



English Language Monopoly and Indigenous Language Specialist Exclusion from Educational Leadership: A Mixed-Methods Study of Secondary Schools in Zambia's Northern Province

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ABSTRACT

Original Research Article

This study investigates the systemic exclusion of indigenous language specialists from Head of Department (HOD) positions in Northern Province secondary schools, Zambia, where English language teachers monopolise departmental leadership despite the region's predominantly Ibibemba-speaking population (71.3% of households). Grounded in Language Policy and Planning Theory, the research employed a convergent mixed-methods approach combining questionnaire surveys (N=124) with semi-structured interviews (N=38) of language teachers, HODs, school administrators, and education officials across seven districts. Purposive sampling selected participants representing diverse sociolinguistic contexts. Thematic analysis revealed that English language monopoly stems from four interconnected mechanisms: perceived superior prestige of English qualifications (cited by 87.3% of head teachers), entrenched colonial attitudes perpetuating linguistic hierarchies, policy ambiguity enabling discretionary discrimination, and assumptions conflating English proficiency with managerial competence. Results demonstrate significant resource allocation disparities ($p < .001$), with English programmes receiving 73.4% of language department budgets while serving 48.2% of enrolled students, undermining indigenous language teacher morale and constraining culturally responsive pedagogies. The research underscores the necessity for explicit appointment criteria mandating equitable consideration of all language specialists, minimum quotas for indigenous language representation in leadership, and policy reforms recognising indigenous language qualifications as equivalent to English credentials for administrative advancement.

Keywords: English Language Monopoly, Head of Department, Indigenous Language Exclusion, Educational Leadership, Linguistic Imperialism, Northern Province, Zambia.

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Introduction

In the complex landscape of postcolonial African education systems, language policy decisions reveal fundamental tensions between indigenous linguistic diversity and colonial legacies that continue shaping institutional power structures decades after political independence. In Northern Province, Zambia, where 71.3% of the population speaks Ibibemba as their mother tongue alongside other indigenous languages including Mambwe (8.7%), Namwanga (6.4%), and Lungu (4.2%) (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022), a disturbing

administrative pattern has emerged whereby teachers holding English language qualifications occupy 92.4% of Head of Department (HOD) positions in language departments across secondary schools. This monopolistic practice systematically excludes qualified indigenous language specialists from educational leadership roles, contradicting both demographic reality and the nation's constitutional commitment to multilingualism (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2016; Ministry of General Education, 2013).

The Head of Department role carries significant institutional power, coordinating curriculum implementation, allocating teaching materials and resources, mentoring junior teachers, conducting performance assessments, and shaping pedagogical approaches within language departments. When these positions remain exclusively occupied by English language specialists, indigenous language programmes face measurable consequences, including resource disparities, marginalised institutional status, constrained development of culturally responsive pedagogies rooted in community linguistic resources, and diminished professional identities among indigenous language teachers (Chisimba, 2020; Mwila, 2021). This pattern reflects broader continental challenges documented across Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, and South Africa, where colonial language policies established enduring hierarchies positioning European languages as superior to African languages in educational administration and professional advancement (Bamgbose, 2019; Mazrui & Mazrui, 2018; Ndhlovu, 2021).

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly conceptualised these persistent inequalities through the lens of linguistic imperialism, which examines how dominant languages maintain structural advantages through institutional mechanisms that appear neutral but systematically favour speakers of colonial languages (Phillipson, 2017; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2022). In educational contexts, linguistic imperialism operates not merely through explicit language policy but through everyday administrative practices, appointment criteria, resource allocation decisions, and professional networking opportunities that reproduce colonial hierarchies while maintaining the appearance of meritocratic selection (Deumert, 2020; Makoni & Pennycook, 2021). This theoretical perspective illuminates how seemingly technical decisions about qualification requirements or leadership competencies can function as mechanisms of exclusion that perpetuate linguistic inequalities across generations.

This research contributes to the discourse on language policy implementation in emerging markets by examining institutional mechanisms, policy interpretations, and ideological factors perpetuating English language monopoly in educational leadership. While existing Zambian scholarship documents tensions between multilingual policy rhetoric and English-dominated classroom practice (Mwanza, 2017; Mwila, 2021; Simwinga, 2020), systematic investigation of indigenous language specialists' exclusion from departmental leadership positions remains limited. Therefore, this study explores the impact of English language monopoly on indigenous language programme development and teacher professional identity in Northern Province secondary schools, providing empirical evidence to inform policy reforms promoting genuine linguistic equity in Zambian education.

Literature Review

Global Perspectives on Language Policy and Educational Leadership

Global scholarship on language policy in postcolonial contexts documents persistent hierarchies favouring former colonial languages in educational administration and institutional power structures. Tollefson (2013) demonstrates how language-in-education policies frequently perpetuate inequalities by privileging dominant languages, restricting marginalised language speakers' access to leadership positions regardless of their qualifications or experience. This phenomenon operates through what Tollefson terms "language policy mechanisms," seemingly neutral administrative procedures that systematically disadvantage speakers of minority languages through qualification requirements, assessment criteria, and professional development opportunities that favour dominant language competence.

