

RADIO BROADCASTING AND CONTRIBUTION TO INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE VITALITY IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

In recent years, radio in Zimbabwe has emerged as a vital platform for promoting indigenous and minority languages. This study evaluates the role of diverse radio stations in promoting indigenous languages in Zimbabwe to mitigate the risk of their loss. Using a qualitative research design that involves qualitative content analysis of 36 scheduled radio programs and 15 key informant interviews with radio and language professionals, the study evaluates language preferences, policy influences, and institutional practices that shape linguistic diversity on air. The findings indicate that community radio stations and some national radio stations play a central role in preserving indigenous and minority languages. Commercial urban stations contribute marginally, prioritizing English for commercial appeal, while campus radio stations demonstrate irregular efforts but show potential for multilingual broadcasting and language promotion. Given these findings, the study concludes that radio in Zimbabwe remains a powerful, yet unbalanced tool for promoting indigenous language vitality. Recommendations include establishing a national language policy for equitable indigenous language coverage on radio, supporting community radio stations with resources for minority language content, incentivizing commercial radio stations to include indigenous languages, strengthening professional training in indigenous language broadcasting, launching pilot multilingual youth programs on campus radio stations, and utilizing radio for multilingual crisis communication.

Keywords: Radio Broadcasting, Contribution, Indigenous Language Vitality, Linguistic Justice, Zimbabwe

Penyiaran Radio dan Sumbangannya terhadap Kelestarian Bahasa Peribumi di Zimbabwe

Abstrak

Dalam beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini, radio di Zimbabwe telah muncul sebagai platform penting dalam mempromosikan bahasa pribumi dan bahasa minoriti. Kajian ini menilai peranan pelbagai stesen radio dalam mempromosikan bahasa pribumi di Zimbabwe bagi mengurangkan risiko kehilangan bahasa tersebut. Dengan menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan kualitatif yang melibatkan analisis kandungan kualitatif terhadap 36 program radio berjadual serta 15 temu bual informan utama yang terdiri daripada profesional radio dan bahasa, kajian ini menilai keutamaan bahasa, pengaruh dasar, dan amalan institusi yang membentuk kepelbagaian linguistik di udara.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa stesen radio komuniti dan beberapa stesen radio nasional memainkan peranan utama dalam memelihara bahasa pribumi dan bahasa minoriti. Stesen radio komersial di kawasan bandar hanya menyumbang secara marginal kerana lebih mengutamakan penggunaan bahasa Inggeris bagi tarikan komersial. Sementara itu, stesen radio kampus menunjukkan usaha yang tidak konsisten tetapi mempunyai potensi untuk penyiaran berbilang bahasa serta mempromosikan bahasa pribumi. Berdasarkan dapatan tersebut, kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa radio di Zimbabwe masih merupakan alat yang berkuasa namun tidak seimbang dalam mempromosikan kelangsungan bahasa pribumi. Cadangan kajian termasuklah mewujudkan dasar bahasa kebangsaan bagi memastikan liputan bahasa pribumi yang adil di radio, menyokong stesen radio komuniti dengan sumber untuk kandungan bahasa minoriti, memberi insentif kepada stesen radio komersial untuk memasukkan bahasa pribumi, memperkukuh latihan profesional dalam penyiaran bahasa pribumi, melancarkan program perintis belia berbilang bahasa di stesen radio kampus, serta memanfaatkan radio untuk komunikasi krisis berbilang bahasa.

