

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **ENGLISH: ATTITUDINAL DIMENSIONS, HISTORY AND ROLE IN THE ZIMBABWEAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter recognizes, describes and documents the important and critical role played by the English language in terms of achievement and learning within Zimbabwe's educational system. As far as this study is concerned the English language is recognized as one of the key means whereby the relationship of the selected affective factors (self-concept of academic ability, attitudes of students and student perceptions of teachers), to achievement and learning, are gauged.

English as a means of communication and as a prominent school subject seems to play an important role in Zimbabwean public life. Having adopted the language during the colonial era and having seen it supplant the local languages in both the educational system and trade and commerce over a period of time, the indigenous population has arguably accepted its normative conditions (Pape 1998).

One of the prime motivations for this study is to ascertain the attitudes school students have towards the English language and whether these attitudes influence their achievement in English. Do school students feel positive about the English Language? Does it still have the kudos of the past? Do school students feel that it ought to be the medium of instruction in schools? Do they think that the English language is harmful or detrimental to the indigenous cultures of Zimbabwe? Do students feel that the acquisition of the language influences their personal outlook on life? These important questions have intrigued researchers (Hofman 1977) and (Pape 1998) and constitute the basis of the chapter's attempt to investigate the attitude students have towards English and the relationship these attitudes have towards their achievement in English at the form four level.

In order to ensure that the English language, as used within Zimbabwe, is historically located, this chapter not only traces the historical roots of the English language (outside the context of Zimbabwe), but it also discusses how the English language became rooted in Zimbabwe. Furthermore the chapter discusses the way in which the English language has become the predominant vehicle of expression within the world of education, trade and commerce (in Zimbabwe).

As a language English is widely used in Zimbabwe. Within Zimbabwe's educational system it is used as a means of instruction and communication at primary school, high school and at university level.

This chapter attempts to place its continued use in Zimbabwe in an historical context by examining its origins, its use as a medium of instruction, the attitudes towards the language and why it is perceived as a language of universal appeal and import.

## **2.2 ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN ZIMBABWE**

Attitudes towards the English language in the broader Zimbabwean society have not been adequately documented, although attitudes towards the language were surveyed by Hofman (1977), in his seminal study of university and college students. Since the English language has official status historically and contemporaneously in Zimbabwe, we may conjecture by inference, its importance, and factually, that it is used as the lingua franca in education, business, financial, commercial/industrial circles and to an extent as the language of social intercourse, within the country. Although negative connotations induced by its colonial heritage are sometimes apparent in contemporary Zimbabwe, it was nevertheless adopted as one of its official languages at independence in 1980. Thus attitudes towards the language were informed by the past and instructed by its universal value and appeal.

According to Mary Gordon of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (H.M.I.) (Gordon 1961), who undertook a study on the use of English under the auspices of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland: -

**“English occupies a unique position in the educational system as a lingua franca for use not only between Africans of various tribes but also between Africans and Europeans.”**  
(Gordon 1961: 6).

More specifically Gordon (1961), saw English as a way of equipping indigenous students with useful and practical English in terms of being able to utilize the language for communicative purposes and in addition to have access to a broad range of texts. According to Gordon (1961), the attitudes of students towards the language included a perception of its utility value. We must however place her views in an historical context; the report was written in the 1960's. Little heed was then taken of her report especially in terms of action by the government of the day. Education was segregated, in a de facto manner, with the barely trained teaching the untrained as far as the indigenous people were concerned. Retrospectively and with hindsight, her views are appealing and had they been implemented, her suggestions may have resulted in a radical re-appraisal of the educational system as it then stood.

Murphree, Cheater, Dorsey & Mthobi (1975) seemed to agree with Gordon's sentiments. They suggested that in order to take up employment in socially divisive Rhodesia, English was used as a criterion in the selection of potential employees. For example, one company quoted in Murphree et al (1975), required that for 'Europeans' wanting clerical and supervisory positions only the ability to read and write was a pre-requisite, whilst for 'Africans' they usually required a senior certificate with good passes.

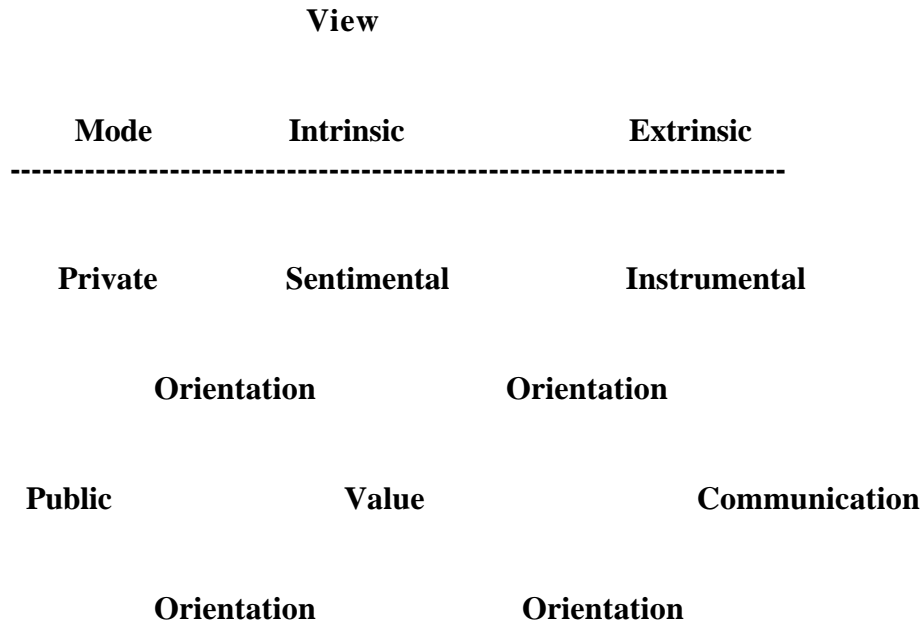
Thus attitudes towards the English language were arguably cemented in the psyches of the indigenous population who were striving to meet the criteria necessary to qualify for a decent job in pre and post independent Zimbabwe. The English language was often considered to be the gateway to success and people were only too keen to learn it (Mwenzivavanhu 1982). The indigenous population certainly within the urban areas of Zimbabwe felt that a good grasp of the English language was almost an obvious necessity and not an issue of debate in pre-independent Zimbabwe.

