

Do Multilingual Education Policies In South Africa Impact Learning Outcomes? A Systematic Literature Review



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ABSTRACT

Despite the intensification of multilingual education policies over the last four decades, only a few studies have focused on their impact on learning outcomes. These studies are neither recent nor systematic. This study systematically reviewed research evidence on how multilingual education policies impact learning outcomes that intersect with broader social, cultural, and political contexts in South Africa. Various data collection methods were used, including document analysis, online database searches, and examination of government websites. The data span between 2013 and 2023, focusing specifically on language rights, linguistic diversity, and the efficacy of language instruction. The authors explored effective strategies to support students in multilingual classrooms. One of the findings showed that although multilingual education policies have a positive impact on learning outcomes, they have their challenges, resulting in declines in students' achievements. The study contributed to new research by proposing a framework called "Mother Tongue-Multilingual Education (MT-ME) to improve the implementation of multilingual education in South African universities.

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INTRODUCTION

South Africa (SA) is a multilingual nation with 11 official languages, reflecting its rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity. However, historical disparities and the legacy of apartheid have resulted in deep-seated inequalities, particularly in SA universities. Access to quality education in one's mother tongue has been limited, perpetuating these disparities. Understanding the implementation of multilingual education policies in South Africa and focusing on language rights, linguistic diversity, and effective language instruction is crucial to meeting the various learning needs of each student.¹

Although multilingual is the use of multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers, a multilingual education policy (MEP), in this context, is the implementation of language policies in the teaching and learning process.² In South African universities, for example, the

¹ Maria Chiras and Angelica Galante, "Policy and Pedagogical Reform in Higher Education: Embracing Multilingualism," in *Policy Development in TESOL and Multilingualism* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2021), 13–24, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3603-5_2.

² Everlyn Oluoch Suleh and Gregory Ekene Osuji, *Multilingualism and Its Contribution to Sustainable Socio-Economic Development* (CUEA PRESS The Catholic University of Eastern Africa PO Box 62157, 00200 ..., 2017).

languages officially recognised are English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele, Swati, Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho (Pedi), Tswana, Venda and Tsonga, and these languages were constitutionally adopted as a Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE) in 2002.³ SA universities have, therefore, been mandated to develop multilingual language policies and implement them in teaching and learning. Although most universities have developed and implemented multilingual language policies, some of these policies were found to impact learning outcomes, and the most effective strategies and approaches to use to implement these languages in classroom practices remain a challenge.

Although several studies have been conducted to explore the impact of Multilingual Education Policy (MEP) on learning outcomes,⁴ these studies' results have been mixed and inconclusive as their impact on learning outcomes is still debated. While some studies show the benefits of implementing a multilingual education policy in education,⁵ others show contradictory results.⁶ For example, Odugu and Lemieux argue that despite progress in multilingual education, African societies still follow colonial norms, limiting native language use in education.⁷ This restriction leads to negative outcomes below the expected benefits. The necessity of implementing a comprehensive language policy that can effectively manage the multifaceted nature of language diversity in the Republic of South Africa, which became unmistakably apparent after the assumption of power by the first democratically elected government in 1994 is very necessary. The optimistic expectation was that the academic institutions within the borders of South Africa would actively and effectively facilitate the advancement and dissemination of multiple languages in their educational curricula, thereby fostering a conducive environment for multilingual education.⁸

Despite these expectations, there is still a concern that more light must be shed on key factors such as equity, practicability, and redressing past discriminatory laws that surround the implementation of multilingual education policy in the educational system. Such insight could fill the research gap, add depth to the existing body of knowledge on the aspect of the methodology, and guide policymakers, researchers, and educators in decision-making, thus checking its impact on the learning outcome.

In light of this, undertaking a systematic literature review of this nature to understand how multilingual education policies intersect with broader social, cultural, and political contexts in South Africa becomes imperative. In addition, more research is also needed to identify the most effective strategies and approaches through a review of previous studies. The novelty of this study is the potential to provide a proposed mother tongue-based multilingual education (MLE) model as a framework to guide the implementation of MLE in universities to improve learning outcomes.

The research questions that guided the study are as follows. How do multilingual education policies impact learning outcomes which intersect with broader social, cultural, and political contexts in South Africa? What strategies are employed in South African schools to ensure effective language instruction and support for students in multilingual classrooms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impact of Multilingual Education Policies on Learning Outcomes in the South African Context

Heugh argues that the debate on multilingual education policy in South Africa has lasted 60 years,⁹ and recent research shows a decline in student achievement. Independent and government studies reveal a gap

³ Department of Education, "The National Language Policy for Higher Education" (Pretoria, 2022).