Research across diverse postcolonial contexts reveals similar patterns of indigenous language teacher marginalisation. In Latin America, studies of Quechua-speaking educators in Peru and Bolivia demonstrate that, despite constitutional recognition of indigenous languages, teachers specialising in native languages face significant barriers to administrative advancement, with Spanish-language qualifications consistently prioritised for leadership positions (Hornberger & Kviatok Dueñas, 2019; López, 2020). Asian scholarship examining language policies in the Philippines and Indonesia reveals analogous patterns where English and national languages dominate educational administration while regional indigenous languages remain confined to lower curricular status and their specialists are excluded from institutional decision-making (Tupas, 2020; Zein, 2020). These global patterns establish that English language monopoly in educational leadership represents not an isolated Zambian phenomenon but a manifestation of broader postcolonial linguistic hierarchies operating across multiple world regions.

African Context: Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Realities

African scholarship provides a crucial regional context for understanding linguistic hierarchies in educational leadership. Mazrui and Mazrui (2018) analyse how colonial language policies established enduring power structures, positioning English, French, and Portuguese as languages of prestige and authority across the continent, with postcolonial governments largely maintaining these hierarchies despite nationalist rhetoric promoting indigenous languages. This "linguistic legacy of colonialism" manifests in educational systems where European languages function as gatekeepers to professional advancement, institutional authority, and socioeconomic mobility, while African languages remain associated with tradition, domesticity, and limited formal domains (Adegbija, 2019; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2020).

Studies from Kenya demonstrate indigenous language teachers' marginalisation in school administration despite Kiswahili's status as a national language, with English major holders dominating departmental leadership and resource allocation decisions (Muthwii, 2016; Ogechi & Orao, 2021). Kenyan research reveals that even in regions where indigenous languages serve as primary community languages, educational administrators consistently privilege English qualifications when making appointment decisions, citing assumptions about English proficiency as essential for professional communication, policy interpretation, and inter-institutional coordination. Nigerian research reveals similar exclusionary patterns where English dominates educational leadership while Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa remain confined to lower curricular status despite their millions of speakers (Bamgbose, 2019; Igboanusi, 2020). Studies in South Africa's post-apartheid context demonstrate that despite constitutional recognition of eleven official languages and progressive language policies, English and Afrikaans continue to dominate educational administration while indigenous African language specialists face systemic barriers to leadership positions (Ndhlovu, 2021; Rudwick, 2020). These continental findings establish a consistent pattern of colonial language privilege in administrative roles that transcends individual national contexts.

Zambian Language Policy and Educational Practice

Zambian research specifically documents contradictions between multilingual policy commitments and institutional practices favouring English. Mwanza (2017) examines how English maintains hegemonic status in Zambian education despite constitutional recognition of 73 indigenous languages, arguing that language-in-education policies fail to translate into equitable classroom practices or administrative structures. His analysis reveals that while policy documents proclaim commitment to multilingual education, implementation mechanisms remain underdeveloped, allowing English dominance to persist through institutional inertia and entrenched colonial attitudes among educational decision-makers.

Linehan (2016) reveals gaps between official bilingual education policies and implementation realities where indigenous languages receive inadequate resources, teacher training, and institutional support compared to English programmes. Drawing on UNESCO data, Linehan demonstrates that Zambian indigenous language programmes operate with approximately one-third of the per-student funding allocated to English instruction, with similar disparities in textbook provision, teacher professional development, and curriculum support materials. Chisimba (2020) explores teacher attitudes toward indigenous language instruction in Zambian schools, finding widespread internalisation of colonial hierarchies positioning English as superior for academic and professional advancement, with

many teachers themselves questioning the value of indigenous language qualifications for career progression. More recent research by Mwila (2021) examines the professional experiences of indigenous language teachers in Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces, documenting feelings of marginalisation and limited career advancement opportunities despite equivalent qualifications to English specialist colleagues.

Simwanga (2020) provides a historical analysis of Zambian language policy evolution, tracing how missionary-era language choices, colonial administrative structures, and post-independence policy decisions have shaped contemporary linguistic hierarchies. His work demonstrates that current patterns of English dominance reflect not merely policy choices but deeply embedded institutional cultures that privilege English language competence as a marker of educational quality and professional capability. However, existing research has not systematically examined indigenous language specialists' exclusion from departmental leadership positions in secondary schools, representing a significant gap that this study addresses by investigating administrative appointment patterns, resource allocation disparities, and their consequences for indigenous language programme development in Northern Province.

Conceptualising Indigenous Language Exclusion: Theoretical Contributions

Recent theoretical developments in language policy scholarship provide frameworks for understanding mechanisms of indigenous language exclusion from educational leadership. Ricento (2020) advances critical language policy theory, examining how power relations shape language policy processes and outcomes across multiple institutional levels. His framework distinguishes between explicit policy texts, implicit policy discourses, and actual policy practices, revealing how contradictions among these levels enable continued marginalisation of minority languages despite official commitments to linguistic diversity. Johnson (2018) develops the concept of "policy arbiters", individuals whose interpretive authority shapes how abstract policy mandates translate into concrete institutional practices, highlighting how administrator discretion can either advance or obstruct equitable language policy implementation.

Phillipson's (2017) linguistic imperialism framework, updated for contemporary globalisation contexts, examines how English maintains structural advantages through interconnected mechanisms operating at global, national, and institutional levels. These mechanisms include unequal resource flows favouring English-medium education, professional advancement structures requiring English competence, ideological formations positioning English as essential for modernisation and development, and institutional practices that naturalise English dominance while marginalising indigenous languages as irrelevant to

professional domains. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2022) extend this analysis to educational contexts, documenting how linguistically diverse education systems systematically exclude indigenous language speakers from power through linguistic gatekeeping mechanisms embedded in teacher education, certification requirements, and appointment procedures.

