


# Chapter 7

## Language as a Lens: Enhancing Religious Understanding and Cultural Identity Through Inclusive Pedagogy in Zimbabwe's Institutions of Higher Learning

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### ABSTRACT

*In the intricate tapestry of Zimbabwean society, the interplay between language and culture emerges as a pivotal determinant of national identity. The nation's rich linguistic diversity comprising languages such as Shona, Ndebele, and English poses significant challenges and opportunities within higher education. The prevailing focus on English, particularly in the domain of Religious Studies, frequently alienates students from their cultural heritage, thus hindering their comprehension of the multifaceted nature of religious teachings. This study explores the efficacy of inclusive pedagogical methodologies that integrate indigenous languages, with the aim of enriching both religious comprehension and cultural identity among learners in Zimbabwean higher education institutions.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe's remarkable linguistic diversity, comprising over 16 officially recognized languages, is integral to the formation of cultural identity. Nevertheless, the preeminence of English within the Religious Studies curriculum frequently sidelines indigenous languages, thereby obstructing students' comprehension of religious concepts and their cultural implications. This research undertakes to investigate the potential of integrating indigenous languages into the Religious Studies curriculum as a means to enhance student understanding and engagement, ultimately fostering a profound connection to both religious teachings and cultural identity. The research explores several strategies for effectively integrating Indigenous languages into the Religious Studies curriculum, drawing on theoretical frameworks and practical examples to illustrate their potential impact. This study aspires to construct a pedagogical framework that champions inclusive practices within Zimbabwean educational institutions. In

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Zimbabwe, the intertwining of language and culture is essential for grasping the nation's identity. With a rich array of languages spoken, including Shona, Ndebele, and English, the educational system must adeptly navigate this complex linguistic terrain. The current focus on English in Religious Studies often alienates students from their cultural heritage, thus impeding their ability to appreciate the intricacies of religious teachings. This research harnesses this perspective by integrating indigenous languages into the Religious Studies curriculum, thereby enhancing the educational experiences of students and fostering a more profound understanding of their cultural and religious heritage.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The Concept of Inclusive Pedagogy**

The discourse surrounding inclusive pedagogy within Zimbabwe's higher education landscape is increasingly gaining prominence, particularly as it pertains to enhancing religious understanding and cultural identity. Inclusive pedagogy is conceptualized as an educational framework that seeks to accommodate the diverse needs of learners by recognizing and valuing their unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Liasidou (2012) articulates that inclusive education transcends mere physical accessibility; it necessitates the creation of an environment conducive to the academic and social flourishing of all students.

However, the implementation of such pedagogical approaches in Zimbabwe encounters formidable challenges, primarily rooted in entrenched educational practices that prioritize English as the medium of instruction. Ndlovu (2018) critiques existing educational policies for their failure to acknowledge the linguistic diversity of the student population, positing that these policies perpetuate entire inequalities. In contrast, Chimhenga, (2021), underscores the transformative potential of inclusive pedagogy in higher education, advocating for its role in fostering a sense of belonging and enhancing academic outcomes for marginalized groups.

The scholarly dialogue surrounding this issue reveals a palpable tension between traditional educational practices and the imperative for reform. While some scholars advocate for a radical overhaul of the educational system to embrace linguistic and cultural diversity, others caution against the potential pitfalls of implementing inclusive pedagogy without adequate training and resources for educators. This dichotomy highlights an urgent need for comprehensive professional development and policy reform to equip educators with the requisite skills to navigate this complex educational landscape.

### **2.2 Religious Studies and Zimbabwe's Linguistic Landscape: Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Era**

The colonial history of Zimbabwe is characterized by the regular suppression of indigenous languages and cultures, a deliberate strategy employed by colonial authorities to assert dominance and undermine the identities of the local populace. The ravages of colonialism are still impactful in the post-colonial Zimbabwe determining the status of indigenous languages and the dominance of English language.

The cultural and linguistic subjugation was integral to the colonial project, enabling colonizers to exert greater control over the colonized. The imposition of English as the sole language of instruction in schools effectively marginalized and devalued local languages, as noted by Ranger (1985). This policy not only restricted students' ability to learn and express themselves in their native tongues but also

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