⁴ Alamsyah, Adib Alfalah, and Sri Dewi Priwanti Siregar. *Developing Multilingual Education Policies: Theory, Research, Practice*: Edited by Michal Tannenbaum, Elana Shohamy, Abingdon, Oxon, New York NY: Routledge Published, 2023, 195 pp. 27–99; Madiba, Mbulungeni. "Multilingual education in South African universities: Policies, pedagogy and practicality." *Linguistics and Education* 24, No. 4 (2013): 385–395; Plüddemann, Peter. "Language policy from below: Bilingual education and heterogeneity in post-apartheid South Africa." PhD diss., Department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism, Stockholm University, 2013.

⁵ Alamsyah, Adib Alfalah, and Sri Dewi Priwanti Siregar, "Developing Multilingual Education Policies: Theory, Research, Practice," *Journal of Latinos and Education* 23, no. 4 (August 7, 2024): 1611–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2023.2248252>.

⁶ Jeenti Malakar and Datta Supradip, "Exploring the Benefits and Challenges of Multilingual Education: A Theoretical Analysis," *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* 5, no. 4 (2023).

⁷ Desmond I Odugu and Camille N Lemieux, "Transitional Multilingual Education Policies in Africa: Necessary Compromise or Strategic Impediment?," *Language and Education* 33, no. 3 (2019): 263–81.

⁸ Sisanda B Nkoala, "Student Perceptions of Multilingualism and the Culture of Communication in Journalism Studies in Higher Education," *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 11, no. 1 (2020): 1–9.

⁹ Kathleen Heugh, "Epistemologies in Multilingual Education: Translanguaging and Genre—Companions in Conversation with Policy and Practice," *Language and Education* 29, no. 3 (2015): 280–85.

between multilingualism in education policy and the reality for students, especially in urban areas. Historical and theoretical disconnections, conflicting interpretations of policy, and a push toward English have influenced the implementation of multilingual education. The ideological framework of multilingualism in the 1990s negotiations had long-term effects on language policy in education; thus, challenges in implementing multilingual education include different views on multilingualism, conflicting policy interpretations, weak teaching methods, and efforts to improve African language education with English. A review of the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement highlights misunderstandings of the multilingual policy and the need for reconsideration in education.

Southwood argues that multilingual education policies in South Africa are influenced by the historical and political context, including apartheid and the promotion of social cohesion and inclusivity.¹⁰ These policies aim to address the social and cultural rights of learners, acknowledging the significance of their home languages and cultures. Language diversity and inclusivity in education are vital for equal opportunities and language development. The interaction between education policies and broader contexts requires suitable assessment materials and proficient speech-language therapists trained in African languages.

Researchers have conducted studies to uncover the role of language, specifically African languages, in learning outcomes, to address these concerns. For example, some researchers explored the impact of language on reading and writing skills,¹¹ while others examined the role of language in mathematics and science education.¹² Some researchers investigated the impact of language policies on educational outcomes; others explored the relationship between language and poverty.¹³ According to Xu and Pu, there is a concern that the policy could influence the university ecosystem and affect its sustainable development.¹⁴ These researchers have not come to a common consensus on the impact of multilingual language on learning outcomes.

Stoop discusses the language policy in South African schools, focusing on the legal framework and relevant case law.¹⁵ The South African Constitution, specifically Section 29(2), recognises the right to education in one's preferred language. However, the provision of mother-tongue education is subject to the concept of "reasonably practicable." This means that if a certain number of learners request education in a specific language, the school should consider providing it. Factors such as equity, practicability, and the redress of past discriminatory laws are considered. The argument also presents different interpretations of Section 29(2) and highlights the importance of balancing factors like equity and practicability.

Coetzee-Van Rooy focuses on a different angle, which is the implications of understanding the dominant language constellations in the multilingual repertoires of urban South African students for directing the creation and implementation of more effective multilingual language-in-education policies and practices.¹⁶ He highlights the potential existence of dominant language constellations within complex multilingual repertoires and the need for further research to explore the implications of this finding for language-in-education policies and practices. He concludes that a more "bilingual English-Southern Sotho" approach, embedded within a broader multilingual approach, could better support academic performance and literacy development in contexts of this nature. Overall, he provides valuable insights

¹⁰ Van Dulm, Ondene, and Frenette Southwood, "Child language assessment and intervention in multilingual and multicultural South Africa: Findings of a national survey", *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics* 42, no. 1 (2013): 55-76

¹¹ Stella Granville et al., "English with or without g (u) Ilt: A Position Paper on Language in Education Policy for South Africa," *Language and Education* 12, no. 4 (1998): 254-72.