Applied to the Zambian context, these theoretical frameworks illuminate how English language monopoly in educational leadership operates through multiple interconnected mechanisms: policy ambiguity enabling discretionary discrimination, ideological assumptions about language prestige and professional competence, resource allocation patterns favouring English programmes, professional networks accessible primarily to English teachers, and institutional cultures that naturalise English dominance while rendering indigenous language expertise invisible or irrelevant for leadership purposes.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in Language Policy and Planning Theory, which examines how societies make decisions about language use in institutional contexts and how these decisions reflect and reproduce power relations. Developed by Cooper (1989) and expanded by Spolsky (2004, 2018), the framework distinguishes between status planning concerning languages' social functions and institutional domains, corpus planning involving language standardisation and development, and acquisition planning addressing language teaching and learning in educational systems. Contemporary extensions of the theory incorporate critical perspectives examining how language policy processes reflect broader societal power structures and ideological formations (Ricento, 2020; Tollefson & Pérez-Milans, 2018).

A central principle of Language Policy and Planning Theory recognises that official policies often diverge from actual institutional practice, with *de facto* language hierarchies contradicting *de jure* multilingual commitments enshrined in constitutions and policy documents. Spolsky (2018) conceptualises language policy as comprising three interconnected components: language practices (actual language use in various domains), language beliefs and ideologies (assumptions about language value and appropriateness), and language management (explicit efforts to modify language practices through interventions). This tripartite framework enables analysis of how contradictions among these components create spaces for discriminatory practices despite official commitments to linguistic equity.

The theory emphasises examining mechanisms through which language hierarchies are reproduced in daily institutional operations, including appointment criteria that privilege certain linguistic qualifications, resource allocation patterns favouring dominant language programmes, professional development opportunities accessible primarily

to teachers of prestigious languages, and discourse practices legitimising exclusionary patterns through naturalised assumptions about linguistic competence and administrative capability (Cooper, 1989; Hornberger, 2021). Status planning analysis reveals how seemingly neutral administrative decisions function as political acts assigning differential prestige to languages, positioning some as suitable for leadership while relegating others to subordinate roles regardless of speakers' qualifications or demographic significance.

Applied to Northern Province secondary schools, Language Policy and Planning Theory enables systematic analysis of how English monopolises educational leadership despite official multilingual policies. The framework guides investigation of explicit appointment policies and implicit assumptions embedded in administrative practices about what constitutes appropriate linguistic expertise for departmental leadership. Status planning analysis examines institutional mechanisms assigning prestige to English language qualifications while devaluing indigenous language credentials, including discourse positioning English as the natural language of administration, resource allocation patterns favouring English programmes, and professional networks predominantly accessible to English language teachers. By revealing contradictions between Zambia's constitutional multilingualism and administrative practices reproducing colonial hierarchies, this theoretical lens illuminates how institutional structures function as mechanisms of linguistic imperialism, providing a foundation for developing equitable policy reforms that genuinely recognise indigenous language expertise as equivalent to English credentials for educational leadership.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to investigate English language monopoly in HOD positions across Northern Province secondary schools. The research design enabled triangulation of statistical patterns with rich narrative data exploring stakeholder perspectives and institutional mechanisms perpetuating exclusionary practices (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The convergent design involved simultaneous quantitative and qualitative data collection, followed by integrated analysis examining convergence, divergence, and complementarity between datasets.

Study Setting

The research was conducted in Northern Province, Zambia, spanning seven districts selected to represent the province's diverse sociolinguistic contexts: Kasama (urban administrative centre), Mbala (semi-urban with mixed linguistic populations), Mpulungu (lakeshore trading centre),

Luwingu (rural with predominantly Ibibemba speakers), Mungwi (rural agricultural area), Chilubi (island district), and Kaputa (border district with significant Mambwe and Lungu populations). This district selection ensured representation across urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts with varying degrees of indigenous language vitality and English language exposure.

Participant Selection and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, allowing researchers to target individuals with specific knowledge and experience relevant to the study (Patton, 2015). The sample included current language department HODs holding English language qualifications (n=24), indigenous language specialists teaching Ibibemba, Mambwe, Namwanga, or Lungu in secondary schools (n=52), secondary school head teachers responsible for administrative appointments (n=24), District Education Board Secretary officials involved in teacher placement and promotion decisions (n=8), Provincial Education Officers overseeing educational policy implementation (n=4), and Curriculum Development Centre representatives (n=2). The total participants comprised 124 survey respondents and 38 interview participants, with 18 individuals participating in both data collection methods.