Attitudes towards the English language in Zimbabwe become more focused when one considers a number of factors. For example, in pre-independent Zimbabwe the factors which informed, shaped and influenced perceptions of the language, included the need to have a good grasp of English in order to secure a job. The English language was also needed in order to access a broader spectrum of communicative tools especially as far as interacting with the dominant groups in the society, were concerned (Hofman 1977 :292). These factors have remained largely unchanged in present day Zimbabwe and studies (Maposa 1992), continue to emphasize the critical importance of the English language in the national life of Zimbabwe.

Hofman's study (1977:278) also refers to an important dimension of attitude when he says that attitudes are elusive dispositions which are rarely well constructed until one is forced by circumstance, to verbalize them. In other words, attitudes become meaningful when one is confronted with a set of circumstances which warrant a stance of some sort. Justifiably perhaps one may therefore argue that 'attitudes' towards the English language remain unproblematic until questions are asked. In fact Hofman found this to be the case in his respondents who were college and university students. They found it difficult to think about their attitudes to the English language as well as to their indigenous languages since they accepted them as just 'being there.'

Hofman (1977), also suggests that people do have strong attitudes about and towards language. He speculates that attitudes towards language go beyond just language considerations and into other areas such as attitudes towards cultures and people. He cites a Shona farmer who feels that 'educated' people show disrespect towards their ancestral spirits by their use of English at home. This point has arisen in post-independent Zimbabwe where the issue of 'English dominance and hegemony' has surfaced in the corridors of universities.

Broadly speaking language attitudes according to Hofman (1977), see figure 2.1, may be categorized in order to arrive at a way of measuring them. He uses the terms 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' as names for extremes of the attitudes towards the language continuum.

**Figure 2.1 Dimensions of attitude**

Source: (Hofman 1977: 279)

More specifically figure 2.1 shows the dimensions of attitudes towards language. A first and basic dimension varies between an intrinsic and extrinsic pole depending on whether a person views language as an object of value in and of itself or as useful for the attainment of ends beyond itself. A second dimension, as shown in figure 2.1, moves between a private and a public mode according to its context of relevance. Figure 2.1 also shows how an intrinsic view takes the form of sentimentalism when it has to do with the private enjoyment of the language; it then becomes a value when the language appears to represent interpersonal or public symbols. An extrinsic view on the other hand, according to Hofman, figure 2.1, becomes instrumentalism in the private mode and communication in the public one, depending on whether a language is considered in terms of private or public advantages, respectively. The two dimensions, as shown in figure 2.1, roughly

define four language attitude types that is, a sentimental orientation, a value orientation (intrinsic), an instrumental orientation and a communication orientation (extrinsic).

The findings of Hofman's (1977) study revealed that English is the language of wider communication and a key to upward mobility in Rhodesia. In relation to figure 2.1 he sees the English language (in Rhodesia) as a useful tool (extrinsic) but also valued and enjoyed by native speakers (intrinsic). Hofman's work is important as far as this study is concerned since it provides a theoretical and contextual base for affirming the importance of attitudes (towards English) in terms of education and progress within (Rhodesian) Zimbabwean society.

Hofman's views, of the English language, although of the past, are supported by the work of Lemmer (1996:17). She objectively surveys the nature of the foothold English has in the post-colonial world with particular reference to Zimbabwe. She says that English was regarded as a 'key resource' in terms of its advocacy by British post-war interests, as well as by leaders in Africa, especially as far as the modernization of Africa was concerned. She says that there are three main reasons for this phenomenon. These are: -

- the use of English as a lingua franca
- the use of English as a route to technical knowledge
- the use of English as a means of contact with world thought.

She also makes the point that English, although often surrounded by controversy, has survived in Africa, not only because of its entrenched position and status, but also because of the apathy encompassing its potential replacement. Often, according to Lemmer, few countries have the necessary 'funds or the time to replace English.' (Lemmer 1996:17). One also has to take cognizance of the limited budgetary resources an undeveloped country has available to enable it to embark on a programme which deems to replace an entrenched system of language use.

Many countries (in Africa) instead, have recognized the utility value of the English language, especially as far as being part of the wider world and the global village phenomenon, is concerned.

In Zimbabwe's case the English language has been retained for the purposes of national unity, as a means of international communication and as a means of instruction within the country's educational system (Lemmer 1996:17).

In terms of national unity, many governments prefer to continue to use the English language as an official means of communication in order to minimize the potential of inter-ethnic conflict and tension. English was and is seen as a less disturbing linguistic intrusion in terms of the above.

As far as international communication is concerned, Pan –African movements such as the former Organization of African Unity (now called the African Union), and world organizations such as the United Nations Organization, use English as one of their main tools of communication. Understandably the use of English by these organisations and others of a similar nature, arguably raise the status of the English language and helps to maintain its prominent place within the society's educational system (Schmied 1991).

Studies by Beveridge and Johnson (1991), Lemmer (1996) and Ashcroft (2001) confirm that historical and contemporaneous factors have led to the prominence of the English language in the erstwhile colonies in general and in Zimbabwe in particular.

It would seem therefore that attitudes towards the English language in Zimbabwe have been influenced and manipulated by a number of extraneous factors which have in turn impacted, not only on the attitudes of individuals towards the language, but also their lives. Instead of the English language offering a means to societal fulfilment, it may be argued that for many, it has instead, more often than not, contributed negatively towards those goals. It did this by restricting those without an adequate grasp of the language, to menial occupations. It may further be argued that the utility value of English has been over emphasized at the expense of the language being seen as an access point to greater and more diversified discourse. Thus reading for pleasure in Zimbabwe is something which, apparently, is deemed of little value and consequence, whilst the reading of textbooks is considered worthwhile. Therefore the question of access (to the English

language), and the need to expose students to the diversity of the language, are important considerations in this study.