¹² Nicholus Nyika, "Language Complaints as an Instrument of Language Rights Activism: The Case of PanSALB as a Guardian of the Right to Mother-Tongue Education," *Language Matters* 40, no. 2 (2009): 239-60.

¹³ Nicholas Spaull, Elizabeth Pretorius, and Nompumelelo Mohohlwane, "Investigating the Comprehension Iceberg: Developing Empirical Benchmarks for Early-Grade Reading in Agglutinating African Languages," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1-14.

¹⁴ Hao Xu and Shi Pu, "The Impact of Multilingual Education Policy on University Language Teachers' Professional Development," *Círculo de Lingüística Aplicada a La Comunicación* 84 (October 7, 2020): 77-84, <https://doi.org/10.5209/clac.71997>.

¹⁵ Chrizzell Stoop (Chürr), "Children's Rights to Mother-Tongue Education in a Multilingual World: A Comparative Analysis between South Africa and Germany," *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 20 (May 11, 2017): 1-35, <https://doi.org/10.17159/1727-3781/2017/v20i0a820>.

¹⁶ Susan Coetzee-Van Rooy, "Dominant Language Constellations in Multilingual Repertoires: Implications for Language-in-Education Policy and Practices in South Africa," *Language Matters* 49, no. 3 (2018): 19-46.

into the complexities of multilingual education policies and practices in South Africa and highlights the need for further research in this area.

The Intersection of Multilingual Education Policies with Broader Social, Cultural, and Political Contexts in South Africa

English seems to be a language that intersects all borders. According to Heugh, the use of English in multilingual policies demonstrates the significance of English as a global language.¹⁷ The language education policy in South Africa reflects discussions of diversity, identity, and power. The complexities of language instruction in multilingual classrooms in South Africa are highlighted by interactions with social, cultural, and political contexts. Therefore, the usage of indigenous languages promotes a connection between students and their cultural heritage, enhancing their participation in acquiring knowledge. Multilingual education policies support Sustainable Development Goal 4 by providing equal educational opportunities for indigenous and minority language groups. The research carried out by Patterson and Gardyne in the Vhembe district of South Africa draws attention to the significant role that Tshivheña plays, an indigenous language, as a medium of instruction in fostering the intellectual and educational development of learners.¹⁸

Southwood argues that multilingual education policies in South Africa are influenced by the historical and political context, including apartheid and the promotion of social cohesion and inclusivity.¹⁹ These policies aim to address the social and cultural rights of learners, acknowledging the significance of their home languages and cultures. Language diversity and inclusivity in education are vital for equal opportunities and language development.

Mkhize and Balfour further argue that the teaching of African languages in universities not only promotes multilingualism but also prepares students to communicate effectively in the communities where these languages are spoken, increasing opportunities for quality healthcare and other services.²⁰ This point of view is supported by Madiba's research, as he argues that the objective of incorporating multilingual language policies into South African universities, including the University of Cape Town (UCT), is to promote equal access and achievement for all students in higher education.²¹ These policies reflect the bigger social, cultural, and political contexts in South Africa, where linguistic diversity is recognised as important to the national heritage and identity. Multilingual education in traditionally white English universities, like UCT, acknowledges the need to address language disparities and provide opportunities for students from different language backgrounds. The presence of spaces for multilingual education at UCT demonstrates the institution's commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment that values linguistic diversity.

Moreover, Mahalingappa argues that South Africa's language policies and variations demonstrate dedication to language rights and address past educational inequities.²² These policies aim to establish a fair educational system that supports learners' native languages and cultural backgrounds. Also, educating people in multiple languages recognises the importance of language for identity, culture, and social unity. Promoting diverse languages in education contributes to nation-building and fosters a sense of belonging among diverse communities in South Africa. On the other hand, Mbirimi-Hungwe argues that the use of multiple languages, especially trans-languaging, should be acknowledged and used in education to improve students' understanding of academic resources.²³ Students' different language backgrounds

¹⁷ Kathleen Heugh, "Multilingual Education Policy in South Africa Constrained by Theoretical and Historical Disconnections," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 33 (2013): 215–37.

¹⁸ Marc D Patterson and Samantha Gardyne, "Indigenous Multilingual Education in Vhembe, South Africa," *Environmental Sciences Proceedings* 15, no. 1 (2022): 18.

