

Navigating Linguistic Diversity: Evaluating Foreign Language Acquisition Constraints and Enhancement Strategies in Zimbabwe's Government Schools

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Abstract

This study examines the limitations and opportunities associated with foreign language acquisition in Zimbabwe's government schools. Despite the government's efforts to integrate foreign languages into school curricula, uptake remains low. The study explores how these limitations, compounded by policy challenges, hinder effective foreign language education, and considers the implications for educational outcomes. Data were collected from key stakeholders, including learners, teachers, school heads, educational inspectors, officials from cultural institutions, and curriculum development specialists. Adopting a predominantly qualitative research design, supported by selected quantitative components, the study provides an in-depth analysis of linguistic diversity, educational resources, and policy frameworks in the Zimbabwean context. Based on findings, the research proposes contextually grounded, evidence-based recommendations, conceptualised as practical solutions and innovative strategies, aimed at enhancing the uptake and teaching of foreign languages in government schools. These solutions and strategies include measures to strengthen teacher capacity, improve resource

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provision, align policy with classroom realities, and foster community engagement. Collectively, these seek to improve learner acquisition and proficiency, and advance Zimbabwe's linguistic competitiveness in a global context.

Keywords: acquisition; global context; linguistic diversity; resource constraints, local context, policy

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Colonialism profoundly shaped Africa's linguistic landscape, with English, French, and Portuguese established as languages of instruction in many countries (Wolff, 2019). In recent decades, however, other global languages such as Arabic and Mandarin have challenged this dominance (Al Hosani, 2022). Today, Africa stands at a crossroads, balancing its colonial linguistic legacy with globalisation, identity politics, and educational reforms. Consequently, many African nations, including Zimbabwe, are revitalising indigenous languages while promoting the learning of foreign languages (FLs) (Akinkurolere and Seru, 2023).

Before independence, Zimbabwe's education system was racially segregated, featuring two distinct curricula, one for White learners and another for Black students (Zvobgo, 1981). The pre-independence curriculum was largely content-based, emphasising rote knowledge rather than practical applications. Foreign language education (FLE) was reserved for White schools, where French, Afrikaans, German, and Portuguese were taught. To address systemic inequities, the Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry (1999) was set up by President Robert Mugabe, to reform the education system, which was criticised for failing to meet the country's industrial and developmental needs. The Commission recommended broad modernisation of the curriculum to promote technological, practical, and

inclusive education; foundations that later informed the integration of FLs.

The 2015-2022 Curriculum Framework (CF), implemented in 2017, extended this vision by including strategic FLs such as Afrikaans, German, Kiswahili, Latin, French, Spanish, and Portuguese (Ndlovu, 2018). These reforms aimed to build linguistic and intercultural competencies essential for regional integration, diplomacy, and global competitiveness. Proficiency in FLs has been recognised as an economic asset; Di Paolo and Tansel (2013) found positive labour market returns to language proficiency in Turkey, while Nakagawa *et al.* (2022) links linguistic proximity to major world languages with higher national gross domestic product (GDP). As Bamgbose (1991) observed, language is a powerful societal resource whose potential must be fully realised. In an era where skills and productivity define national development (Onwudiwe and Ugochukwu, 2015), linguistic capacity, especially in FLs, enhances access to global knowledge, innovation, and trade.

Despite these progressive intentions, FL teaching worldwide continues to face challenges of effective delivery and sustainability (Group of Eight, 2007; Clyne, 2008; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013; Slaughter and Hajek, 2015; Clayton, 2017; Rubino and Hajek, 2024). In Zimbabwe, the limited uptake of FLs in government schools remains a concern. Previous studies have concentrated on policy reviews, languages of instruction, and institutional challenges, but few have examined the underlying reasons for poor adoption or proposed practical solutions. While much scholarship highlights the value of FLs languages in business and trade (Ku and Zussmann, 2010; Fidrmuc, 2012; Muchenje *et al.*, 2013; Slaughter and Hajek, 2015; Kubota, 2016; Clayton, 2017;), there is a notable gap regarding the barriers to implementing FLE in public schools and how these can be addressed.