Hofman's work has intimated that the views and opinions of people are important in formulating language policy and that they ought to be taken into account both in a political/social sense as well as in the educational setting of the classroom where funds on the one hand and training on the other, may impact.

An examination of the above factors should help to demystify a language which has arguably been subsumed in the psyche of the nation as a measure of self-worth rather than as a communicative and developmental tool. Therefore, competence in English becomes a key factor in terms of how we assess and evaluate ourselves and how others assess and evaluate us.

## **2.3 THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

The brief history of the English language below, places the language's appeal in an historical context. This is seen as important in terms of this study since the English language tends to be used as means of attributing worth and status in societies (in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular), through their educational systems.

That the English language became the dominant language within British colonies during the colonial era is irrefutable, and that it has largely, in the post –independence era, retained its status in many of the erstwhile colonies (in Africa), is also arguably the case. Therefore it may be of some importance to delineate why, and perhaps how, this language, spoken by an obscure Germanic tribe, came to achieve its current linguistic prominence.

### **2.3.2 History of the English language**

McCrum, Cran and McNeil (1992) and Millward (1989), provide succinct accounts of the



history of the English language. McCrum et al (1992), suggest that: -

**“The making of English is the story of three invasions and a cultural revolution. In the simplest terms, the language was brought to Britain by Germanic tribes, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, influenced by Latin and Greek when St. Augustine and his followers converted England to Christianity, subtly enriched by the Danes, and finally transformed by the French-speaking Normans.”** (McCrum, Cran & McNeil 1992: 33).

Therefore the language known as English today, has its origins in an amalgam of linguistic influences dating back to its Indo-European origins in 3000BC. In fact languages of a similar type were spoken over wide geographical areas from Ireland to the West, to India in the East. The cause of this spread is of interest and suggests that one cannot escape the notion that humanity and its languages spread through practices that may be deemed violent and barbaric such as territorial wars, incursions and usurpation (McCrum, Cran et al 1992). As suggested by McCrum et al it is important to remember that the English language, from its earliest beginnings, was eclectic and flexible and this is still largely the case today. The importance of this notion cannot be underestimated since English is a language of many nations and not only of one, England.

Interestingly, McCrum et al (1992) suggest that the actual branch of the Indo-European languages to which English belongs is Germanic in origin; hence the similarities between German, Dutch, Frisian, Danish and Norwegian. These languages are descended from one source; a dialect of Indo-European called Proto-Germanic.

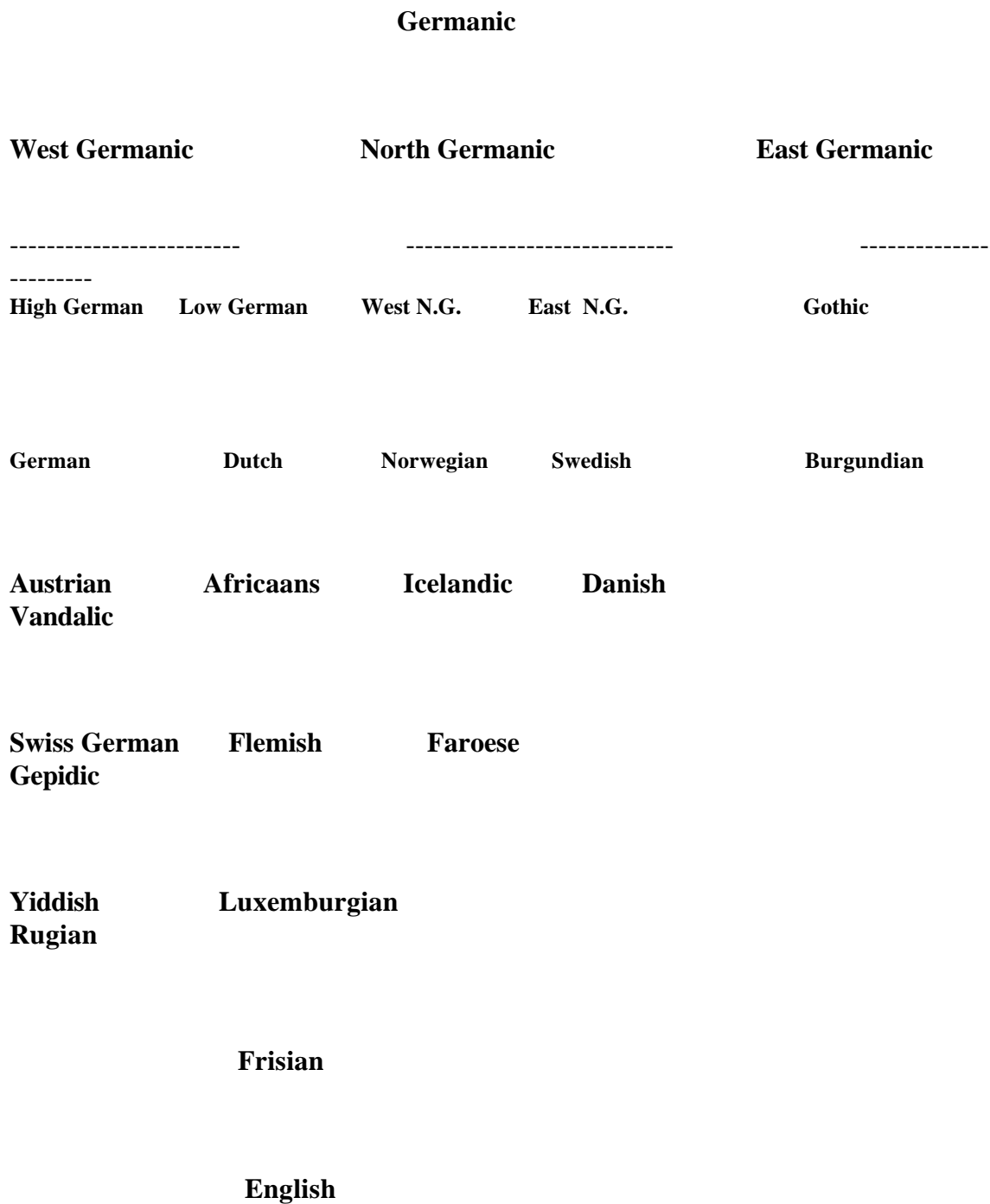
According to Millward (1989), at about the beginning of the Christian era, the speakers of the Pro-Germanic language still formed a relatively homogenous cultural and linguistic group, living in the north of Europe.