Inclusion criteria required: (a) current employment in Northern Province secondary schools or district/provincial education offices; (b) minimum two years' experience in current role; (c) direct involvement in or experience with language department operations; (d) willingness to participate voluntarily with informed consent. Exclusion criteria included temporary or contract teachers with less than two years' experience and individuals on extended leave during data collection.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected through three complementary methods between January and June 2023. Questionnaire surveys were administered to 124 participants, measuring variables including appointment patterns across schools and districts, qualification distributions among language department staff (22 items), resource allocation disparities between English and indigenous language programmes (15 items), teacher career aspirations and professional development access (12 items), perceptions of qualification prestige and administrative competence requirements (18 items), and demographic characteristics (8 items). The survey instrument was developed based on a literature review and pilot-tested with 15 teachers in Copperbelt Province, yielding Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .78 to .89 across subscales, indicating acceptable to good internal consistency.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 38 participants representing all stakeholder categories, exploring topics such as appointment decision-making processes and criteria, perceptions of English language qualifications versus

indigenous language credentials, institutional attitudes toward multilingual education policy, experiences of inclusion or exclusion in professional networks, and recommendations for promoting equitable representation in leadership positions. Interview protocols were developed collaboratively with two Zambian language education experts and pilot-tested with four teachers before finalisation. All interview sessions lasting 45-90 minutes were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Document analysis examined 47 documents, including appointment letters (n=24), Ministry of General Education guidelines on HOD qualifications and selection (n=6), school departmental reports and resource allocation records (n=12), Provincial Education Office policies on teacher placement and promotion (n=3), and District Education Board Secretary circulars (n=2). Document analysis provided triangulation for self-reported survey and interview data while revealing formal policy frameworks guiding appointment decisions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative survey data were analysed using SPSS version 27, employing descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) to establish baseline patterns of HOD appointments, qualification distributions, and resource allocation across schools and districts. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests, examined associations between language specialisation and leadership appointment, while independent samples t-tests compared resource allocation between English and indigenous language programmes. Effect sizes (Cohen's d, Cramer's V) were calculated to assess the practical significance of observed differences.

Qualitative interview data and document content were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework: familiarisation with data through repeated reading of transcripts, generating initial codes identifying interesting features systematically across the dataset (n=847 initial codes), searching for themes by collating codes into potential patterns (n=47 candidate themes), reviewing themes to ensure coherent relationship with coded data and entire dataset (n=12 refined themes), defining and naming themes to clarify their essence (n=6 final themes), and producing the research report with vivid exemplars illustrating themes. Analysis was conducted manually with NVivo 12 software supporting data organisation and retrieval. Trustworthiness was enhanced through member checking with 12 participants who reviewed and confirmed theme interpretations, peer debriefing with three language education researchers not involved in the study, and triangulation across data sources.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were provided with detailed information sheets explaining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights, including voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Written informed consent was secured before all interviews and survey administration. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by using pseudonyms in all transcripts and research outputs, storing data securely with access restricted to the research team, and reporting findings in aggregate form, preventing identification of individual participants or specific schools (Bryman, 2016). Particular care was taken to protect indigenous language teachers who might face professional consequences for criticising institutional practices.

Results and Discussion

This section presents findings from the research on English language monopoly in HOD positions across Northern Province secondary schools. Data were analysed thematically to uncover key patterns illuminating institutional mechanisms perpetuating indigenous language specialist exclusion and consequences for language programme development.

Extent of English Language Monopoly

Quantitative data revealed striking patterns in HOD appointments across Northern Province secondary schools. Survey results indicated that 92.4% of language department HODs ($n=85$ of 92 positions across surveyed schools) held English language as their major qualification, while only 7.6% held indigenous language specialisations despite indigenous language specialists constituting 43.8% of language teachers in surveyed schools ($\chi^2 = 47.32$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .62$, indicating a large effect size). This disproportionate representation persisted across all seven districts, ranging from 88.9% English HODs in Kaputa District to 95.7% in Kasama District, demonstrating systematic exclusion rather than localised variation.

Document analysis confirmed this pattern, with appointment letters consistently identifying English language qualifications as the primary criterion for HOD selection. Examination of 24 appointment letters revealed that 22 cited the appointee's English language specialisation as a qualification for leadership, while only two mentioned any consideration of indigenous language expertise. A District Education Board Secretary official explained during interviews:

English language major holders are perceived as having broader administrative capabilities suitable for departmental leadership. When we review applications, the English qualification carries more weight because we assume these teachers have stronger communication skills, better analytical abilities, and more exposure to professional development opportunities. It's not that we deliberately exclude indigenous language teachers, but the English qualification seems to signal readiness for leadership in ways that indigenous language credentials don't (DEBS Official 3, Kasama District).

This finding aligns with continental patterns documented by Muthwii (2016) in Kenya and Bamgbose (2019) in Nigeria, where colonial language qualifications monopolise educational leadership despite indigenous languages' demographic significance and official policy support for multilingual education.

Mechanisms Perpetuating Exclusion

Thematic analysis of interview data identified four interconnected mechanisms reproducing English language monopoly in HOD positions.

Mechanism 1: Perceived Superior Prestige of English Qualifications

Widespread perceptions positioned English language qualifications as inherently superior to indigenous language credentials, with 87.3% of head teachers expressing beliefs that English major holders possess superior academic training, stronger analytical capabilities, and more rigorous university education compared to indigenous language specialists. One head teacher articulated this perspective:

When I'm considering who to appoint as HOD, I look for someone with strong English skills because the HOD must write reports, communicate with the District Office, interpret policy documents from the Ministry, and represent the school at professional meetings. All of these tasks require excellent English. An indigenous language specialist might be very knowledgeable about Ibibemba grammar, but if their English isn't equally strong, they'll struggle with the administrative demands of the position (Head Teacher 7, Mbala District).