Although new pedagogical approaches, such as technology integration and context-based learning, have been adopted globally, progress within Zimbabwe remains limited. Institutions responsible for implementation have struggled to provide sustainable solutions (Matsvange *et al.*, 2016). Studies from multilingual contexts like South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria reveal similar implementation challenges, yet few have analysed Zimbabwe's specific situation at the government school level. This study, therefore, investigates the constraints affecting foreign language acquisition (FLA) in Zimbabwe's government schools and proposes enhancement strategies to improve FLE implementation.

The study not only extends theoretical understanding of FLE, but also contributes to evidence-based policymaking. It pursues three objectives: (1) to determine the extent of FL teaching and learning in schools; (2) to examine factors influencing implementation or non-implementation of FLE; and (3) to propose strategies to enhance effective FLE in public schools. Through these aims, the study seeks to strengthen Zimbabwe's efforts to cultivate globally competent learners for an interconnected world.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Effective implementation of FLE is best understood through complementary theoretical perspectives. Three main frameworks inform this study: Top-down and Bottom-up policy implementation models, and the Language Policy and Planning (LPP) theory. Top-down implementation emphasises centralised decision-making and structured guidance from policymakers (Buzogány and Pülzl, 2024). This approach assumes hierarchical compliance and measures success by adherence to policy objectives (Sørensen and Torfing, 2021). In Zimbabwe, the introduction of FLs through the 2015-2022 CF and training initiatives such as Confucius Institutes exemplify this model.

However, it has limitations in that excessive centralisation often overlooks teachers' realities and contextual barriers (Ndamba, 2013; Harris, 2023). Empirical studies show that teachers frequently lack support to interpret and operationalise language policy (Nkomo, 2008; Ndamba, 2010). Over-reliance on bureaucratic monitoring equally hinders innovation (Madsen *et al.*, 2022; Khan, 2022).

Bottom-up models view implementers, teachers, school heads, and local administrators, as active agents shaping policy outcomes (Tummers, 2022). Implementation, therefore, is an evolving process of negotiation and adaptation to local conditions (Hill, 2021). In Zimbabwe, school-level actors interpret and adjust policy directives according to resource availability, learner needs, and contextual realities. Recognising their agency is crucial for sustainable reform.

The LPP Theory (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997; Johnson, 2013) complements these approaches by addressing sociolinguistic and ideological aspects of FLE. It distinguishes among status planning (language roles), corpus planning (development of linguistic resources), and acquisition planning (promotion of learning). In Zimbabwe, while FLs are recognised in policy, weak acquisition planning, manifested in shortages of teaching materials and qualified staff, undermines implementation. English and indigenous languages dominate linguistic hierarchies, marginalising FLs. Aligning language policy with community values, teacher agency, and learner motivation is, therefore, essential to make FL policies relevant and sustainable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Implementing FLE in national curricula is a multifaceted process influenced by learner characteristics, contextual conditions, and policy dynamics. This conceptual framework discusses the core concepts of 'foreign language', 'curriculum',

and 'implementation' that underpin FLE. The term 'foreign language' differs from 'second language' primarily in its usage within the learner's environment. A FL is generally learned through formal instruction in settings where it is not used for daily communication, unlike a second language, such as English in Zimbabwe (Zhou and Chen, 2023). Stein-Smith (2021) defines a foreign language as one not commonly spoken in the learner's country and typically acquired through formal learning. The distinction is important because FL learners lack immersion opportunities, making motivation and exposure central to success.