¹⁹ Frenette Southwood, "Child Language Assessment and Intervention in Multilingual and Multicultural South Africa: Findings of a National Survey," *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics* 42, no. 0 (January 21, 2014): 55, <https://doi.org/10.5774/42-0-147>.

²⁰ Dumisile Mkhize and Robert Balfour, "Language Rights in Education in South Africa," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 31, no. 6 (2017): 133–50.

²¹ Mbulungeni Madiba, "Multilingual Education in South African Universities: Policies, Pedagogy and Practicality," *Linguistics and Education* 24, no. 4 (2013): 385–95.

²² Laura Mahalingappa, "Building Teacher Candidates' Self-Efficacy Beliefs about the Education of Multilingual Learners: A Linguistically Responsive Approach," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 131 (2023): 104190.

²³ Vimbai Mbirimi-Hungwe, "Towards the Development of a Multilingual Environment: A Case of a South African University," *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching* 11, no. 3 (2023): 526–36.

should be recognised and valued, as they have valuable knowledge that deserves recognition in education. Trans-languaging language in education can provide equal opportunities and promote social equality for multilingual individuals.

De Klerk and Palmer argue that the promotion of multilingualism and the adoption of innovative teaching strategies are essential for fostering the multilingual abilities of learners from an early age.²⁴ However, the successful implementation of a multilingual educational approach largely hinges on the proficiency of teachers in multiple languages. It also states that multilingualism has gained recognition as an asset in education due to its numerous cognitive, social, and cultural benefits. It allows learners to develop a deeper understanding of various languages and cultures, improves cognitive flexibility, and fosters empathy and appreciation for linguistic diversity. He further indicates that teachers often struggle with implementing innovative teaching strategies to develop Foundation Phase (FP) learners' multilingual abilities. These challenges can range from limited resources and training opportunities to insufficient support from educational institutions and policymakers. However, the proficiency of teachers in multiple languages plays a crucial role in the success of a multilingual educational approach. Teachers who possess strong multilingual competencies are better equipped to guide and support learners in acquiring and using additional languages. Thus, improving teacher proficiency is essential to creating a conducive learning environment.

The literature reviewed above has proven that although multilingual education policies have some positive impact on learning outcomes that intersect with broader social, cultural, and political contexts in South Africa, they have their challenges, resulting in poorer student achievement. For example, there is a concern that the policy could influence the ecosystem of universities and affect their sustainable development.²⁵

Strategies in South African Schools for Effective Language Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms

According to Mahalingappa, South African educational institutions have implemented policies to support students who speak multiple languages, but the strategies to carry them out have not been fully realised.²⁶ However, these policies aim to ensure education in native languages. Instructional interventions that consider linguistic diversity as a strategy have been successful in boosting the self-efficacy beliefs of future teachers, and including critical content in teacher education as a strategy can greatly impact teachers' abilities to support multilingual students.

Heugh affirms that the principle of additive multilingual education is another strategy included in curriculum documentation to promote literacy and critical thinking in the native language while also learning English. Although efforts have been made to improve African language education with English during the first ten years of school, teacher education has focused on changes in the curriculum and administrative procedures, potentially affecting classroom practices and instruction for students who speak African languages in rural and township settings. The government has also reassessed multilingualism in education after two decades of ineffective measures. However, strategies and methodologies aimed at addressing linguistic diversity in South African schools and helping students in multilingual classrooms have not been identified.

South African universities are promoting multilingual education by using different strategies, such as different languages in tutorials and lessons and creating an inclusive environment. Although universities offer African language courses for professional purposes as a strategy that supports students and academics in accessing language rights, the omission of certain languages limits language rights for students. For example, Stellenbosch University uses isiXhosa for effective learning and teaching, acknowledging the importance of language for careers.²⁷ The UCT has also created practical spaces for multilingual education as another strategic way to promote multilingual education. Furthermore, ethnographic theories and initiatives at UCT provide information on the provision of valuable strategies

²⁴ Edwin Darrell de Klerk, June Monica Palmer, and Maseeng Papashane, "Promoting Multilingualism: Foundation Phase Teachers' Experiences in Teaching isiXhosa to Native Speakers of Afrikaans," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 1 (2021).

²⁵ Xu and Pu, "The Impact of Multilingual Education Policy on University Language Teachers' Professional Development."

²⁶ Mahalingappa, "Building Teacher Candidates' Self-Efficacy Beliefs about the Education of Multilingual Learners: A Linguistically Responsive Approach."