These attitudes reflect colonial hierarchies that systematically devalued African languages and their speakers (Mazrui & Mazrui, 2018). However, indigenous language teachers challenged this assumption, noting that their university education was conducted primarily in English medium and that they demonstrated English competence through daily teaching practice. An Ibibemba specialist with 14 years' experience observed:

The irony is that I teach Ibibemba using English as the medium of instruction because the curriculum requires it. Every day, I demonstrate my English competence in front of students, writing on the board, explaining concepts, and communicating complex ideas. But when leadership positions become available, suddenly my English isn't good enough? It's not about language competence—it's about how people value different kinds of qualifications (Indigenous Language Teacher 12, Luwingu District).

Mechanism 2: Policy Ambiguity Enabling Discriminatory Practices

Policy ambiguity enabled discriminatory practices by providing no explicit mandates for equitable representation across language specialisations in departmental leadership.

Ministry guidelines specify generic qualification requirements (Bachelor's degree in education, minimum five years' teaching experience, satisfactory performance ratings) without addressing language specialisation equity, allowing administrators to exercise discretion shaped by internalised linguistic hierarchies. A Provincial Education Officer acknowledged:

The policy documents are silent on this issue. They tell us that HODs should be qualified teachers with appropriate experience, but they don't say anything about balancing representation across language specialisations. So head teachers use their judgment, and their judgment tends to favour English teachers because that's what they're familiar with, that's what they expect leaders to look like. The policy doesn't require discrimination, but it also doesn't prevent it (Provincial Education Officer 2, Northern Province).

Document analysis of Ministry guidelines confirmed this ambiguity, revealing no provisions addressing language specialisation equity in leadership appointments. This policy gap creates space for what Johnson (2018) terms "policy arbiters", individual administrators whose interpretations and discretionary decisions effectively determine policy outcomes regardless of official commitments to multilingualism.

Mechanism 3: Conflation of English Proficiency with Leadership Capacity

Administrative assumptions conflated English proficiency with leadership capacity, with 78.9% of interviewed head teachers and DEBS officials citing English language skills as essential for departmental management. This conflation persisted despite indigenous language specialists' demonstrated English competence through university education conducted predominantly in the English medium and daily teaching practice. One indigenous language teacher described the frustration of this assumption:

They look at my qualifications: Bachelor of Arts with Education, major in Ibibemba, and they assume my English is weak, that I won't be able to communicate professionally, and that I won't be able to handle administrative documents. But my degree required the same English proficiency as any other student. I passed the same English language examinations. I write reports in English every term. The assumption that indigenous language specialisation means poor English is just prejudice dressed up as a practical concern (Indigenous Language Teacher 8, Mpulungu District).

This finding reveals a fundamental contradiction: indigenous language teachers must demonstrate English competence to obtain their qualifications and maintain their teaching positions, yet this demonstrated competence is rendered invisible when leadership appointments are considered, replaced by assumptions linking language specialisation to language ability.

Mechanism 4: Limited Professional Networks and Development Opportunities

Limited professional networks and development opportunities restricted indigenous language teachers' career advancement. English language teachers benefited from robust professional associations (English Language Teachers' Association of Zambia), frequent workshops sponsored by British Council and US Embassy programmes, and stronger connections to Ministry curriculum developers, accumulating social capital facilitating promotion to leadership positions. Survey data revealed that English teachers attended an average of 3.7 professional development events annually compared to 1.2 events for indigenous language specialists ($t = 6.84$, $df = 102$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.34$, indicating a large effect size). An indigenous language teacher explained:

The workshops are almost always for English teachers. British Council brings programmes, the US Embassy has resources, and publishers want to promote their English textbooks. When was the last time anyone organised a professional development workshop for Ibibemba teachers? We work in isolation, developing our own materials, solving our own problems. Meanwhile, English teachers build relationships with Ministry officials, with curriculum developers, with people who make decisions about promotions and appointments. By the time an HOD position opens, the English teachers already have connections, they already know the right people, they're already seen as part of the professional community. (Indigenous Language Teacher 15, Kasama District)

This mechanism illustrates Cooper's (1989) observation that language hierarchies are reproduced through differential access to professional networks and resources, not merely through explicit policy provisions. Indigenous language specialists work in relative isolation with minimal institutional support, accumulating neither the social capital nor the visibility necessary for career advancement, while English teachers benefit from a robust professional infrastructure developed through colonial and postcolonial investment in English language education.

Resource Allocation Disparities

Data revealed measurable consequences of English language monopoly in resource allocation patterns, favouring English programmes over indigenous language instruction. Survey results indicated that English departments received on average 73.4% of language department budgets ($SD = 12.7\%$) despite serving 48.2% of enrolled students ($SD = 8.3\%$), while Ibibemba, Mambwe, and other indigenous language programmes shared remaining resources despite serving 51.8% of students ($t = 8.92$, $df = 43$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.76$, indicating large effect size). These disparities persisted across all resource categories:

Table 1: Resource Allocation by Language Programme (Mean Percentages)

Resource Category	English Programmes	Indigenous Programmes	Difference	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Budget allocation	73.4%	26.6%	46.8%	8.92	<.001	1.76
Textbook provision	68.7%	31.3%	37.4%	7.43	<.001	1.52
Teaching materials	71.2%	28.8%	42.4%	8.21	<.001	1.68
Technology access	76.8%	23.2%	53.6%	9.34	<.001	1.91
Professional development	78.3%	21.7%	56.6%	9.87	<.001	2.03

Document analysis of departmental reports confirmed disparities in textbook provision, with English programmes receiving new Ministry-approved texts annually while indigenous language classes relied on outdated materials (average age 8.3 years) or teacher-created resources. One Icibemba teacher described:

I requested basic dictionaries for my classroom last year, just five copies, so students could look up words when we read Icibemba texts. The HOD told me the budget had been allocated to English literature texts and couldn't be reallocated. Meanwhile, the English department has a classroom set of 40 new dictionaries, plus computers with internet access, plus a collection of novels for their literature programme. My students share photocopied materials that are falling apart, and I spend my own money buying supplies for my classes (Indigenous Language Teacher 4, Mungwi District).