The 'curriculum' in FLE extends beyond a syllabus to represent a structured plan for developing competencies and worldviews. Wiggins (2020) and Tomlinson (2022) describe it as a coherent design of learning experiences, goals, and assessments, while Marsh (2021) sees it as an environment shaping educational outcomes. Su (2012) adds that curriculum design should align pedagogy, content, and policy intent. Accordingly, an effective FL curriculum must integrate linguistic content with broader educational goals (Sibanda, 2023). 'Implementation' refers to translating policy into practice. It involves factors such as clarity of policy, stakeholder commitment, and availability of resources (Hill and Hupe, 2014; Herweg *et al.*, 2018; Fowler, 2019). Ambiguous policies can lead to inconsistent application (Matambo and Chabata, 2023). Successful implementation requires collaboration among educators, policymakers, and communities (Chisango and Ndlovu, 2022).

The success of FLE depends on a complex interaction of internal and external factors. Internally, learner characteristics such as motivation, aptitude, and personality shape outcomes (Dörnyei, 2020). Externally, socioeconomic background, teacher support, access to resources, and cultural exposure play major roles (Larsen-Freeman, 2022; Gass and Selinker, 2021; Le,

2022). Motivation remains a key determinant in FL learning. It influences initiation, persistence, and intensity of engagement (Kusumaningrum, 2019; Sari, 2019). Bandura (2020) defines motivation as a cognitive evaluation of goals and self-efficacy. Ryan and Deci (2017) distinguish between intrinsic motivation, driven by interest and enjoyment, and extrinsic motivation, driven by rewards or career prospects. Intrinsic motivation promotes deeper learning (Mercer and Ryan, 2019; Liu and Zhang, 2020), yet in Zimbabwean schools, it is weakened by outdated materials, underqualified teachers, and limited exposure to authentic language experiences. Extrinsic motivation is also weak because FLs are not tied to tangible benefits such as job opportunities or examination outcomes.

Instrumental motivation, linked to practical goals like exams or employment (Nanda *et al.*, 2019; Siahaan *et al.*, 2022), tends to dominate in low-income settings where education is viewed as utilitarian. However, the perceived benefits of FLE remain abstract. Integrative motivation, driven by the desire to connect with the target culture (Masgoret and Gardner, 2019; Wigfield and Ecclestone, 2020) is often minimal due to limited intercultural exposure. Consequently, motivation for FLE in Zimbabwean government schools remains fragile. Personality traits also influence learning outcomes. Extroverts generally engage more confidently in communication, while introverts may prefer reflective learning styles (Radic and Bojanic, 2020; Robinson *et al.*, 2020). The effect, however, is indirect and mediated by instructional context (Dewaele, 2019; Oxford, 2020). Zimbabwe's large class sizes and teacher-centred methods often disadvantage introverted learners. The Critical Period Hypothesis (Lennenberg, 1967) suggests that early exposure leads to better linguistic outcomes (Munoz and Spada, 2019). While desirable, early FLE implementation in Zimbabwe faces constraints due to teacher shortages and resource limitations.

Overall, research underscores that FLE implementation is shaped by multiple interacting dimensions, policy clarity, institutional capacity, socio-economic context, and learner variables. The theoretical frameworks outlined above provide a foundation for interpreting how these factors intersect in Zimbabwe's efforts to integrate FLs into its education system.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a predominantly qualitative research design to gain in-depth insights into the constraints affecting FLA in Zimbabwe's government schools. To complement and contextualise the qualitative findings, a limited quantitative component is employed. This involved the collection and analysis of numerical data on teachers' qualifications, instructional hours allocated to FL teaching, and average class sizes. The mixed method approach strengthened the validity of the findings. The study collected data from key stakeholders, who included learners, teachers, school heads, educational inspectors, cultural institutions' officials, educational inspectors and curriculum development officials. The study employed a purposive sampling with a comparative or maximum variation design. Purposive sampling selected schools that offer FLE to gain rich, relevant insights on the phenomenon under study. A small number of schools that do not offer FLE were included to capture contrasting perspectives and understand the factors influencing non-adoption. This comparative purposive sampling balanced the data and minimised bias. This allowed for a comparative analysis of the factors that support or hinder adoption of FLE in different school contexts. This approach ensured that the sample reflected a broad range of experiences relevant to the study's objectives.

