidzi: Danho re “A” Level**. Chimhundu and Chabata (2007) posit that many scholars regard the aspect of grammar as one of the difficult areas in studying ChiShona. Analysing this view, one may simply see that teachers and students develop attitudes towards the teaching and learning of ChiShona grammar because they regard it as difficult. Basing on the above scholars’ views, the writers of this article have been prompted to undertake a research based on the attitudes of teachers and students towards the teaching and learning of “A” Level ChiShona grammar.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Questionnaires were used to gather data from five teachers who contributed in the making of this article. Questionnaires were also distributed to five heads of secondary schools which teach “A” Level ChiShona. One teacher from each school was given a questionnaire to find out the attitudes of teachers and school heads towards the teaching of “A” Level ChiShona grammar. Interview guides were used in this research to gather data from twenty-five school children and five heads of departments of the five schools in Chirumhanzu District where the research was conducted. Interviews were used in this research so as to gather information which is directly linked to individuals’ points of view as propounded by Shumbayaonda (2006).

Document analysis was also used to gather information from the documents so that the researchers would compare and contrast information gathered through this instrument and other instruments like questionnaires and interviews as asserted by Chisi (2004). In this article, document analysis was also used as a method of bridging the gaps which were left out by research instruments like interviews and questionnaires. In support of this research instrument used in this article, Chisaka and Vakalisa (2000) in Shumbayaonda (2006) assert that document analysis is a gap filler used to address shortcomings of other instruments used in a research.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

From the interview guides of the students, a question was asked to find out about the most difficult component of ChiShona language at “A” level. The responses which were gathered by the researchers revealed that, very few students regard practical criticism as the most difficult but the majority of the students regard ChiShona grammar as the most difficult. These findings show that students have negative attitudes towards the teaching and learning of ChiShona component which is grammar. The students’ assertions concur with Nyota (1999, 2012), Chimhundu and Chabata (2007) and Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011) who assert that many students regard grammar as the most difficult in teaching and learning languages. Combining the research findings based on the above subject and the scholars’ views, it is clear that students are afraid of the grammar component when learning a language which is a clear indication that students develop a negative attitude towards the teaching and learning of grammar due to fear of the component. As Bangbose (2000) so clearly depicts, the existence of widespread negative attitudes to African languages among Africans of all walks of life is one of the major challenges to educational language learning in Africa.

The writers of this article also asked a question which sought to find out the number of children who enrol to study other “A” Level subjects and ChiShona at “A” Level to heads of departments of schools in which this research was conducted. From the evidence gathered, it showed that fewer students choose ChiShona as compared to other subjects when they enrol for “A” Level studies. All the five heads of departments of

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schools which participated in the research alluded that, ChiShona subject has the least number of students as compared to other subjects. It is also now a common feature that few students are found studying ChiShona subject at high schools which is a clear indication that they are not only students who have negative attitudes towards the subject but also the teachers, school administrators and parents who look down upon the subject thinking it is meant for those who are mediocre performers. Most of the students interviewed revealed that some lower sixth students do not choose ChiShona as a subject for study at “A” Level because they fear one component of the subject which is ChiShona grammar. The heads of departments also complemented the students’ sentiments saying most students fear ChiShona grammar one of the components of ChiShona subject. When the researchers further probed for the reasons behind, they found out that the students regard ChiShona as a difficult subject among most of those offered at “A” Level especially the commonly cited component of ChiShona which is grammar. These sentiments are supported by statistics from the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council which superintends examinations in Zimbabwe, which

show a radical decline in the number of candidates registering to write “A’ Level ChiShona:

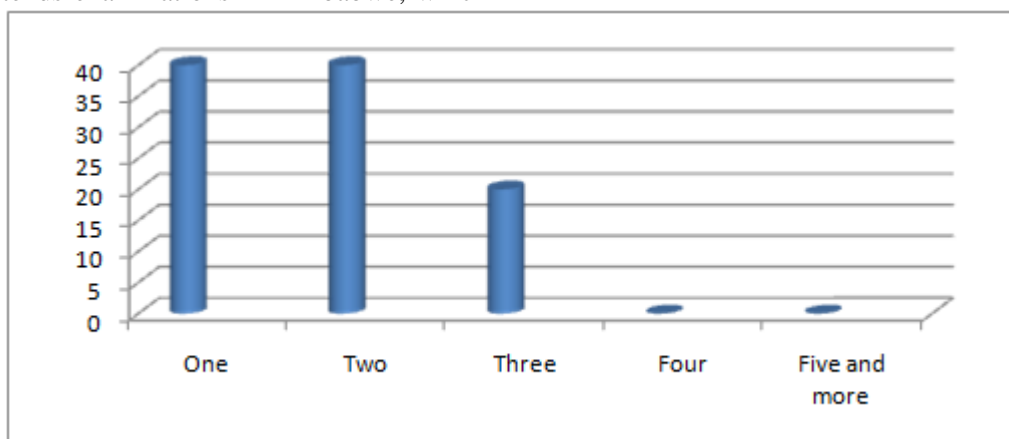
**Table1.** Number of examination entries in ChiShona

Year	Entry
2008	7381
2009	4687
2010	3997
2011	3208

*Source:* Zimsec files

The above statistics clearly show a dwindling of “A” Level students’ interest in studying ChiShona. These findings show that, since ChiShona grammar is a component of ChiShona subject, the negative attitudes which are being exhibited by the students to the subject itself and the citation of ChiShona grammar as an example of the most difficult components of ChiShona show that students have negative attitudes towards grammar.

The questionnaires of teachers also required to know the number of ChiShona grammar textbooks which they have at the school and the ones which they use when teaching ChiShona grammar. The information gathered from the teachers is shown by the graph which follows.



**Graph1.** Responses concerning grammar textbooks.

From the information gathered and displayed on the graph, it shows that 40% of the teachers which is two out of five have one ChiShona grammar textbook which they use to teach the subject. One teacher out of five teachers which is 20% revealed that he uses four different grammar textbooks when teaching ChiShona. Two out of five teachers which is 40% also alluded that they use two ChiShona grammar textbooks. These results entail that, there are a few textbooks for use when teaching grammar as compared to other subjects which show that

the teachers who constitute the procurement committee of the schools and administrators have negative attitudes towards the teaching of ChiShona grammar. To further buttress this assertion, through the analysis of documents, the researchers also found out that whilst all other subjects received book donations from UNICEF, under the Education Transition Fund (ETF) in 2009/10 era, ChiShona failed to get any of these donations at these schools. There were few complaints if there were any concerning the unequal distribution of textbooks

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which jeopardised the teaching and learning of ChiShona from the heads of departments, teachers and administrators of “A” Level teaching schools.

On the teachers’ questionnaires and interview guides of students and heads of departments, a question was asked which required to know the text which is mostly used by teachers and students during the teaching and learning of “A” Level ChiShona grammar. The table below shows the teachers’ responses concerning the book mostly used during the teaching and learning of ChiShona grammar:

**Table2.** Teachers’ responses

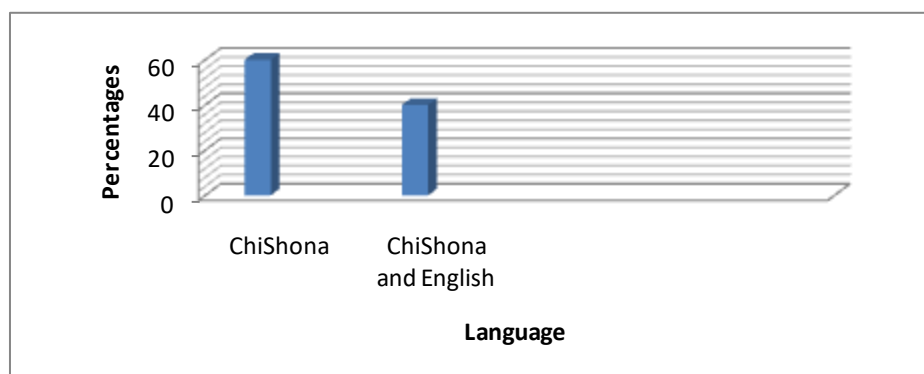
Response	Quantity	Percentage
Other textbooks	0	0
Dudziramutauro (1999)	5	100