**“Up to about the beginning of the Christian era, Germanic was probably one language with only minor dialectal differences. However as groups migrated into various parts of Europe and became separated, dialectal differences developed rapidly.”** (Millward 1989:51).

No records exist of the language of this period, but something is known of those who spoke it. They were described by Roman authors, who referred to them as Germani (Germans). Tacitus (in Millward 1989), describes them as a tribal society living in scattered settlements in the woody and marsh-ridden country of north-west Europe. Interestingly enough, Tacitus made reference to the Germani' when he said that the Germans hated peace and thought that it is only in war that renown and plunder can be won. Thus it is insinuated by Tacitus that language spreads via aggression, war and plunder and thereafter this dominance is reinforced through linguistic omniscience. This point is certainly supported by others (Lemmer 1996), when, in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, England usurped territories around the world.

Figure 2.2 helps to explain the origin of the English language from around 370 AD.

**Figure 2.2 Derivation of the English Language**



Source : Millward (1988: 52)

Figure 2.2 shows the derivation of the English language and the various influences that came to bear in its formation.

The English language is therefore a language which has spread far beyond its roots and historical formation. Its eclectic nature and flexibility enabled it to absorb the linguistic and even cultural nuances of other tongues. Later when it became established as a world language and certainly by the onset of the colonial era, its influence as a language entity, encompassing a culture, became more apparent in third world countries such as Zimbabwe.

Certainly the linguistic proliferation of Germanic peoples coupled with their apparent aggressive nature ensured the spread of English dialects through Europe. The demise of the Roman Empire during the first century AD ensured the increased linguistic influence of the Germanic tribes and thus the derivatives of these dialects, for example Frisian (see figure 2.2), became more widely spoken and eventually the language most closely related to English. This dialect was spoken along the North Sea from northern Holland through Germany to Denmark. From these areas by the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD the three Germanic tribes the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes migrated to the British Isles with their language.

Millward (1988) catalogues what happens thereafter and says that these tribes did not appear as a unified conquering entity, but instead as bands of adventures who did not establish their dominance over the Roman-Celts and others, until the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Over this period of time the English Language itself mutated and changed. These changes included the way in which England was divided in and around 700AD between the Saxon, Jute and Angle tribes. When these tribes eventually unified, Christianity was to play its part in terms of the introduction of writing by clerics. Later, the invasions by the Norsemen and Normans were to have a marked influence on the English language.

According to McCrum et al (1992), the Danes, from around 797, had conquered a large part of England. As a consequence many, of their words were integrated into the developing English language. Notwithstanding this influence, the Norman Conquest of in 1066 resulted in French being adopted as the language of the aristocracy while Latin

was adopted as the main language of writing. Those of the 'lower orders' still spoke English during this time. French remained in use for some three hundred years until it was gradually replaced by English after the middle of the 13th century. The kind of English which emerged was greatly influenced by the French and contained a large number of French words and expressions. This influence is aptly demonstrated in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer who wrote 'The Canterbury Tales' and who died in 1300.

Millward suggests that the 'effects of printing were manifold' (Millward 1988:194) and that the introduction of the first printing press in England by William Caxton in 1476, heralded a paradigmatic change in terms of the spread of the language through literary texts. Printing became the catalyst for the major upheavals of the 16th century which, in turn, were linked to the Renaissance and the reformation. About this time scholars began to use English instead of Latin for writing purposes. Thus, English became suffused with Latin words and, at the same time, a more standardized version of English began to emerge. There were three important influences in this process; Chaucer, mentioned above; the flourishing output of literature, most influentially that of Shakespeare (1563 – 1616), and the Authorized Version of the Bible which was published in 1611.

Stevens (1985), has a slightly different view in terms of the historical growth of the English language. He sees it having come into existence as a distinct language not in remote Anglo-Saxon times but around the year 1362 when the vernacular language of England replaced French as the language of the courts. He further argues that the language has emerged as we know it today through five phases of development. They are:-

- Phase 1 Foundation and Consolidation 1350 – 1600. During this period English became generally dominant and a standard form evolved with the arrival of the printing press and the spread of education.
- Phase 2 The Adventurers 1600 – 1800. During this period English speaking natives of the British Isles explored and settled in remote parts of the world and established

colonies. The native English was added to as was the case in England where it was transformed by borrowings from Latin, French and Greek amongst others.

- Phase 3 The Independent Colonies 1790 – 1914. This period began with the breaking away of the 13 colonies in America and includes the increasing independence of for example Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Thus English began to change through this process and it caused English to become different from the language spoken in Britain.
- Phase 4 Colonial subjects 1900 – 1950. This period saw English deliberately taught, especially from 1925 onward, to colonial peoples through the English medium education systems in Africa and other parts of the world. This period also saw millions of new users of English as a second language.
- Phase 5 Cultural Independence 1950 – present. In previous phases English had been transported as a culturally nativist linguistic activity and by phase four this idea had been cemented through paternalistic education systems espousing British and American cultural and social norms. Examples may be found in English textbooks as recently as the 1970's. However increasingly and certainly in the 21st Century, the English language as used in many former colonies remains in those countries for the purpose of national unity and international communication.

Stevens suggests, arguably, that the origin of the English language is of less importance than the notion of 'ownership' of the language by those who now use it as a means of communicating with the rest of the world. So in terms of this study the English language ought not to be viewed as an alienating force or indeed as an alien imposition, but rather as a means of cohesion and getting on in the world.