Kata Kunci: *Penyiaran Radio, Sumbangan, Kelangsungan Bahasa Pribumi, Keadilan Linguistik, Zimbabwe..*

Introduction

Zimbabwe is a multilingual country with over sixteen indigenous languages, including Chewa, Chibarwe, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, and Sign Language, among others. Shona and Ndebele are

recognized as national languages, while the rest hold minority language statuses, highlighting the country's rich cultural heritage. However, these languages, particularly the minority ones, face marginalization and extinction due to the dominance of English, the main official language (Nhongo & Tshotsho, 2020). Many indigenous languages are struggling to survive, with some likely to disappear in the near future, especially among younger generations who prefer English in digital spaces (Chirimaunga, 2025; Mazvarirwafa & Moyo, 2022). Nonetheless, in recent years, there has been growing recognition of the importance of promoting indigenous and minority languages to preserve cultural heritage and national identity. The Zimbabwean government has made efforts to promote their use in education and media (Chirimuuta, 2017). Radio has thus emerged as a crucial platform for language revitalization, given its wide reach and accessibility, particularly in rural and urban communities (Tsarwe & Sibanda, 2025). Owing to its wide coverage and oral nature, the radio has been identified as a key player in promoting indigenous languages in Zimbabwe.

Radio has been used to promote indigenous languages in various African countries, including Malawi, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Botswana, showcasing its effectiveness in language preservation and promotion (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2025; Chikaipa, 2023; Masuku & Aiseng, 2025; Dube, 2025). Through broadcasting in local languages, radio stations increase the visibility and prestige of these languages, encouraging their use in everyday life and providing a sense of identity and belonging for speakers (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2025). Moreover, radio has been identified to effectively promote cultural expression and exchange, allowing communities to share their stories, traditions, and values with wider audiences (Masuku & Aiseng, 2025). In Zimbabwe, community radio has been instrumental in using indigenous languages to discuss social issues, promote cultural awareness, and foster community and national pride (Dube, 2025). Community radios, recently licensed, are emerging as strong platforms for minority languages (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2025). Despite the shift in global communication and interaction landscape in the context of digital media literacy (Hashim, 2025), radio remains a vital tool for indigenous language sustenance (Zimuto, 2025).

Existing research in Zimbabwe has acknowledged radio's importance in promoting indigenous languages, focusing on community radios and national radios that prioritize indigenous language use (Dube, 2025; Zimuto, 2025; Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2025). These studies highlight community-based initiatives' potential for language preservation, but a

significant research gap remains regarding the broader radio broadcast landscape in Zimbabwe and its impact on indigenous language vitalization. Specifically, there is a lack of research examining various radio types (national, commercial, campus, and community-based stations) and their roles in promoting indigenous languages. This study addresses this gap by adopting an inclusive approach, encompassing all Zimbabwean radio categories, to understand radio broadcast's contribution to local language preservation and promotion. It aims to assess diverse radio stations' roles in promoting indigenous language vitality, identifying best practices and challenges to inform policymakers, language planners, and radio practitioners. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do radio stations differ in language preferences?
2. What policies influence language use on radio?
3. How do radio practitioners perceive their role in promoting indigenous languages?
4. What challenges affect indigenous language broadcasting?
5. How does language selection on radio impact linguistic justice and equity in Zimbabwe?

Methodology

This section presents a detailed blueprint of the methods used to investigate the study's research questions, providing a clear understanding of the research process. It outlines the research design, sampling criteria, data collection and analysis methods, quality appraisal and bias assessment measures, and ethical considerations, as detailed in the subsequent subsections.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to gain an understanding of the extent to which radio broadcasting activities in Zimbabwe contribute to indigenous language vitality and preservation through use. Key informant interviews with radio broadcast professionals and language specialists, and qualitative Content Analysis were used as primary data collection tools. Drawing on the strengths of qualitative research in facilitating in-depth analyses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), its adoption in this study enabled a richer exploration of ways in which language is employed in Zimbabwean radios, and how these preferences reflect broader societal expectations around language use, particularly in the context of

indigenous language promotion. This methodological approach was also vital in enabling the study to achieve its objective to determine the potential of radio in advancing linguistic equity and cultural preservation in a multilingual society like Zimbabwe.

Sampling Criteria and Procedure

This study used purposive sampling to select two distinct samples: 12 diverse radio stations and key informant interviewees. The radio stations included three state-owned national radios, three privately-owned commercial urban radios, three community radios, and three campus radios, ensuring representation of all radio categories in Zimbabwe. This inclusive approach allowed for comparative analysis of language preferences and programming priorities across broadcasting contexts.