²⁷ Mkhize and Balfour, "Language Rights in Education in South Africa."

for the implementation of multilingual education in South African universities, although the full implementation of multilingual education at UCT has not been achieved. This is because strategies and methods for effective language instruction in multilingual classrooms have not been fully implemented, though the adoption of multilingual policies shows a commitment to meeting the needs of diverse language learners in higher education.

Overview of Reviewed Studies

The study by Van Dulm and Southwood centres its attention on the assessment and intervention of child language in the context of multilingualism and multiculturalism in South Africa. The objective of their study was to gain an understanding of how speech-language therapists (SLTs) in South Africa modify their methods to accommodate the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the local child population. The findings show that SLTs in South Africa are proficient in either English exclusively or Afrikaans exclusively, with no knowledge of both languages. The study also discovered that the provision of services by SLTs to bilingual children, including those whose first language is neither English nor Afrikaans, presents challenges and is largely unsatisfactory. A small proportion of bilingual clients receive intervention in their first language. Research emphasised the need for an increased number of multilingual SLTs, particularly those who are fluent in African languages. Additionally, there is a need to develop assessment and intervention materials that are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

Mahalingappa's research lies in the development of self-efficacy beliefs among teacher candidates in the education of multilingual learners, achieved through the implementation of a linguistically responsive instructional intervention.²⁸ This intervention incorporates critical language awareness and systemic functional linguistics to enhance the candidates' understanding of language structures and their capacity to integrate multilingual activities and critical perspectives into classroom instruction. The findings indicate that the intervention had significant impacts on the self-efficacy beliefs of teacher candidates, with various effects being influenced by background factors. The study underscores the importance of incorporating critical content into teacher education coursework to foster changes in preservice teachers' perceptions and abilities to support multilingual learners.

The research by Mbirimi-Hungwe presents an observational investigation that was conducted at a university in South Africa, which is currently transforming to recognise and incorporate indigenous languages.²⁹ The investigation specifically focuses on the significance of multilingualism, particularly through the practice of translanguaging, in enhancing students' understanding of academic materials. The study concluded that it is necessary to acknowledge and use multilingualism not only for communicative purposes but also for academic purposes. It also highlighted that multilingual students possess valuable reservoirs of knowledge that deserve recognition in the contexts of teaching and learning. The study by Mbirimi-Hungwe advocates for the acceptance of a translanguaging approach in teaching, underscoring the role played by students' language practices in providing multilingual students with access to social justice.³⁰ Ultimately, it is concluded that by incorporating practices of translanguaging and recognising the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students, educational institutions can promote fair access to education and foster social justice for multilingual learners.

In his study, Madiba investigated South African universities that have adopted multilingual language policies to implement multilingual education according to the democratic constitution and the language policy for higher education (LPHE).³¹ According to the study, the adoption of these language policies aims to promote equity of access and success for all students in higher education and focuses on the implementation of multilingual education in traditionally white English universities with a specific emphasis on the UCT. However, the existence of a multilingual language policy at UCT has created agentive and implementational spaces for multilingual education, although it has not yet been fully realised.

²⁸ Mahalingappa, "Building Teacher Candidates' Self-Efficacy Beliefs about the Education of Multilingual Learners: A Linguistically Responsive Approach."

²⁹ Mbirimi-Hungwe, "Towards the Development of a Multilingual Environment: A Case of a South African University."

³⁰ Mbirimi-Hungwe, "Towards the Development of a Multilingual Environment: A Case of a South African University."

³¹ Madiba, "Multilingual Education in South African Universities: Policies, Pedagogy and Practicality."

Mkhize and Balfour delve into the matter of language rights in education within the confines of South Africa, with a specific focus on the controversy that surrounds the actualisation of multilingual education as a fundamental entitlement in the nation.³² Their study sheds light on the existence of constitutional and legislative frameworks that support the notion of multilingual education, although with the caveat that such support has not been effectively put into practice.³³ The study strongly emphasised the exclusion of African languages from the curriculum in select primary schools, as well as the erosion of linguistic diversity within educational institutions, particularly at the higher education level. It also refers to various studies documenting encouraging trends in the promotion of multilingual education within specific higher-learning establishments. The study concluded that universities should thoroughly assess their language policies and how they are implemented to determine whether they contribute to or impede the language rights of students.

Another study by Patterson et al. was centred on the Vhembe district of South Africa and examined the role of Tshiveña, an indigenous language, as a means of imparting knowledge in the field of education.³⁴ The study focused on how the education system uses the knowledge possessed by learners in Tshiveña to establish connections with their culture, family, and community. Teachers used Tshiveña to ensure the emotional well-being of the learners and to elucidate abstract concepts inclusively, thereby fostering greater engagement in the learning process. The outcomes of their study hold considerable significance in terms of addressing Sustainable Development Goal 4, which pertains to quality education in the Vhembe district and guaranteeing equal access to learning for children who speak indigenous and minority languages.