From the teachers’ responses it is clear that all the teachers who were interviewed revealed that they use one textbook to teach “A” Level ChiShona grammar. The use of one textbook show that there are few textbooks to use and there is no variety of textbooks for teaching ChiShona grammar at “A” Level. This is a problem which is perpetrated by negative attitudes towards the teaching of ChiShona from the schools’ administrators since other subjects have a variety of textbooks purchased by the same school administrators.

The heads of departments revealed that the teachers use only one textbook entitled **Dudziramutauro** (1999) co-authored by Warinda and Mashiri. The findings from the

heads of departments of languages of the five schools have also fallen in tandem with the findings from the interview guides of the students. Almost all the students who were interviewed from the five schools confirmed that they use only one textbook mentioned earlier when learning “A” Level ChiShona grammar. The use of one textbook in the teaching and learning of “A” Level ChiShona grammar is a clear indication that there are few textbooks concerning the subject. Since there are few textbooks for the ChiShona subject as compared to other subjects as found by the researchers, it shows that there are negative attitudes towards the teaching and learning of “A” Level ChiShona grammar because there is uneven distribution of textbooks in subjects offered by the five schools which participated in this research. The research also revealed that the subject which is suffering most from the uneven distribution of textbooks is ChiShona and within the subject itself the component of grammar is encompassed which translates that there are negative attitudes in the teaching and learning of ChiShona “A” Level grammar on the administration side since they are the ones who are neglecting the purchase of grammar textbooks.

In this same research, a question which wanted to find out about the language used by the teachers when teaching “A” Level ChiShona grammar was asked on the teachers’ questionnaires and the children’s interview guides. The responses of the teachers are shown below:



**Graph2.** Teachers’ responses concerning language

The graph shows that 60% of the teachers use ChiShona to teach ChiShona grammar throughout their lessons and 40% mix ChiShona and English when teaching ChiShona grammar. This shows that some of the teachers still have attitudes towards the teaching of ChiShona

grammar in ChiShona language. Some of the teachers ended up writing reasons that the grammatical terms are difficult to refer to using ChiShona. This is an indication that there are negative attitudes towards the subject since there are reference books to use when teaching

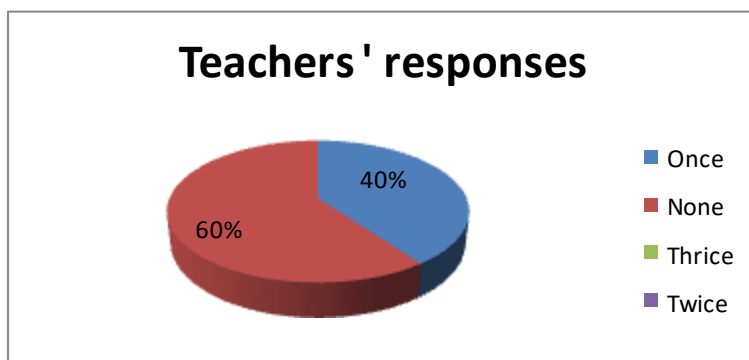
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the subject like **Duramazwi reUvaranomwe neDudziramutauro (2007)** and ChiShona is language which can explain itself.

The evidence gathered from the interview guides of children also reiterated that there are negative attitudes towards the teaching and learning of ChiShona grammar because most of the children revealed that all their teachers code mix and code switch two languages which are ChiShona and English when teaching “A” Level ChiShona grammar. When the children were further probed they revealed that some of the

teachers fear that they may be regarded as uneducated if they continue using ChiShona when teaching which may translate that it is an issue of attitude.