Key informant interviewees were selected from participating radio stations and language planning institutions based on criteria including being a radio broadcast professional or language specialist with over 2 years' experience, and willingness to participate. The researcher approached prospective participants, verified eligibility, and scheduled interviews in various formats, yielding a sample of 15 participants (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic traits of key informant interview participants

Participant ID	Gender	Institution	Role/ Position	Experience (Years)	Interview Mode
P01	Female	National Radio	Senior Producer	12	Face-to-face
P02	Female	National Radio	Presenter	7	Telephone
P03	Male	National Radio	Program Manager	15	Face-to-face
P04	Female	Commercial Radio	Presenter	5	Online
P05	Male	Commercial Radio	Marketing Producer	10	Face-to-face
P06	Male	Commercial Radio	News Editor	8	Telephone
P07	Female	Community Radio	Station Manager	11	Face-to-face
P08	Male	Community Radio	Presenter	6	Face-to-face
P09	Female	Community	Executive	9	Telephone

		Radio	Producer		
P10	Female	Campus Radio	Student Presenter	2	Online
P11	Female	Campus Radio	News Anchor	4	Online
P12	Male	Campus Radio	Program Producer	3	Online
P13	Female	Arts & Culture	Language Official	14	Telephone
P14	Male	University	Language Specialist	16	Face-to-face
P15	Male	Independent	Language Consultant	20	Telephone

Source: Author

Data Collection Methods

The data collection process for this study involved key informant interviews conducted from July to August 2025, following systematic procedures. The interviews were designed to be flexible and convenient for the respondents, with face-to-face interactions taking place at participants' respective institutions, while telephone and online interviews were scheduled at a convenient time. Prior to the interviews, consent was obtained to record the conversations, ensuring that the participants were comfortable with the process. The face-to-face interviews were relatively in-depth, lasting between 25 to 40 minutes, while the telephone and online interviews were slightly shorter, ranging from 12 to 18 minutes. Additionally, interviews with language practitioners were concise, lasting less than 10 minutes, as they focused on a specific set of questions, addressing the fifth research question only. The interview questions were carefully crafted to address the research questions, enabling a better understanding of the research topic. The alignment between the research questions and the interview questions is summarized in Table 2, also indicating the rationale for these questions, offering a clear visual representation of the research design.

Table 2: Research questions and interview questions matrix

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Purpose/Rationale	Respondents
RQ1: How do radio stations differ in language preferences?	1. Which languages dominate your programming? 2. What informs your language choices?	To identify linguistic patterns and decision-making factors shaping language preferences across different radio stations, revealing how context, audience, and strategic goals influence the use of indigenous languages versus other languages.	Participants P1 – P12
RQ2: What policies influence language use on radio?	1. Do you follow language guidelines or policies? 2. How do these policies shape your programming decisions, and what challenges do you face in implementing them?	To determine structural factors that guide language choices on radio, understanding the interplay between regulatory frameworks and broadcasting practices.	Participants P1 – P12
RQ3: How do radio practitioners perceive their role in promoting indigenous languages?	1. How does your station support local languages? 2. What challenges do you face in promoting local languages, and how do you overcome them?	To gather professional perceptions on the responsibilities and experiences of radio practitioners in advancing indigenous language use and cultural preservation.	Participants P1 – P12
RQ4: What challenges affect indigenous language broadcasting?	1. What limits your use of indigenous languages? 2. How do audience	To explore operational barriers and external factors impacting the use of indigenous languages on radio, identifying potential	Participants P1 – P12

	preferences and feedback influence your decisions about language use in programming?	areas for improvement.	
RQ5: How does language selection on radio impact linguistic justice and equity in Zimbabwe?	1. In what ways do you think language choices on radio contribute to linguistic equity or marginalization in the Zimbabwean community? 2. How could radio broadcasting practices be adjusted to better promote language justice for minority or indigenous language speakers?	To explore the broader societal implications of language selection on radio, assessing how broadcasting practices contribute to or challenge linguistic hierarchies, and identifying potential strategies for fostering greater equity and inclusion in language representation.	Participants P13 - P15