In terms of a standard form of the language Stevens (1985) confirms the linguists view that there are many different 'Englishes' in the world but these different versions of the language importantly retain their underlying unity. They do so, according to Stevens,

through the mechanism of a single, non-localised dialect, Standard English, which all educated English users, without external imposed authority, maintain virtually free from variation world-wide. Therefore given the unity which shared grammar and core vocabulary produce, the diversity of English may be exercised through a free choice of accent, and the use of local ‘embellishments.’ This standard form of the English language according to Millward (1988), may be traced back to the time of Chaucer, but for a long time thereafter there were variations in grammatical use. After the Restoration (of Charles 1) in 1660, there was considerable interest in establishing a Standard form of English, and in 1712 Jonathan Swift (in Millward 1988) proposed the setting up of an Academy to do this. However, scholars were the most enterprising in terms of standardizing spelling and fixing the meanings of words. Several grammars were produced and among the most influential was Lowth’s grammar of 1762 (in Millward 1988). From this time onwards, there was an increased interest in fixing a standard of English pronunciation. This resulted in a tradition of dictionaries such as Walker’s which advised on pronunciation.

The 20th century saw the advent of a standard way of pronunciation initiated by the seminal work of Daniel Jones’s “Received Pronunciation” (in McCrum et al 1992) where Jones’ schemata was subsequently adopted by the BBC in the 1920’s. Subsequent to this BBC English as it became known, became the demonstrable standard of the spoken word.

This brief history of the English language demonstrates how languages are far from static entities. Their natures suggest that they are eclectic and subject to changes initiated by population movements, war, territorial incursions and become an adopted medium of expression (in a particular country), sometimes largely by default rather than from some grand design. History reveals that the language of the conqueror reigns supreme and that local populations and cultures are affected whether they like it or not.

### **2.3.3 The history and development of the English language in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular**

The study of English began its life as a privileged academic subject in Britain during the

1920's. It had established itself as a key academic subject when it was included in the syllabuses of both Oxford and Cambridge University following the Newbolt Report. The classics until then had been considered as the intellectual driving force of academia and the sciences (then,) as emerging disciplines. The inclusion of English was therefore seen as replacing the Classics which at that time was the epicentre of 19th century intellectual enterprise. Political and cultural considerations need to be taken into account when examining the emergence of English as a discipline firstly in universities and then generally in schools. Viswanathan (1987) affirmed the relationship between English as an academic discipline and the 19<sup>th</sup> century form of colonial imperialism: -

**“British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of liberal education.”** (Viswanathan 1987: 17).

Although his assertions are in the context of India, they apply equally to Africa. In fact, it may be argued that the study of English and the growth of the Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of one is inextricably bound to the other (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989). Examples, according to Ashcroft et al (1989), include the unconsciousness naturalizing of constructed values like civilization and humanity (positive constructions) and their antithesis, savagery, both native and primitive.

These assertions ought to be recognized as the root causes of at least some of the antipathetical views towards English and are certainly supported by Strevens (1985).

It may be further argued that English Studies served as the template for the denial of the literatures and bodies of knowledge outside these spheres. Here the rich tradition of Indian literature and the culturally important oracy of the African continent became sidelined.



Thus the colonized were left with few choices in terms of the dominating character of English and impact in literary and other circles. This view is corroborated by Chung and Ngara (1985), where they suggest: -

**“Colonialism had very powerful organs at its disposal to project its own culture. These included the school system, the stage, the screen, the church and the English language.”** (Chung and Ngara 1985 : 74).

It would be difficult to argue against the view propounded by Chung and Ngara (1985) that the English language arguably became a vehicle of suppression which in turn created a literate elite whose prime means of identification was with the colonizing power. As a result, whether the indigenous population liked it or not, they seemed to become entirely enamoured with the conditions in which the language was taught and used.

One of the main features of the imperialistic era was control over language. This system installed a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and tended to marginalize all ‘variants’. Importantly, language became the means whereby a hierarchical power structure was validated and maintained and where conceptions such as ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality,’ were interpreted according to the values of the dominant power.

The interpretation of imperialistic history above, with reference to the English language, seems to suggest a rational and deliberate attempt to ‘control’ the colonized through language. We believe the imposition of the English language happened by degrees and came about as a result of territorial gain and incursion but the results of these incursions speak for themselves and the legacy of divisiveness persists. However rationalists seem to agree that many countries also benefited, certainly as far as the English language is concerned, since they now have access to the world and its knowledge manufacturing industry.

Although British expansion and colonization resulted in the spread of the English language worldwide, the language itself became adept at adapting itself to the ‘new’

conditions it met. Millward (1988: 297) speaks of distinctive forms of the English language; this is evidenced by the variety of distinctive forms the language has adopted in the Caribbean, Canada and African countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe.

However, the 'standard' metropolitan form still tends to take precedence. It may therefore be argued, that the English language assumed primacy in pre-independent Zimbabwe as a tool for ensuring the legitimacy of the ruling elite.

Certainly, English has become so deep-rooted in Zimbabwe (Lemmer 1996:17), that its proficiency for example is a requirement for acceptance into both the police and the armed forces. Such policies, certainly in the case of Zimbabwe, seemed to have resulted in the maintenance of a pre-independence infra-structure within the educational system. This in turn has created elites, who still manage and largely control the country's civil and economic life, and who therefore ensure that the retention of English remains unproblematic. In fact, English is still regarded as the primary linguistic resource, as opposed to the indigenous languages which have become arguably marginalized.

After independence however, the language remained as the teaching medium in the nations schools and as one of the country's official languages. There were a number of reasons for this. These include: -

- the need to maintain stability and continuity in terms of the nations infra-structure
- the importance of English as the language of international discourse
- the expectations of the population
- Zimbabwe's historic ties with Britain.

#### **2.3.4 Concluding remarks**

In conclusion it may be argued that the English language, although imposed by the colonial powers on African nations such as Zimbabwe, becomes, in the post-colonial era, not only established and legitimized through societal institutions like the school, but also manages to retain its status among individuals as a language of social import. Therefore the English language remains pivotal in contemporary Zimbabwe as a means, quite often, of gauging merit and self-worth.