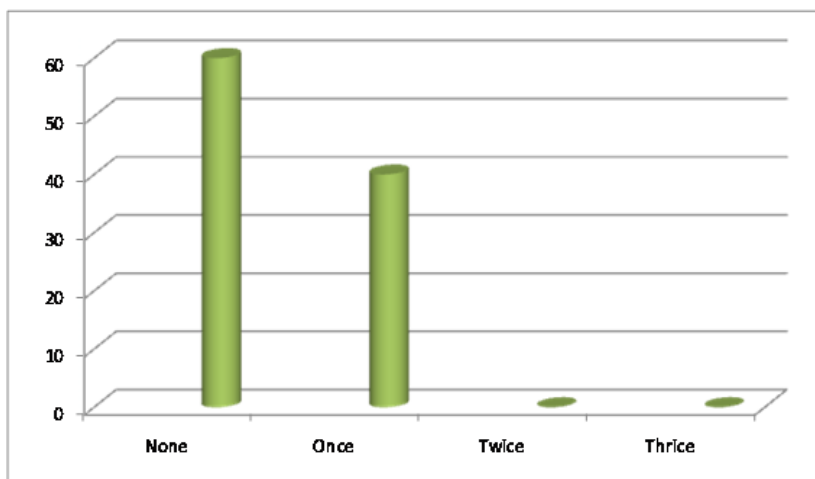
In the same research, the teachers and school heads’ questionnaires and interview guides of the heads of departments contained a question which wanted to find out about the times teachers are supervised while they are teaching “A” Level ChiShona grammar. The pie chart below shows the teachers’ responses:



**Piechart1.** Teachers’ responses

The teachers’ questionnaires show that only 2 teachers out of the five who were interviewed from the five schools revealed that they were only supervised once teaching “A” Level ChiShona grammar. 60% of the teachers which is three (3) of the teachers were never supervised teaching “A” Level ChiShona grammar. These results show that lack of supervision by the heads of departments and school administrators is a sign of negative attitudes towards the subject component since other ChiShona subject components have been supervised more than two times per term as compared to grammar component. It may also

be a sign of a negative attitude towards the teaching of “A” Level ChiShona grammar on the side of the teachers since in most cases they are the ones who determine which subject content to teach during supervision because some of the sentiments by teachers when further probed showed that they are adamant to teach difficult components of the subject during supervision and they cited grammar as an example. It could be that, since most teachers are relatively green, this could be impacting on their delivery since experience is a very important variable for results in any profession (Mudzanire and Mazuruse, 2013).



**Graph3.** Graph showing school heads’ responses



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Information gathered from the school heads' questionnaires show that 2 heads which is 40% out of five teachers have supervised teachers teaching grammar once and it shows that three (3) heads which is 60% out of 5 have never supervised teachers teaching grammar. These findings show that, the administrators have negative attitudes towards the teaching of “A” Level grammar. One of the heads who was interviewed aired these views, “Grammar *reChiShona rinonetsa kunzwisisa kuti riri kufamba sei kana richidzidziswa uye haugoni kuziva kuti chidzidzo chagonekwa here kana kuti hachina.*” in simple translation meaning that, “ChiShona grammar is difficult to understand when it is being taught and one cannot tell if the lesson was fruitful or not.” Analysing these sentiments, one can conclude that the administrators have negative attitudes towards the teaching of ChiShona grammar because the administrators approach its supervision with a presumption that ChiShona grammar is difficult to teach and observe during teaching of the subject. According to Mudzaanire and Mazuruse (2013:13), “University graduates who teach Shona would have received most of their instruction in English at the university, but, when they go to teach in schools, they are expected by the authorities and the students alike to teach Shona totally in Shona. It subsequently becomes very difficult and problematic for the university graduate teachers to adjust to this anomalous scenario.”