Source: Author

Theoretical Framework

Situational Theory

The situational theory provides the framework for this study. According to Aldoory and Sha (2007), the situational theory is one of the best models for understanding why people communicate and when they are most likely to do so. The basic premise of the situational theory is that in order to identify each group's communication needs, organisations should divide the public into two groups: those who actively seek information and those who passively absorb it (Topić, 2017). Accordingly, there are basic components of the theory divided into three namely problem recognition (which is about the public being conscious of the matter at hand that is considered critical), constraint recognition (which is about perceptions of members of the public as to the barriers to resolving the identified problems), and the last which is the level of concern among

specific members of the public in respect of the subject and according to Topić (2017), these are required to accurately forecast communication behaviour, and attitude and behaviour change of members of the public who are exposed to certain situations in society.

According to Choo (2009), the situational theory also postulates that stakeholders are considered as publics once there is acknowledgment of the reality that certain issues or challenges exist and such may affect them, leading to the decision to take action towards proffering solutions to address the identified challenges. In this theory, there is emphasis on segmentation in PR (Aslan, 2023). This implies that in the case of a crisis, the PR professional must first determine who the stakeholders are and create avenues for effective strategies. In the case of the CBN's Naira redesign policy implementation, the population ought to be divided into tactical segments such as aware-public, unaware public, literate, semi-literate, rural, and even activists. This enables the professional to design specific messages and target each group with a unique approach and strategy.

According to Aslan (2023), to ensure the process is successful, public relations practitioners must monitor concerns, organisational responses, and activism. This tactic helps effectively divide the populace and garner support (Topić, 2017). The situational theory of public relations states that amateur practitioners engage with audiences via the media (Supa, 2008). The essence is to ensure that critical stakeholders identified are not missed in the PR implementation. As institutions conduct PR activities, the idea is to open the net as wide as possible to cover all stakeholders identified based on the assumptions of the situational theory. This theory provides the framework for this study to help systematise ideas that pertain to the use of PR by the CBN during the implementation phase of its Naira redesign policy in Nigeria.

Public Information Model

The model was developed in the era between 1906 and 1923 (Niemann-Struweg et al., 2007). The main idea behind the public information model is that an institution is able to provide information that is truthful about the organisation to the public. Such information may not be restrictive as it could be on the organisation's identity, success stories, important personalities to the organisation, or even messages to warn the public about anything deemed not so favourable to them. The first scholars to propose this theory were James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt, who are both renowned public relations experts known around the world, especially

within the field. The model was developed from the beginning until about the middle of the twentieth century. The main concern of PR is to maintain communication between an organisation and its publics. The model helps facilitate the communication process between society's varying groups.

Typically, a characteristic of a public information model is that the communication is of the one-way communication orientation (Niemann-Struweg et al., 2007). Though researching constituencies is not often executed, the emphasis on the public communication model is placed on the trustworthiness of the messages based on truth; nothing but the absolute truth. Institutions, both private and public, place in high esteem the need to share accurate information targeted at the public and also focus on the need to inform them, and not just for the sake of publicity. Therefore, information-dissemination to the public should be about accuracy and truth and not necessarily about publicity for the communication organisation or institution.

The public information model holds that the disseminated information should not form the basis for the PR expert to tell the public what to think. However, it also recognises the possibility that repetitive information-sharing efforts by an organisation go a long way to address the importance of an issue. In other words, when an organisation repeatedly provides certain information to the public, it indirectly places importance on that matter and may want the public to know more about such an issue. A major application of this model is crisis management, where the government attempts to share relevant information with the public on measures to be taken to avert danger or difficulties. It could also be about navigating through difficult situations, stressing the information required by the public at such critical times. It is on the account that the model provides a theoretical foundation for this current study, with a focus on CBN's Naira redesign policy implementation and the PR strategies adopted.