## **2.4 THE ROLE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE WITHIN THE ZIMBABWEAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND BEYOND**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

The Zimbabwean educational system was inherited from the colonial experience under the British. The 'imposed' system meant in effect that the medium of instruction became the English language and that English also became a key curricula offering in Zimbabwe.

There were few post-independence changes in the Zimbabwean educational system and as a result, the English language largely retained its status as a key curricula subject where it is offered as a compulsory discipline in both the primary and secondary areas of the education system.

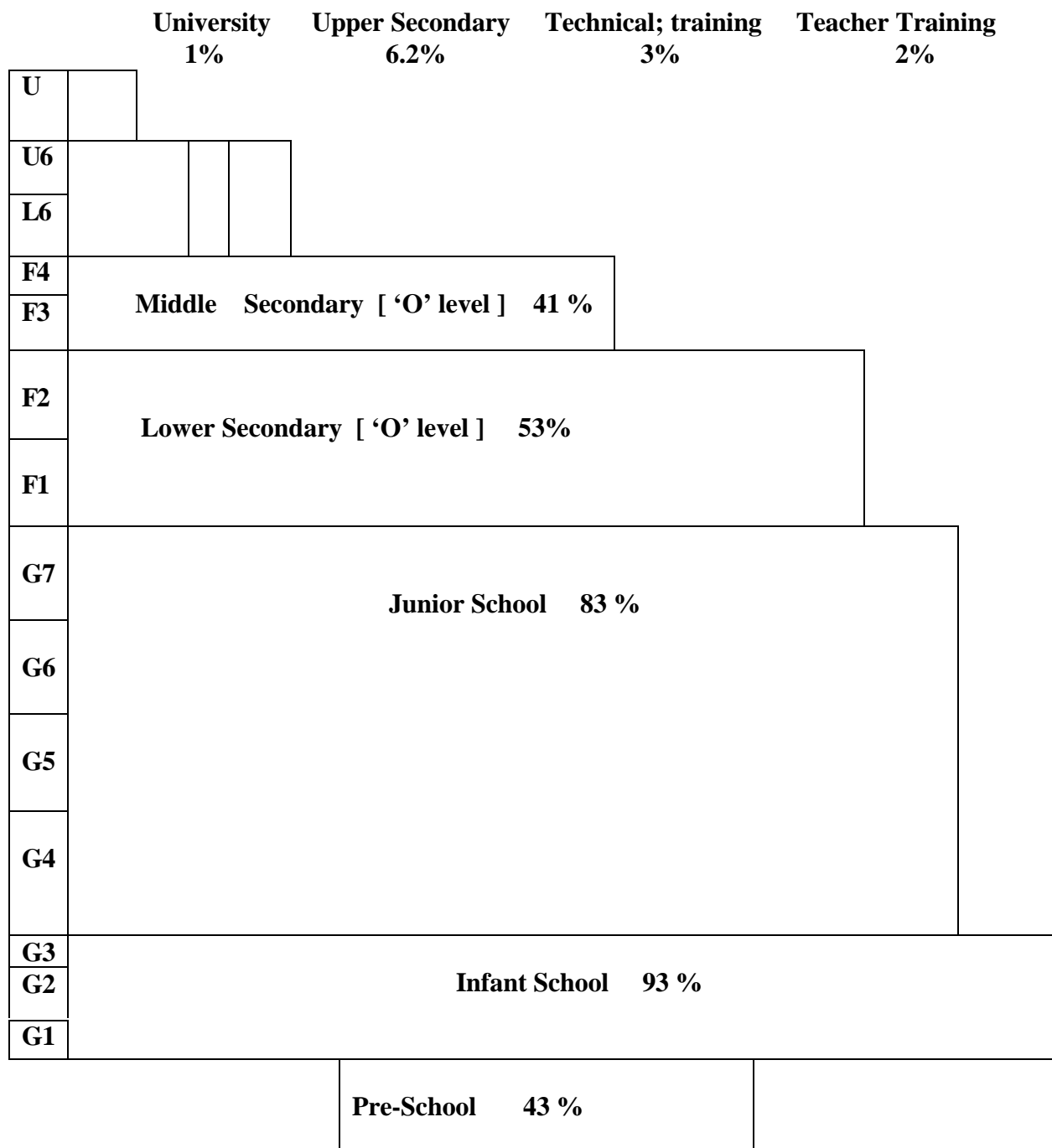
### **2.4.2 The Zimbabwean education system**

Lemmer (1996) makes several observations regarding Zimbabwe's education system prior to independence in 1980. She points out that during the ninety years of colonization, a de facto segregated education system was established and the education of the indigenous people, where it existed, was largely in private (often church hands). This situation then changed dramatically following independence. Since 1980 the Government has established a unitary system of education from the former two sub-systems. However, the education system according to Lemmer (1996:440), remains divided but on a rural/urban basis instead.

Lemmer (1996) further suggests that education policy following independence intended to unify the diverse socio-cultural elements and form a national identity. The new system necessitated the change to compulsory primary schooling from the age of seven. Thereafter, secondary schooling is available for either four or six years. Most students terminate their studies after form four, since sixth form acceptance is based on performance in what is called ordinary level examinations ('O' level). These in the past were conceived, validated, monitored and marked by the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate. From the early 1990's however Zimbabwe gradually replaced Cambridge in a phased takeover of the examination system. In a phased manner and over a 10 year period

the Cambridge examinations were localised. Currently (2003) the examination system is entirely managed by the Zimbabwe Examination Council (Zimsec). Gatawa (in Lemmer 1997), graphically demonstrates the Zimbabwean education system in figure 2.3.