METHODOLOGY

This research is desktop research, which used a qualitative research approach based on a systematic review of literature as well as analysis of case studies, journal articles, books, etc. All articles used were related to multilingual education in South Africa. A qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study as it provided the opportunity to learn and understand the impact of policies in multilingual education on learning outcomes and how it intersects with broader social, cultural, and political contexts in South Africa.

Data collection methods

Various data collection methods were used in this study, including document analysis, online database searches, and government websites. Document analysis can be defined as a primary data collection method that involves systematically reviewing policy documents, academic literature, and other written materials related to multilingual education policies.³⁵ By examining a wide range of documents, the study can gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical context, implementation, and impact of these policies on learning outcomes.

Online database searches were also conducted to retrieve a wide range of research studies and data related to multilingual education in South Africa. This method allows access to a large number of peer-reviewed articles, research papers, and educational reports from different disciplines. Online database searches offer an extensive array of academic literature, ensuring that the study incorporates the latest research findings and diverse perspectives on multilingual education policies.

Sources of Data

Relevant studies published between 2013 and 2023 were searched using various public databases and websites, with databases such as ERIC, Scopus, and Google Scholar as search engines. The focus of academic journals and research databases was on peer-reviewed articles that explore the impact of multilingual education policies on learning outcomes, language proficiency, and cultural preservation, with selected reputable sources like the South African Journal of Education, the Journal of Multilingual

³² Mkhize and Balfour, "Language Rights in Education in South Africa."

³³ Mkhize and Balfour, "Language Rights in Education in South Africa."

³⁴ Patterson and Gardyne, "Indigenous Multilingual Education in Vhembe, South Africa."

³⁵ Bojana Lobe, David Morgan, and Kim A Hoffman, "Qualitative Data Collection in an Era of Social Distancing," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19 (2020): 1609406920937875.

and Multicultural Development, and the International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism selected.

Inclusion Criteria and Exclusion

The inclusion criteria were that all articles should be written in the English language and from the period 2013 to 2023. The researchers excluded articles on bilingualism and concentrated more on studies in higher education than in primary and secondary education.

Selection Process

Convenience sampling was appropriate for the selection of the documents needed for this study. This study followed the researchers' process guided by the PRISMA flow diagram (See Figure 1) in identifying, screening, and determining articles eligible for inclusion. Twenty (20) articles were identified in the databases, while six duplicate articles were excluded. Another three were excluded after screening because they did not explicitly explore multilingualism in the context of South Africa. After the researchers skimmed the titles, abstracts, and body of the identified articles to determine the potential eligibility for the systematic review, a final count of 14 studies (n-14) was included for analysis.

Data Analysis Strategy

This study reviewed existing data on multilingualism, which helped identify gaps in the literature. Open coding was employed to analyse data based on emerging themes. Inductive thematic analysis was used to capture important aspects of the data as they relate to the research questions. Qualitative data were further categorised into relevant themes related to language proficiency, cultural identity, and educational experiences. Dawadi states that thematic analysis is a method for analysing and identifying patterns in the data employing thematic codes.³⁶

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With respect to the reviewed literature, the findings of this study are discussed under the following themes that emerged: Language exclusion, translanguaging approach, speech-language therapy (SLT), the inclusion of critical content, indigenous language, and language rights.

Research by Mkhize and Balfour revealed that the implementation of multilingual education policies in South African schools has been a controversial issue despite the constitutional and legislative frameworks that support multilingual education.³⁷ Some primary schools have excluded African languages from their curriculum, undermining linguistic diversity. The omission of certain languages in language policies can be seen as a limitation of language rights for students who speak those languages. However, there are promising trends in the promotion of multilingual education in some universities, indicating efforts to address linguistic diversity. Furthermore, the use of students' linguistic resources in the classroom supports language planning from below and empowers students to be active language policy actors, contributing to addressing linguistic diversity.