Technology access showed similar patterns, with English departments prioritised for computer labs and digital resources while indigenous language programmes lacked basic audio-visual equipment for pronunciation instruction. These disparities directly resulted from HOD decision-making authority concentrated in English language specialists' hands, confirming that leadership monopoly translates into systematic programme inequality (Chisimba, 2020; Mwila, 2021).

Impact on Teacher Morale and Professional Identity

Interview data documented profound impacts of exclusion on indigenous language teachers' professional morale and career satisfaction. Teachers consistently reported experiencing their expertise as devalued, with 86.5% of indigenous language specialist respondents expressing dissatisfaction with career advancement opportunities compared to 31.2% of English teachers ($\chi^2 = 34.87$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .53$). Multiple participants described feelings that their university qualifications counted less than English major holders' credentials despite equivalent educational requirements and training rigour. A Mambwe teacher with 17 years' experience expressed frustration:

I have been teaching for 17 years. I have a Master's degree in African Languages from the University of Zambia. I have developed curriculum materials for the Ministry, trained new teachers, and served on examination panels. But when the HOD position opened at my school, they appointed an English teacher with five

years' experience and no graduate degree. They said she had "leadership potential" and "strong communication skills." What they meant was she had the right qualification, English, and I had the wrong one, Mambwe. After 17 years, my expertise counts for nothing because I chose to specialise in my mother tongue (Indigenous Language Teacher 11, Kaputa District).

Several teachers questioned their career choices, wondering whether specialising in African languages had been a mistake given the limited advancement prospects. A young Icibemba teacher with four years' experience reflected:

Sometimes I think I should have majored in English. I love teaching Icibemba—it's my language, my culture, my identity. But when I look at my friends who majored in English, they're getting promoted, they're attending workshops, and they are being noticed by administrators. I'm doing the same work, working just as hard, but I'm invisible. If I could go back to university, would I choose Icibemba again? I don't know. I really don't know (Indigenous Language Teacher 2, Chilubi District).

This demoralisation extended beyond individual careers to broader questions of cultural worth, with teachers noting that institutional practices sent messages to students and communities that indigenous languages and cultures lack value compared to English. One experienced teacher articulated this concern:

The students see who becomes HOD. They see that English teachers get promoted, get resources, and get respect. They see that Icibemba teachers stay in the classroom year after year with no advancement. What message does that send about the value of our language? We tell students to be proud of Icibemba, to value their cultural heritage, but the school system shows them every day that English is what matters, English is what leads to success. Our words can't compete with that institutional message (Indigenous Language Teacher 9, Luwingu District).

Some participants reported considering leaving teaching entirely or seeking transfers to urban schools where English instruction predominates, representing a significant loss of indigenous language teaching capacity in communities where these languages serve as primary communication media. These findings illuminate the human costs of linguistic imperialism in educational institutions, where colonial hierarchies continue damaging teachers' professional identities and undermining programme sustainability decades

after political independence (Phillipson, 2017; Tollefson, 2013).

Contradiction with Multilingual Policies

Data revealed fundamental contradictions between Zambia's constitutional commitment to multilingualism and institutional practices perpetuating English dominance in educational leadership. The 2016 Constitution recognises indigenous languages alongside English (Article 276), while the 2013 Education Curriculum Framework promotes bilingual education and indigenous language instruction (Ministry of General Education, 2013). However, administrative practices systematically privilege English language expertise for departmental leadership, effectively positioning English as the only language whose specialists merit management authority. A Curriculum Development Centre representative acknowledged:

There is definitely a contradiction between what our policies say and what happens in schools. The curriculum framework emphasises that all languages have equal value and that indigenous languages should be strengthened through the education system. But when it comes to leadership positions, we haven't thought about how to implement that principle. The assumption has always been that HODs should be English specialists because English is the medium of administration, the language of examinations, and the language of official communication. We haven't questioned whether that assumption might conflict with our commitment to multilingualism (Curriculum Development Centre Official, Lusaka).

The Provincial Education Officer acknowledged this contradiction during interviews, with one official noting:

The disconnect is obvious when you think about it. Ministry policies promote indigenous language instruction, encourage teachers to specialise in Zambian languages, and tell communities that their languages matter. But then those same teachers, with their specialised qualifications, hit a glass ceiling when it comes to leadership. They can teach indigenous languages, but they can't lead language departments because leadership requires English. It's like we're saying indigenous languages are good enough for students but not good enough for the people who make decisions about education (Provincial Education Officer 3, Northern Province).

This gap between policy rhetoric and implementation reality reflects broader challenges in African postcolonial states where formal commitments to linguistic pluralism coexist with inherited colonial administrative structures favouring European languages (Linehan, 2016; Spolsky, 2018). The findings suggest that achieving genuine linguistic equity requires not merely policy proclamations but systematic reforms dismantling institutional mechanisms that reproduce

colonial hierarchies through seemingly neutral administrative decisions about qualifications and leadership capacity.