**Figure 2.3 Zimbabwe: structure of the formal education system**



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**100 percent of Age Group**

Source: Lemmer (1997: 441)

The skewed nature of the educational system in Zimbabwe prior to independence is revealed by the following statistics presented in Presidential Commission of Enquiry Report of 1998. For example, of the 5371 white children who started school in 1968 at the age of six, 5181 reached form four in 1978, a dropout rate of only 5%. This dropout rate was largely attributed to emigration. In sharp contrast 75% of the indigenous population was enrolled in primary schools at the age of seven in 1968. Of these 35 % dropped out. Thus only 31 % of this population group completed primary school. Of these 19 % went on to secondary school i.e. 7 % of the age group. Of these, again, 32 % dropped out of secondary school, leaving 3 % to reach sixth form.

Notwithstanding the above, the Mission and Church regulated schools played an important role in the education of indigenous people prior to independence. However, for the settler population, which the government of the day largely served, education by the 1930's was both free and compulsory. Thus those of the general indigenous population fated to do well (despite the hurdles and because of their resilience), entered a system heavily weighted against their success.

### **2.4.3 The role of English within the Zimbabwean school system**

English was introduced as the official language of Zimbabwe in 1890 following its occupation by the British South Africa company. At independence this status as one of the official languages of Zimbabwe, was largely retained (Lemmer 1996). The other official languages are Shona and Ndebele which are spoken as a first language by over 90% of the population (Maposa 1992). English, however became the medium of instruction throughout Zimbabwe's educational system in all schools with the exception the junior primary phase between grades 1 and 3. The language also retained its dominant position in most domains of national activity including government, business, administration and the law courts (Maposa 1992).

In addition English is used widely in the following domains in Zimbabwe: -

- International and inter-cultural communication
- National and regional official activities
- Science and technology
- The media

It was felt as far back as the 1930's that the teaching of English was a form of imposition when A.E Walden (in Chitsike 1987) said:-

**“ ....great attention is being paid to the teaching of English but I fear there is danger in creating an English educated class which is out of touch with its own native life and customs.”**  
(Chitsike 1987: 9).

However, the Mission Schools, although largely the only means of obtaining an education above the primary school level for the indigenous, failed to teach the students proficiently. Resources and materials were mainly religious in content, thus their exposure to a variety of English Language contexts was limited.

This, indeed, was the criticism leveled at the education offered to indigenous people in Zimbabwe prior to independence. In 1961 Mary Gordon (Gordon 1961), as a representative of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), discussed a range of issues in her paper entitled "The Teaching of English to Africans in Southern Rhodesia. She seems to touch upon several areas of concern to this study.

Gordon (1961: 6) documents the following: -

- that the greater percentage of Zimbabwe's indigenous population were still rural with little access to school
- that there was a growing urban working class population who lived in townships around the periphery of the larger cities
- that these people (often without their families) formed the labour force of the then Rhodesian economy and they needed at least a rudimentary education

- that Primary schools were servicing a percentage of the school going cohort but as mentioned above, the dropout rate was staggering and the only Government High school offering university entrance examinations then, was Goromonzi
- that as an indigenous Zimbabwean, one 'qualified' to join for example the police force with a grade 7 ( primary school ) certificate or indeed one could qualify as a temporary teacher.

Gordon (1961:6) also indicates in her paper that the political development of Southern Rhodesia ensured that not only the place of English, as the first European language was retained, but also its importance to the indigenous population. She recognized that it was of value to the indigenous nationals because it offered them a lingua franca, not only between the various ethnic groups but as a communicative device when engaging with those of European origin. She also recognized the value of the vernacular languages. This is an important point of Gordon's, since a good grasp of the vernacular language ensured a good basis for the learning of English.

She also endorsed the growing need to ensure that 'African' pupils had a more than adequate grasp of idiomatic and literary English in order to be able to use the English language as an effective means of communication and to have access to all forms of written English (Gordon 1961:6).

Since Southern Rhodesia's institutions operated within the milieu of mainstream English, and since its majority population were largely deprived of access to it, its accessibility became a societal goal. In terms of this study the notion that access to English through quality education is important, and in order to ensure that quality, Gordon recognized that a number of issues were to be addressed. She also implied that a good grasp of English depended upon factors other than the cognitive abilities of individual students and was rather more to do with systemic conditions.

Thus from Gordon's point of view English was seen as a language which was there to serve the needs of all the people. She also accepted that the English language was inadequately taught in terms of meeting the needs of a growing urban and industrialized



population. Gordon (1961) felt that the way in which education for the indigenous was organized left much to be desired. She said: -

**“For pupils learning English as a second language all questions of method and approach must depend upon the age and stage at which the language is introduced.”**  
(Gordon 1961: 7).

Gordon’s concerns (Gordon 1961:7) extended to asking the following questions:-

- whether there was a need to ensure mother tongue competence before teaching English
- whether it was necessary to teach the three basic skills of writing, speaking and listening concurrently from the beginning, or should one start the new language by teaching it orally
- was there a danger that the learning of English may tend to alienate the educated English speakers from their own people
- was there a danger of the cultural history of the indigenous people being eroded to a large extent, since it is preserved through indigenous languages.

These questions had not been addressed by the Rhodesian government of the day and remained largely unproblematic until independence in 1980.

Official educational policy in Southern Rhodesia prescribed that indigenous children were taught through the medium of Shona or Ndebele, except in English and Arithmetic lessons, during the first five years of lower primary courses. English was more often (then), used as a medium of instruction as children moved into the upper primary school and then became the replacement language at the upper primary level of school.

Gordon (1961) critiqued the way in which English was introduced and taught in Southern Rhodesia. She hailed the introduction of Scheme books which prescribed both modes of teaching and content areas to be covered. She felt that they served a good purpose since they took into account the number of untrained teachers involved in primary school teaching. These books were only introduced in 1957. Prior to this primary school

teaching in the English medium can be assumed to be of extremely variable quality. Gordon (1961:10) confirmed this view by attributing poor standards of English teaching to the poor command of English by the teachers.

She also said that a leap forward in the quality of teaching English would only occur when there are ways of equipping a sufficient number of teachers with an adequate grasp of English in order to 'break the existing vicious circle' (Gordon 1961:10).