The LPHE implemented in South African universities has the intention of acknowledging and incorporating Indigenous languages; however, it fails to fully recognise the significance of these languages as valuable sources of knowledge. The focus of this policy is on the positive response to multilingualism and the utilisation of indigenous languages for communication purposes. Nevertheless, there are certain aspects of the transformation that do not fully acknowledge the importance of indigenous languages as valuable sources of knowledge. The main objective of the LPHE is to provide insight into situations where multilingualism is recognised and utilised through translanguaging, intending to enhance students' understanding of academic materials. The policy strongly advocates for the adoption of a translanguaging approach in teaching that acknowledges and uses the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students. By incorporating translanguaging practices and recognising the language practices of students, educational institutions can promote equal access to education and foster social justice for multilingual students.³⁸

³⁶ S. Dawadi, "Thematic Analysis Approach: A Step by Step for ELT Research Practitioners," *Journal of Nelta* 25, no. 1–2 (2020): 63–71.

³⁷ Mkhize and Balfour, "Language Rights in Education in South Africa."

³⁸ Mbirimi-Hungwe, "Towards the Development of a Multilingual Environment: A Case of a South African University."

South Africa has implemented educational policies that aim to address the linguistic diversity of its population to provide equal opportunities for all learners. These policies promote the use of the 11 official languages in education. However, a study by Van Dulm and Southwood revealed that speech-language therapists (SLTs) in South Africa do not adequately reflect the multilingual and multicultural realities of the population.³⁹ The survey findings indicate that SLTs primarily focus on treating children whose first language is English, followed by Afrikaans and indigenous African languages. In addition, the intervention provided in the client's first language is limited to a small percentage of bilingual individuals, highlighting a gap in the implementation of multilingual education policies within SLT practices.

South African universities have adopted policies regarding multiple languages to enact an education system that accommodates various languages, aligning with the principles of the democratic constitution and the Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE). The purpose of adopting these language policies is to foster equal opportunities and success for all students in higher education. One example of a university that has implemented a multilingual language policy is the UCT, which has created avenues for multilingual education within its institution. However, it should be noted that UCT has not yet fully achieved the realisation of a comprehensive multilingual education system.⁴⁰ The process of implementing multilingual education in traditionally white English universities, including UCT, is an ongoing endeavour. The existing language policy at UCT has established spaces that empower individuals and facilitate the implementation of multilingual education. The application of ethnographic theories and multilingual education projects at UCT offers valuable insights into the implementation of multilingual education in South African universities.

There exists a disconnection between the establishment of multilingualism within contemporary educational policy and the multilingual existence of students. Constitutional and governmental policies in South Africa promote a multilingual approach, yet there is a tendency to assimilate towards English in the execution of these policies. The concept of additive multilingual education is mentioned in the early sections of the new curriculum documentation; however, it has not been successfully put into action. The execution of multilingual education has encountered obstacles and ineffective measures, as changes in the curriculum have focused more on administrative procedures rather than classroom practice. In general, South African schools have policies for multilingual education that aim to incorporate various languages into the early grades but eventually move to using English as the main language of instruction. Nevertheless, there are difficulties in aligning policy with the linguistic reality of students and effectively implementing multilingual education in practical terms.⁴¹

South African universities have made efforts to promote multilingual education by allowing the use of different languages within the same tutorial or lesson, creating an inclusive environment that respects linguistic diversity. Some universities, such as UKZN and UCT, offer courses in African languages for professional purposes, providing students and academics with the necessary support and confidence to access language rights. The omission of specific languages, such as Sepedi, in language policies can be seen as a delimitation of language rights for students who speak those languages. However, some universities, such as Stellenbosch University, already use isiXhosa to facilitate effective learning and teaching, recognising the importance of language for career purposes.⁴²

Madiba further confirms that South African universities have implemented multilingual language policies to foster equal opportunities and achievements for all students in higher education.⁴³ The introduction of multilingual education in historically English universities, such as UCT, has established spaces that are both active and practical for multilingual education. Ethnographic theories and multilingual education initiatives at UCT offer valuable insight into the implementation of multilingual education in South African universities. However, it is worth noting that the realisation of multilingual education at UCT has not yet been fully achieved. Although the specific strategies and methods employed in South African schools to ensure effective language instruction and support for students in multilingual classrooms are not explicitly mentioned in the sources provided, the adoption of multilingual language

³⁹ Mbirimi-Hungwe, "Towards the Development of a Multilingual Environment: A Case of a South African University."

⁴⁰ Madiba, "Multilingual Education in South African Universities: Policies, Pedagogy and Practicality."

⁴¹ Heugh, "Multilingual Education Policy in South Africa Constrained by Theoretical and Historical Disconnections."

⁴² Mkhize and Balfour, "Language Rights in Education in South Africa."

⁴³ Madiba, "Multilingual Education in South African Universities: Policies, Pedagogy and Practicality."

policies and the establishment of active spaces for multilingual education indicate a commitment to addressing the needs of diverse language learners in higher education.