The study employed semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to trace the evolution of FL education policy and to evaluate the coherence between policy intentions and classroom implementation. Semi-structured

interviews were conducted with learners, teachers, school administrators, and curriculum officers to capture individual experiences and perceptions on FLA. Focus group discussions were held with groups of teachers to facilitate collaborative reflection and to explore shared experiences and strategies within school contexts. Additionally, document analysis was conducted on policy documents, curriculum frameworks, school timetables, and language department records, to triangulate data and provide contextual evidence on how foreign language education is structured and implemented. The use of multiple instruments enhanced the credibility and depth of the findings.

Data collection was carried out following ethical clearance and formal permissions. An introductory letter from the university and a standard consent form were used to seek informed participation from respondents. All participants voluntarily consented to take part in the study, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, as well as the relevant district education offices in the selected study areas.

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret qualitative data gathered from interviews, focus group discussions, and relevant educational documents. The collected data were first transcribed and then systematically coded. After coding, the information was organised into themes that corresponded with the research objectives. This process helped identify key patterns, recurring issues, and emerging strategies based on participants' responses.

FINDINGS AND CONSTRAINTS TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Having outlined the research methods above, this section presents an in-depth analysis of the findings, which reveal key

constraints impacting FLE and FLA in Zimbabwe’s government schools. Five central themes were identified.

While FLs are included in Zimbabwe’s national CF, policies remain broad and lack clear operational guidelines. Participants, including teachers and school administrators, reported inconsistent interpretations of FL policy, resulting in ad hoc implementation. For example, although French and Portuguese are officially recommended, few schools actually offer them due to unclear directives on teacher recruitment, materials provision, and expected student outcomes. According to the Zimbabwe language education policy, FLs are allocated only four periods per week, compared to six for English, Ndebele, and Shona (Ndlovu, 2018). As Bamgbose (1991) asserts, the number of periods allocated to a subject reflects its importance and value in the curriculum. Consequently, learners perceive FLs as secondary, leading to negative attitudes that affect motivation and policy implementation (Wang and Fang, 2020).

The lack of political will to prioritise and adequately finance FLE is a significant constraint. Although continental fora have emphasised multilingualism, implementation has been limited. Ademowo (2014) critiques the gap between rhetorical commitments and actionable outcomes, noting that many African states participate in ‘talk-shops’ without translating ideas into progress. In Zimbabwe, for instance, the Nziramasanga Commission’s findings in 1999 led to a revised curriculum only rolled out in 2017. The delay was not due to insufficient resources but to inadequate political will. This lack of commitment is closely tied to the broader resource constraints discussed in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Resource constraints were the most frequently cited barrier to successful FLE implementation. Respondents highlighted a severe shortage of qualified FL teachers, particularly in rural

areas where schools often rely on untrained volunteers. Even in urban centres, a small number of teachers are responsible for large classes, resulting in compromised instruction and demotivated learners. Richards *et al.* (2013) and Murphy (2024) emphasise that teacher language proficiency directly impacts instructional quality. Beyond staffing shortages, the absence of teaching materials such as textbooks, audio-visual aids, and digital resources, renders FLE highly theoretical. Chinakidzwa and Ndamba (2024) further note that lack of access to modern digital tools affects the interactivity and appeal of lessons.

While private schools often have access to online resources and can register students for international examinations such as the *Diplôme d'Études en Langue Française* (DELFL), government schools are disadvantaged. This disparity reinforces systemic inequalities in language learning opportunities. Many research participants pointed to a bloated curriculum that prioritises examinable subjects, like English, Mathematics, and Sciences, over FLs. These are frequently sidelined due to limited timetable slots. In high-density suburbs, where schools operate double sessions, scheduling additional subjects such as French or Portuguese is practically impossible. This logistical constraint restricts the continuity and depth of language instruction, frustrating both teachers and learners. Without protected time slots and integration into the core curriculum, FLs remain peripheral.