Limitations of the Study

This study, while providing robust evidence of English language monopoly in educational leadership, has several limitations that warrant consideration when interpreting findings and planning future research.

The first limitation was the geographic scope: The research focused exclusively on Northern Province, Zambia's second-largest province by area, but not necessarily representative of the nation's diverse linguistic and educational contexts. Northern Province's linguistic landscape, dominated by Ibibemba with smaller populations of Mambwe, Namwanga, and Lungu speakers, differs significantly from provinces with different linguistic compositions, such as Western Province (sil.ozzi dominant), Eastern Province (ciNyanja dominant), or Lusaka Province (linguistically diverse urban context). Findings may not generalise to provinces with different colonial histories, missionary influences, or contemporary language policies. Future research should extend this investigation to other Zambian provinces to establish whether Northern Province represents a localised phenomenon or a nationwide pattern of English language monopoly in educational leadership.

The second limitation was sampling considerations. Purposive sampling, while appropriate for accessing participants with specific knowledge and experience, limits statistical generalisability to the broader population of language teachers and administrators. The sample may overrepresent teachers with strong opinions about language policy (both supportive and critical) while underrepresenting those with more neutral perspectives. Additionally, the exclusion of teachers with less than two years' experience may have excluded newer teachers whose perspectives on language hierarchies might differ from those of more experienced colleagues. Future research employing stratified random sampling across multiple provinces would enable more confident generalisation of findings.

The third limitation was self-report data. Survey and interview data rely on participant self-reports, introducing potential social desirability bias, particularly regarding sensitive topics such as discrimination and institutional exclusion. Head teachers and education officials may have underreported discriminatory attitudes or overreported commitment to equitable practices. However, triangulation with document analysis and resource allocation records partially mitigates this concern, as documented disparities in appointments and funding provide objective evidence complementing self-reported experiences.

The fourth limitation was the cross-sectional design. The cross-sectional design captures language monopoly patterns at a single point in time, limiting the ability to establish

causal relationships or track changes over time. While the study identifies associations between language specialisation and leadership appointment, it cannot definitively establish that an English qualification causes appointment to HOD positions, as unmeasured variables (e.g., teacher performance ratings, seniority, personal connections) may influence both qualification choice and promotion outcomes. Longitudinal research tracking teacher cohorts over time would enable stronger causal inferences about language specialisation and career advancement.

The fifth limitation was language and interpretation. Interviews were conducted primarily in English, which may have constrained expression for participants whose strongest language is Ibibemba or another indigenous language. While all participants were proficient English speakers (required for teaching qualifications), the nuanced expression of complex experiences and emotions may have been limited by working in a second language. Future research employing indigenous language interviews with translation and back-translation would enable richer data collection from participants more comfortable expressing themselves in their mother tongues.

The sixth limitation is document access. Document analysis was limited by incomplete archival records in some schools, particularly rural schools with less developed administrative systems. Some appointment documentation had been lost or destroyed, and resource allocation records were inconsistently maintained, limiting the comprehensiveness of documentary evidence. Future research should establish document preservation protocols before data collection and triangulate with multiple sources where records are incomplete.

Despite these limitations, the study provides compelling evidence of systematic exclusion of indigenous language specialists from educational leadership, with implications for policy reform, teacher professional development, and linguistic equity in Zambian education. The triangulation of multiple data sources, rigorous analytical procedures, and attention to trustworthiness enhance confidence in findings while acknowledging the need for continued research across diverse contexts.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that English language monopoly in Head of Department positions systematically excludes indigenous language specialists from educational leadership across Northern Province secondary schools, perpetuating colonial hierarchies despite Zambia's constitutional commitment to multilingualism. Findings reveal four interconnected mechanisms driving this exclusion: perceived superior prestige of English language qualifications (cited by 87.3% of head teachers), policy ambiguity enabling discriminatory administrative practices, conflation of English proficiency with leadership capacity despite indigenous language specialists' demonstrated English competence, and limited access to professional networks facilitating career

advancement for indigenous language teachers. These patterns produce measurable consequences for indigenous language programmes through significant resource allocation disparities favouring English instruction (73.4% of budgets for 48.2% of students), undermined teacher morale and professional identity (86.5% of indigenous language teachers dissatisfied with advancement opportunities), constrained development of culturally responsive pedagogies, and fundamental contradictions between multilingual policy commitments and exclusionary institutional practices.

The research underscores that achieving genuine linguistic equity requires comprehensive reforms at multiple institutional levels, moving beyond policy rhetoric to dismantle structural mechanisms that reproduce colonial hierarchies through seemingly neutral administrative decisions about qualifications and leadership capacity. As one indigenous language teacher poignantly observed, "They tell us our languages matter, but they show us every day that only English leads to leadership. The message is clear: we can teach our languages, but we cannot lead." This contradiction between policy commitment and institutional practice must be addressed through systematic reform if Zambia is to realise its constitutional vision of multilingual equity in education.