Her views are later confirmed by Maposa (1992:250), who identifies reasons for the poor performance in English ranging from a shortage of trained teachers and the questionable quality of teacher training, to the shortage of appropriate reading materials. He also importantly comments on the lack of research to explain and identify exactly what aspects of English Zimbabwean students find difficult.

Prior to independence the secondary school curriculum was organized as follows: -

- Years one and two                      Preparation for the Rhodesian Junior Certificate
- Years three and four                  Preparation for the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate
- Years five and six                      Preparation for the Cambridge Higher School Certificate

The medium of instruction was entirely in English. By 1961 there were a few township secondary schools, but only two Government secondary schools covered the third phase of the Secondary curriculum. Places in the secondary sector were, of necessity, heavily restricted. Moreover the quality of tuition was questionable, since many secondary sector staff had an inadequate grasp of spoken English.

As a result of the inadequate preparation in English experienced by pupils both in the primary and secondary sectors of the educational system, students entering English medium institutions of higher learning, that is the universities and training colleges, were greatly handicapped. It was surprising she said, that the standard of English in the schools and the training colleges 'is so high' (Gordon 1961), given the above.

In educational terms, English still occupies a dominant position in Zimbabwean society. It is regarded as the primary linguistic resource in a country where the indigenous languages lay idle in the market place of civil and economic discourse. Indeed, English and its use has become part of the nation's fabric therefore reflecting the unproblematic nature of its promotion within the educational system. Often the lack of English is blamed for general educational and social problems, just as upward mobility and academic achievement have become associated with a firm grasp of English (Schmied 1991:100).

The English subject curriculum itself, both at 'O' level and at 'A' level (see appendix 2) which under the Rhodesian 'dualistic' system of education was recognizably British in origin and character, (very few texts originated from Africa), confirmed the dominance and importance of the English language and literature.

Although the government of Zimbabwe recognizes the importance of the indigenous languages and their societal roles, in practical terms, education authorities and parents continue to promote and accept traditional conceptions of the value of English as a medium of instruction (Schmied 1991:17).

However, teachers still see deteriorating academic performance in all subjects, in terms of the lack of accuracy in spoken and written English (Schmied 1991:108). This phenomenon is experienced apparently to a greater extent in the high-density schools where resources both human and material, cannot compare to their low density and private counterparts (Lemmer 1996:19).

The debate whether the English language ought to retain its status and prominence in Zimbabwean society and its schools, is an ongoing one (Maposa 1992). The language's status remains intact in the nation's schools where it continues to be a prominent and respected curricula subject and one that is needed by students to proceed to further education and occupational routes.

#### **2.4.4 The multi-lingual nature of Zimbabwe's population**

The multi-lingual nature of Zimbabwe's population has also to be taken cognizance of since those who speak English as a first language not only traditionally and historically introduced the language, but have also been arguably influential in maintaining its educational and commercial hegemony.

Within the geographical boundaries of Zimbabwe the demographic distribution of its population (Sapes Trust: SADC Country Studies 2001:26), is as follows:- Shona and Ndebele speaking peoples 99.8 % of the population and the other 0.2% of the population comprises a combination of all other minority groups.

Each distinct population group share a common culture emanating from their origins and make-up. These groups of minority origin include those of European stock, Asian stock and those referred to as being of 'mixed origin'. The influence of these minorities groups culturally and otherwise and (because of their history), was and still is, in inverse proportion to their size.

Chung and Ngara (1985:71), appropriately define culture in terms of know-how and expertise which in turn, partially explains the predominance of these groups as well as the importance of English within that dominant milieu. They contend that the culture of a society may be analysed in terms of four basic elements. These are economic/ technological, social/communicative, ideological and aesthetic.

In other words and by inference, culture is often hierarchically bound, and influences in its own dynamic and interactive way, what happens in a given society. Thus the English language has been and is an important mediating vehicle for the expression of culture, and if we accept that culture is hierarchically bound, then English has indeed assumed the mantle of dominance but a dominance which is inclined towards not only the concept of the 'global village' but is of some utility value to the society.

#### **2.4.5 The use of English within commerce and industry**

English is used extensively in commerce and industry not only in ordinary discourse but, more importantly, in conferencing and documentation. Indigenous employees use their home languages within the office in general discourse, but tend to veer towards English in their exchange with management.

English seems to play a prominent role since it provides the medium of exchange in terms of contracts and otherwise, both regionally and internationally.

#### **2.4.6 Concluding remarks**

The scholastic and societal role of the English language remains pivotal in contemporary Zimbabwe and given the fact that the English language plays a key role in the learning and education of Zimbabwean students makes it an important issue in the lives of Zimbabweans.

Undoubtedly the English language has become a world language and is spoken and being learned by large tracts of the world's population and indeed is matched only by Mandarin Chinese as the world's most spoken language.

As a result Zimbabwe, as a country, has willy-nilly maintained the precedence of English in its curriculum. Some have argued (Lemmer 1996), that the only reason why newly independent governments had not moved away from the English language (as the language of instruction in schools for example) was because of the enormous costs involved. This contention is arguably true but tradition and legacy also play their parts.

Certainly in terms of expedience and 'dollar sense,' the course taken by the Zimbabwean Government to retain the use of the English language made sense. To do otherwise would not serve Zimbabwe's modern outlook and ambitions and perhaps do a disservice to the country's population. Of necessity, Zimbabweans need the license English as language grants, in order to enter the spheres of education business and trade within and beyond its borders.

The following reasons seem most apposite in describing why the English language continues to play such an important role in the affairs of Zimbabwe with particular reference to its educational system. It would seem that not only does Zimbabwe continue to share close ties with its erstwhile colonial rulers but Zimbabwe also realises that as part of the modern world it needs to continue to teach and nurture the English language. Thus the (English) language maintains its primacy in the lives of Zimbabweans.

The next chapter will focus on the three selected affective factors that is self-concept of academic ability in English, student perceptions of their teachers of English and student attitudes towards English and how these factors relate to achievement in English.