Urban schools are far more likely to offer FLs, benefitting from better infrastructure, qualified personnel, and supportive governance. In contrast, rural schools struggle with fundamental challenges: lack of electricity, absence of ICT infrastructure, and limited exposure to foreign cultures. This urban-rural divide perpetuates educational inequalities, undermining the national goal of inclusive education and limiting students' global competitiveness.

DISCUSSION

The results align with global patterns observed in under-resourced educational systems, where FLE is often deprioritised in favour of core subjects or due to logistical constraints (Lanvers *et al.*, 2021; OECD, 2022). In Zimbabwe, the findings reveal a persistent disjunction between national policy ambitions and their actual implementation; a manifestation of the top-down approach characteristic of language policy and planning (LPP) in many African contexts (Bamgbose, 2011; Heugh, 2013). While policy formulation has been centrally driven, school-level implementers remain marginal in decision-making, limiting ownership and contextual adaptation. This reflects a divide between macro-level policy design and micro-level practice, a central concern in implementation theory. The ambiguity surrounding the FL policy exemplifies this top-down weakness. Without clear directives, schools interpret policy inconsistently, undermining planning and continuity in instruction. Unlike Finland and Singapore, which have implemented coherent, compulsory, and well-resourced language policies from early education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019), Zimbabwe's approach lacks enforceability and feedback mechanisms from schools and teachers. From an LPP perspective, this illustrates the absence of effective bottom-up participation, where local educators and communities could provide contextual insights to shape policy adaptation. Similarly, Rwanda's successful shift to English as a medium of instruction demonstrates how strong government investment in teacher training and materials, coupled with stakeholder involvement, can enable sustainable policy operationalisation (Mouboua *et al.*, 2024).

Resource constraints further reinforce the top-down imbalance. Although the state articulates ambitious linguistic goals, the implementation level is undermined by shortages of qualified teachers and teaching materials. This aligns with findings from

South African and Nigerian contexts, where teacher training deficits and weak digital infrastructure hinder language instruction (; Chinakidzwa and Ndamba, 2024; Maja *et al.*, 2024). According to the LPP Theory, policy success depends not only on formulation, but also on capacity-building and local agency. Zimbabwe's experience highlights that unless teachers are empowered as agents of implementation, through adequate training, resources, and incentives, FLE will remain aspirational rather than achievable.

The issue of overloaded curricula and double-shift schooling further reflects institutional rigidity and the hierarchical nature of decision-making. The curriculum structure leaves little room for the integration of new subjects including FLs, and schools have minimal autonomy to innovate. Without structural reform and bottom-up flexibility, FLE will remain marginalised. International best practices suggest that language immersion and cross-curricular integration, when developed collaboratively with educators, can enhance linguistic competence and relevance (Warschauer and Kern, 2016).

Ultimately, the constraints affecting FLA in Zimbabwe's public schools underscore the limitations of a top-down policy process that prioritises symbolic inclusion of FLs without a corresponding operational framework. An integrated, multi-faceted, and stakeholder-driven approach is needed, one that aligns policy intent with classroom realities through mutual feedback loops. Stronger political will, resource mobilisation, and capacity-building must be complemented by mechanisms for local participation, teacher empowerment, and sustained evaluation. This integrative approach would help reconcile the theoretical tension between policy formulation and practice, thereby translating Zimbabwe's linguistic aspirations into tangible outcomes.