The findings from the teachers and school heads' questionnaires also tallied with the findings from the interview guides of the heads of departments of languages. The interview guides of the heads of departments revealed that few heads of departments of languages have assessed teachers teaching “A” Level ChiShona grammar. The information gathered is a clear indication that the heads of departments have also negative attitudes towards the teaching of “A” Level grammar since they do not supervise teachers teaching grammar lessons. On the side of the teachers, it still gives an impression that they are not comfortable to be observed teaching the grammatical component of “A” Level ChiShona.

A question which wanted to find out about the problems which are encountered during the teaching of “A” Level ChiShona grammar was asked on the teachers' questionnaires and head

of departments and students' interview guides. The table below shows problems highlighted by teachers.

**Table3.** Problems given by teachers

Responses	Quantity	Percentage
Few textbooks	2	40
Negative attitudes	3	60

From the findings shown on the table, it reveals that 60% of the teachers cited negative attitudes of pupils and other teachers as the main problem of teaching ChiShona “A” Level grammar. Teachers alluded that most children view ChiShona grammar as a difficult subject component because they do not put much of their study time towards it. Teachers also revealed that some of their counterparts allocate more time to other subject components thereby jeopardising the time allocated to the teaching of “A” Level ChiShona grammar which is a clear indication that teachers have negative attitudes towards the teaching of “A” Level ChiShona grammar.

These findings reveal that one of the problems associated in the teaching of ChiShona subject are negative attitudes towards the teaching and learning of grammar at “A” Level. In the same vein, Machibaya (2011) and Magwa (2012) concur that one of the stumbling blocks in the teaching and learning of ChiShona are negative attitudes of teachers and pupils towards the subject. In another view, Chimhenga and Chivhanga (2013) posit that many students regard ChiShona as a subject meant for those students who are not intelligent. Analysing these views and findings, one can conclude that the teaching and learning of ChiShona is affected by negative attitudes towards the subject which also translate that since ChiShona grammar is a component of ChiShona subject it is also affected by negative attitudes.

The document analysis also sought to find out about the number of written exercises concerning the grammar component given by the “A” Level ChiShona teachers in children's exercise books. The researchers found out that the grammar component in the daily exercise books of children are very few as compared to other ChiShona components like practical criticism, composition and literature. The number of grammar exercises is far less than the other components of ChiShona subject which is a clear indication that the teachers have also a

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negative attitude towards the component of grammar.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STUDY

Basing on the findings of this study, the researchers make the following recommendations:

- There is need to change learner’s mindsets so that they develop interest and positive attitudes towards ChiShona grammar. It is imperative that learner’s mindsets must be changed by packaging the teaching of ChiShona grammar in a way which they understand and appreciate.
- Teachers who trained grammar in English need workshops and seminars as a form of in-service training or on-the-job-training to upgrade the teachers so that they would be able to teach grammar in ChiShona language.
- Collaborative teaching may be very helpful because it has an advantage of assigning members to aspects of their specialisation and interest. If a teacher is good in grammar, then that teacher should be allowed to concentrate on moulding students in those areas.
- The adequacy of ChiShona textbooks is very important in cultivating interest and a positive attitude in learners towards ChiShona grammar.
- Universities and colleges training ChiShona teachers must teach them using ChiShona language and not English language for easy conceptualisation of issues.
- The ChiShona “A” Level syllabus which is currently written in English language must be translated to ChiShona language and include more comprehensive guidelines which are helpful to the teacher.

### CONCLUSION

From the findings and analysis made, it can be noted that teachers, children, school heads and heads of departments of languages have negative attitudes towards the teaching of “A” Level ChiShona grammar. These negative attitudes is shown through different ways like; choice of subjects at “A” Level, language used to teach grammar, uneven distribution of textbooks which favours other subjects in the

expense of ChiShona and feelings of students concerning components of ChiShona subject. The research also acts as an eye opener to those who are interested in researching about causes of failure in ChiShona subject at “A” Level. This study recommends the demystifying of ChiShona grammar in education by all stakeholders through packaging it in a way which cultivates positive attitudes and makes it palatable to the students.

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