Method

The qualitative data collection research design was adopted for this study. The researcher conducted focus group discussions with key participants drawn from the staff of the corporate communication unit of the Central Bank of Nigeria. Three sessions were conducted in total, and each had 6 participants purposively selected for the sessions. While the first and second sessions lasted more than 2 hours, the last one lasted for just 1 hour, thirty minutes before the saturation point. The mode for

the sessions was face-to-face, and each yielded insights until a saturation point was reached in the third session. The participants in the three sessions had a good grasp of issues that pertain to the use of communication during the implementation phase of the Naira redesign policy. After careful transcription and analysis, data were matched with research objectives to arrive at themes under which this study's findings are discussed. This implies that the thematic method of analysis was adopted for analysing the qualitative data from the FGD.

Results and Discussion

Primarily, the researcher sought to assess PR strategies of CBN in the bank's implementation of the Naira redesign policy in Nigeria. Particularly, the rationale of the study was to find out the challenges that inhibited the bank's communication during the period. Accordingly, the FGD yielded significant insights as to the strategies and channels utilised by the bank as well as the challenges faced in the process. On channels and strategies utilised, discussants were divided as there was no consensus on the use of PR during the period. However, based on the qualitative data, the findings of the study highlight the use of PR strategies. Avenues utilised as revealed in the study include press conferences, traditional media (TV/radio), social media, and community outreach. The apex bank was also seen to have explored deposit money banks (DMBs) as points to engage the Nigerian public.

Qualitative data from the FGD also demonstrate that there is a definitive recall of the PR strategy deployed by the appropriate directorate of the CBN responsible for communication amid the implementation of the Naira redesign policy in Nigeria. Data further show that participants definitely recall the utilisation of strategies. The implication of this is that the bank actually communicated with the Nigerian public on matters relating to the policy amid its implementation. As a matter of fact, the bank did not just communicate with the public but also issued several instructions through appropriate channels to the commercial banks in the country, asking them to make the banknotes available to the public (Aina, 2023).

However, Eromosele (2023) negates the findings of the study with the assertion that the bank failed in its communication efforts during the crisis. It is important to note that the themes from FGD encompass CBN and the PR strategies, channels of communication, and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Naira redesign policy in

Nigeria. The discussion of the findings is structured in line with these thematic areas that highlight the research objective.

The CBN and PR Strategies for Implementing Naira Redesign Policy in Nigeria

Findings show the adoption and application of specific PR strategies adopted for communication during the crisis period. Accordingly, the study shows that PR strategies such as influencer, media, and inclusivity were utilised by the corporate communications directorate. However, the use of influencer PR and of media PR, which is made manifest in press releases and conferences, was expressed by [Participant 4]. Participant 2 also shared a position on the dominant use of social media platforms. In essence, the bank conducted a series of press conferences and released information to the press for onward dissemination to members of the public. The result of press conferences and media platforms is supported by literature on the notes and statements issued by the bank during the period of the implementation of the policy (Nigerian Economic Forum Group, 2023; Nwachukwu, 2023; Okon, 2022). It also supports the persuasion theory as acts of the conferences and statements were partly to provide information to convince Nigerians to support the policy.

Findings of the study also demonstrate that the strategies were specifically designed for crisis management, image management, and information-dissemination. This result implies that, on account of the goals envisaged, the apex bank designed strategies that were crisis management-tailored, image management-tailored, and the specific interest was to ensure that adequate information was provided to the public. This is based on the opinion of one of the discussants who actively participated in the FGD session. It also supports the persuasion theory as the CBN made attempts to persuade the tense public using public relations to douse tensions and stop further escalations aftermath of the implementation and the hardships that ensued.