The preceding discussion highlights that Zimbabwe's challenges in implementing FLE stem less from policy absence than from the disengagement between formulation and execution; a tension central to both top-down and bottom-up implementation theory and Language Policy and Planning (LPP) frameworks. To bridge this gap, strategies must move beyond diagnosing systemic weaknesses toward operationalising practical, context-sensitive solutions that empower actors across all levels of the education system. The following section accordingly proposes innovative and theoretically grounded approaches designed to realign national language policy with classroom realities, ensuring that FLA becomes attainable, equitable, and sustainable within Zimbabwe's educational context. To improve FLA in Zimbabwe's government schools, a multifaceted and theory-informed approach is required, one that balances top-down policy guidance with bottom-up participation and contextual adaptation. Such a model should address policy clarity, teacher development, technology integration, collaboration, and partnerships in a coherent framework of LLP.

A fundamental shift in language policy is needed, prioritising early and continuous exposure to FLs, ideally beginning in early primary education in line with global best practices. From an LPP perspective, policy clarity and continuity are critical for effective implementation. Zimbabwe's current ambiguity reflects a largely top-down process, where schools and teachers have limited input in defining realistic goals.

A restructured policy should, therefore, combine central coordination with school-level agency, ensuring both national coherence and local relevance. FLs should be integrated as core subjects, not optional add-ons, to ensure continuity across grades. Drawing lessons from international models such as Singapore's compulsory bilingualism and Finland's learner-

centred approach supported by strong teacher education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019), Zimbabwe can adapt strategies aligned with its social and economic goals. South Korea's strategic investment in English education demonstrates how clear policy linked to national development vision can yield measurable progress. Similarly, Zimbabwe can align FLE with Vision 2030, leveraging linguistic competence for regional diplomacy, trade, and cultural exchange. To translate top-down policy into classroom practice, clear implementation standards, defined instructional time, and monitoring frameworks are essential. Equally important is bottom-up participation, through teacher consultation, pilot programmes, and regular curriculum reviews, ensuring that policy evolves with classroom realities. Incentives such as language innovation grants or proficiency bonuses could motivate schools and teachers.

Teacher capacity forms the bridge between policy intent and classroom enactment, the critical implementation layer in LPP. An urgent overhaul of both pre-service and in-service teacher preparation is necessary to foster professional competence and agency. While Zimbabwe's pre-service training is relatively strong, continuous, specialised training for FL educators in multilingual and resource-poor contexts remains limited.

Partnerships with universities and international organisations can support the development of language-specific teacher education programmes and modular certification schemes for in-service teachers. Establishing national FL teaching standards with measurable proficiency levels will promote professional consistency and accountability.

Professional development should be ongoing and classroom-anchored through mentoring, peer coaching, and periodic refresher workshops. To bridge the rural-urban gap, mixed-

mode learning (combining face-to-face, mobile, and online training) should be adopted, supported by digital infrastructure. Innovative, low-cost strategies such as Language Assistant Programmes (co-teaching with native speakers), Teach-the-Teacher Initiatives (training multipliers), and Teacher Resource Packs (self-study bilingual guides), can enhance teacher confidence and methodological diversity.

Encouraging bottom-up innovation through teacher-led research, language teaching festivals, and community radio initiatives, will foster ownership and local adaptation, crucial for sustainable policy implementation.

Technology provides opportunities to democratise FL learning and reduce disparities, but effective use requires alignment with both LPP and socio-economic contexts. The government should adopt a hybrid model where national authorities set digital education standards (top-down), while schools and teachers customise content (bottom-up) to fit learner realities.

Developing open-access, mobile-friendly, and culturally contextualised tools will expand learning opportunities. Offline-capable resources such as interactive storybooks, audio modules, and gamified vocabulary trainers are vital for low-bandwidth regions. Collaboration with global language platforms (e.g., Duolingo, Babbel) can formalise digital learning pathways through government accreditation.

Equitable access must remain central. Investment in solar-powered digital kits, mobile learning labs, and community information centres (CICs) can mitigate infrastructure deficits. Such centres have already been established across the country. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) with telecom providers could lower data costs, while local content creation involving teachers, learners, and linguists will ensure cultural authenticity. In this

way, digital innovation becomes not merely a technological upgrade, but also a participatory process of curriculum localisation consistent with LPP principles.