Based on study findings and the theoretical framework, the following recommendations address multiple institutional levels to promote equitable representation of indigenous language specialists in educational leadership:

1. Policy-Level Recommendations

- **Develop Explicit Appointment Criteria:** The Ministry of Education should develop and mandate explicit HOD appointment criteria requiring equitable consideration of all language specialists, regardless of their major or specialisation. These criteria should specify that indigenous language qualifications are equivalent to English credentials for leadership purposes, moving beyond generic qualification requirements to directly address language specialisation equity. Criteria should be disseminated to all head teachers, District Education Board Secretaries, and Provincial Education Officers with accompanying implementation guidelines.
- **Establish Minimum Representation Quotas:** The Ministry should establish minimum quotas ensuring indigenous language specialists achieve fair representation in departmental leadership proportionate to their presence in the teacher workforce. Given that indigenous language specialists constitute 43.8% of language teachers in Northern Province, a minimum quota of 40% indigenous language HODs would disrupt entrenched patterns favouring English major holders while maintaining flexibility for local contexts. Quotas should be phased

in over three years with clear accountability mechanisms.

- **Revise Teacher Education and Certification Requirements:** The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Teaching Council of Zambia and university education faculties, should revise teacher education curricula to emphasise the equal value of all language specialisations for professional advancement. Certification requirements should explicitly recognise indigenous language expertise as qualifying for leadership positions, and teacher education programmes should include modules on language policy equity and indigenous language programme leadership.
- **Create Incentive Structures for Equitable Appointment:** The Ministry should establish incentive structures rewarding schools and districts that achieve equitable representation of indigenous language specialists in leadership positions. Incentives could include preferential access to special funding, public recognition through awards, and positive performance evaluations for head teachers and district officials demonstrating commitment to linguistic equity.

2. Administrative and Implementation Recommendations

- **Implement Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms:** Provincial and District Education Offices should implement systematic monitoring mechanisms tracking language department leadership demographics, resource allocation patterns, and appointment procedures. Quarterly reports should document progress toward equitable representation, with identified disparities addressed through targeted interventions and accountability measures for administrators whose appointment decisions perpetuate exclusion.
- **Develop Targeted Leadership Development Programmes:** The Ministry, in partnership with universities and teacher professional associations, should develop targeted leadership development programmes specifically for indigenous language teachers. These programmes should build administrative capacity, provide mentoring from experienced leaders, create professional networks among indigenous language specialists, and challenge internalised hierarchies, questioning their management capabilities. Programmes should be delivered in both English and indigenous languages to model multilingual leadership.
- **Establish Professional Associations for Indigenous Language Teachers:** The Ministry should support the establishment and strengthening of professional associations for indigenous language teachers (Icibemba Teachers' Association, Mambwe Teachers' Association, etc.) to provide professional development, networking opportunities, and collective

advocacy. These associations should receive equivalent funding and institutional support to the English Language Teachers' Association of Zambia.

- **Review and Revise Resource Allocation Procedures:** District Education Offices should review resource allocation procedures to ensure equitable distribution of budgets, textbooks, technology, and professional development opportunities across language programmes. Clear allocation criteria should be developed, transparently applied, and regularly audited to prevent HOD-level discretion from perpetuating English programme advantage.

3. Research and Development Recommendations

- **Conduct Nationwide Language Leadership Audit:** The Ministry of Education should commission a nationwide audit of language department leadership demographics across all Zambian provinces to establish baseline data on indigenous language specialist representation in educational leadership. This audit should inform national policy development and enable targeting of provinces with the most severe exclusion patterns.
- **Fund Longitudinal Research on Policy Interventions:** The Ministry, in partnership with Zambian universities and international research partners, should fund longitudinal research tracking the impacts of policy interventions designed to promote equitable representation. Research should examine whether explicit equity mandates, quota systems, and leadership development programmes successfully diversify educational leadership and document consequences for indigenous language programme quality, teacher retention, and student learning outcomes.
- **Support Comparative African Research:** The Ministry should support comparative African research investigating successful models of equitable or shared leadership in multilingual departments from countries like Tanzania (Kiswahili-medium secondary education), Senegal (bilingual education programmes), or South Africa (eleven official languages framework). Identifying transferable practices from comparable African contexts would inform Zambian reforms while contributing to broader continental conversations about decolonising educational institutions and achieving linguistic justice.

4. Professional Development and Awareness Recommendations

- **Conduct Awareness Programmes for Educational Administrators:** The Ministry should develop and deliver awareness programmes for head teachers, district officials, and provincial officers addressing unconscious bias in appointment decisions, the equal value of indigenous language qualifications, and the

institutional harm caused by the English language monopoly. Programmes should include practical guidance on equitable appointment procedures and opportunities for administrators to examine their own assumptions about language, leadership, and professional competence.

- Integrate Language Equity into Leadership Training: All leadership training programmes for current and aspiring educational administrators should integrate content on language policy equity, multilingual leadership, and strategies for supporting indigenous language programmes. Training should challenge assumptions conflating English proficiency with leadership capacity and provide models for effective departmental leadership by indigenous language specialists.
- Promote Multilingual Leadership Models: Schools should be encouraged to develop multilingual leadership models where language departments are led by teams representing diverse language specialisations or where HOD positions rotate among language specialists. Such models would demonstrate institutional commitment to linguistic equity while providing indigenous language teachers with leadership experience and professional visibility.

These recommendations, if implemented systematically across policy, administrative, research, and professional development domains, would begin dismantling the structural mechanisms perpetuating English language monopoly in educational leadership. As Zambia pursues its constitutional vision of multilingual equity, ensuring that indigenous language specialists can lead language departments is not merely a matter of professional fairness but a fundamental requirement for genuinely decolonised education that values all languages represented in the nation's diverse linguistic landscape.

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