Channels of Communication during the Naira Redesign Policy Implementation

In respect of the communication channel utilised during the Naira redesign policy implementation, findings of this study reveal that social media platforms, traditional media, and ICTs were the channels utilised by the appropriate directorate at the apex bank in the deployment of PR-curated messages and communication. Findings based on the account of a participant show that new media channels were highly utilised for

communication with the general public in the course of implementing the Naira redesign policy. This is also in line with findings of earlier studies that show the use of multiple media channels as tools for PR (Sommerfeldt et al., 2019; Storozhuk, 2022). Among the different channels revealed are those of the traditional media genre, social media, and associated new media technologies that have simplified PR practice in the digital age.

In respect of the challenges, this study reveals that among the participants, there was a strong support of the notion that the apex bank faced challenges in its PR efforts amid the implementation of the policy on Naira redesign in Nigeria. Findings show that the issues ranged from a lack of adequate preparedness to issues that border on the approach to public relations during the implementation phase of the policy in the FCT-Abuja. However, it suffices to state that on account of the result of the study, the apex bank encountered challenges in its efforts to relate with the public in the period under review. This is evident in the observation that shows its inability to persuade the public using all channels and strategies of public relations deployed during the implementation. The bank's failures and mistakes around the period are recorded in different reports (Onyeiwu, 2023; PLAC, 2023).

Challenges encountered in the Use of PR during the Naira Redesign Policy Implementation

Findings show information-related, image-related problems and the negative response of the public due to the hardship as prominent challenges encountered by the apex bank. The data from the FGD reveal that information overload, policy-induced hardships, as well as poor image and reputation, were some of the challenges faced by the CBN in its public relations efforts during the implementation phase of the Naira redesign policy in Nigeria. The challenge associated with the economic hardship during the period made a mockery of the adoption and use of PR strategies for the implementation of the Naira redesign policy in Nigeria. As Nigerians faced varied challenges, it became a challenge to convince them support the implementation of the policy.

The participants in the FGD believed that these challenges were among the many faced by the apex bank. However, repeated mention of hardships occasioned by the policy implementation is an indication that it happened to be the major challenge encountered. This is supported by existing literature that shows that Nigerians suffered difficult times on account of the economic and social crisis that accompanied the

implementation of the policy. For instance, Emordi and Ikedinma (2024) in their study show that the implementation of the policy brought deep tension, confusion, and acute cash crunch, leading to suffering among Nigerians. This was further exacerbated by the PoS transaction charges that jumped to 400 percent and above (Mojeed & Izuaka, 2023). There is no gainsaying, therefore, that the apex bank had a poor image during the period. The crisis created huge challenges for the PR team as there was a struggle to ensure that the people were made to believe the narratives put out in ways to justify the policy (even in the face of the hardships induced). This is an indication that efforts were made to push counter-narratives in the course of the policy implementation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that there was communication and active PR during the implementation phase of the Naira redesign policy of Nigeria's central bank. However, the PR used was not strategic in terms of message content, as there was no empathy whilst the public faced hardships in the face of the implementation. This is an indication that despite the use of various avenues such as TV/radio, social media, and through press conferences and community activities, the bank failed to leverage PR to assuage the pains of members of the public who had to endure the hard times occasioned by the policy implementation designed by the financial institution. Owing to the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The apex bank should understand the place of communication and PR in crisis management and leverage empathetic messages in engagements with members of the public in the implementation of unpopular policies, particularly the ones that come with untold hardship.
2. The people should be engaged to be part of the policy process, and by that, they are expected to champion the cause and also develop the capacity to understand and see to the implementation. In essence, they are empowered to show understanding and persevere through any form of hardship that may arise on the grounds of the implementation of such a people-championed policy.

Acknowledgement

The researcher acknowledges the assistance of the staff of CBN for taking part in the FGD sessions that yielded the data for the study. Additionally, staff and students of Glorious Vision University are also

hereby acknowledged for the enabling environment in which the manuscript was prepared for publication.

Author's Declaration

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