Collaborative professional cultures represent a bottom-up mechanism for sustaining language policy implementation in resource-constrained systems. Zimbabwe should encourage grassroots, teacher-led models of collaboration that enhance both competence and morale.

'Inter-school Foreign Language Teaching Circles (FLTCs)' can facilitate joint lesson design, material development, and peer reflection. 'Peer Mentorship Programmes' can pair experienced and novice teachers, while digital platforms like WhatsApp or Telegram can support remote collaboration and idea sharing.

Regional professional development retreats and joint materials creation projects can help teachers co-produce context-relevant resources. Institutionalising such collaboration within school timetables, and recognising it formally, will strengthen teachers' collective agency. Training school heads and district supervisors to facilitate collaborative environments is equally essential, reflecting a shared-responsibility model consistent with the bottom-up dimension of LPP.

Sustainable improvement in FLE requires multi-actor collaboration bridging public and private efforts. From an LPP perspective, these partnerships function as an intermediate implementation mechanism, enabling resource mobilisation and innovation while maintaining national policy alignment.

Three partnership models are particularly relevant:

Adopt-a-School Initiatives: Encourage private organisations and diaspora communities to support schools through a transparent central registry linking corporate social

responsibility (CSR) funds to identified needs. Recognition incentives can strengthen engagement and accountability.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Structured PPPs can enhance infrastructure, teacher training, and digital resource development. A clear legal framework for education PPPs, particularly those targeting language education, should define roles, funding mechanisms, and performance-based evaluation.

Educational Foundations: These entities can combine philanthropy with systemic reform by funding pilot programmes, digital content, or in-service training. Alignment with national ministry priorities and independent evaluations will ensure sustainability and transparency.

When designed through participatory planning and mutual accountability, such partnerships transform the traditionally top-down model of policy delivery into a networked ecosystem of implementation, bridging government vision and classroom practice.

Grounded in both top-down and bottom-up implementation theory and LPP frameworks, these innovative approaches collectively argue that sustainable FLE reform in Zimbabwe hinges on policy coherence, participatory implementation, and capacity empowerment. By embedding flexibility, accountability, and collaboration across all levels: — from national leadership to classroom practice, Zimbabwe can align its linguistic goals with educational realities, turning FLE into a practical and transformative component of its national development agenda.

Collectively, the proposed innovative approaches illustrate how theory and practice can converge to reshape Zimbabwe’s FLE landscape. By embedding policy clarity, teacher empowerment, technological innovation, collaboration, and strategic partnerships within a participatory LPP framework, Zimbabwe can transform FLE from a peripheral aspiration into a practical developmental

asset. The next section concludes the study by synthesising key insights from the findings and discussion, reaffirming how an integrated implementation model, balancing top-down policy intent with bottom-up agency, can effectively align national language goals with school-level realities.

CONCLUSIONS

Foreign language acquisition in Zimbabwe's government schools is hampered by a convergence of policy, infrastructural, and human capacity challenges. Despite the integration of FLs into the national curriculum, ambiguous policies, lack of enforcement, and resource gaps have rendered the initiative largely symbolic. The urban-rural divide in access, combined with overloaded timetables and under-trained teachers, has widened disparities in language learning opportunities. International experiences underscore the importance of early introduction, compulsory frameworks, and teacher capacity development in enhancing FLA. This study underscores the need for Zimbabwe to reframe its language education strategy with a stronger focus on implementation. This involves revising and clarifying foreign language policy, investing in teacher training and development, and fostering partnerships with private and international stakeholders to bridge infrastructure gaps. Blended and digital learning can offer scalable solutions, but must be accompanied by equitable access initiatives. Ultimately, a comprehensive and inclusive approach is essential for Zimbabwe to prepare its youth for meaningful participation in the global linguistic and economic landscape.

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