According to Mahalingappa, South African educational institutions have adopted various policies, such as the Language in Education Policy and the National Curriculum Statement, to facilitate and promote the education of students who speak multiple languages.⁴⁴ These policies aim to ensure that learners can receive education in their native languages. The use of an instructional intervention that is sensitive to linguistic diversity and includes elements such as critical language awareness and systemic functional linguistics has shown positive outcomes in terms of enhancing the self-efficacy beliefs of future teachers in supporting students who speak multiple languages. The inclusion of critical content within teacher education coursework can have a significant impact on the perceptions and abilities of future teachers in effectively supporting students who speak multiple languages.

The inclusion of the principle of additive multilingual education in curriculum documentation is intended to foster the development of literacy and critical thinking abilities in the native language while simultaneously mastering educational concepts in the language of instruction, specifically English. Considerable efforts have been made to enhance the provision of African language education in conjunction with English during the initial ten years of schooling. The focus of in-service teacher education has revolved around alterations in the curriculum and administrative procedures, which may have had an impact on classroom practices and the instruction of students who speak African languages in rural and township settings. The government has recently reevaluated the implementation of multilingualism in education after two decades of ineffective measures. These strategies and methodologies aim to address the linguistic diversity present in South African schools and aid students in multilingual classrooms.⁴⁵

The historical and political context of South Africa influences the implementation of multilingual education policies. This context includes the legacy of apartheid and the promotion of social cohesion and inclusivity. These policies aim to address the social and cultural rights of learners, recognising the significance of their home languages and cultures in the educational process. Language diversity and inclusivity in education play a vital role in ensuring equal opportunities for all learners and supporting their language development. The interaction between multilingual education policies and broader social, cultural, and political contexts emphasises the need for linguistically and culturally appropriate evaluation and intervention materials. It also underscores the importance of training more multilingual speech-language therapists, particularly those who are proficient in African languages.⁴⁶

The teaching of African languages in universities not only promotes multilingualism but also prepares students to communicate effectively in the communities where these languages are spoken, increasing opportunities for quality healthcare and other services.⁴⁷ Mahalingappa argues that South Africa's linguistic variation and policies on educating in multiple languages exemplify the nation's dedication to advocating for language rights and redressing past inequities in education.⁴⁸ These policies seek to establish a more comprehensive and just educational system that appreciates and supports learners' native languages and cultural backgrounds. The implementation of policies to educate in multiple languages acknowledges the significance of language as a means of expressing identity, preserving culture, and fostering social unity within South African society. Recognising and bolstering the use of diverse languages in education contributes to the overarching objective of nation-building and cultivating a sense of belonging among heterogeneous communities in South Africa.

There are arguments that the formulation and implementation of policies on education in multiple languages are influenced by ongoing debates and discussions surrounding language, identity, and power dynamics in South African society. These policies also intersect with broader political agendas, as they are an integral part of the government's efforts to address historical injustices and promote social

⁴⁴ Mahalingappa, "Building Teacher Candidates' Self-Efficacy Beliefs about the Education of Multilingual Learners: A Linguistically Responsive Approach."

⁴⁵ Heugh, "Multilingual Education Policy in South Africa Constrained by Theoretical and Historical Disconnections."

⁴⁶ Southwood, "Child Language Assessment and Intervention in Multilingual and Multicultural South Africa: Findings of a National Survey."

⁴⁷ Mkhize and Balfour, "Language Rights in Education in South Africa."

⁴⁸ Mahalingappa, "Building Teacher Candidates' Self-Efficacy Beliefs about the Education of Multilingual Learners: A Linguistically Responsive Approach."

transformation in the post-apartheid era. The effectiveness of policies on educating in multiple languages relies on collaboration and engagement with various stakeholders, including educators, communities, and policymakers, to ensure their efficient implementation and impact.

The use of multiple languages, particularly translanguaging, must be recognised and employed in educational settings to augment students' understanding of academic resources. The diverse linguistic backgrounds of students must be acknowledged and appreciated, as they possess valuable reservoirs of knowledge that merit acknowledgement in educational settings. Integration of translanguaging practices in the field of education has the potential to offer equal access to education and promote social equality for multilingual individuals.⁴⁹

The utilisation of indigenous languages as a means of imparting knowledge aids in establishing a connection between students and their cultural heritage, familial roots, and local community, thereby augmenting their active participation in the process of acquiring knowledge. Additionally, educational policies that promote multilingualism also meet the objective of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure the provision of high-quality education by guaranteeing that children belonging to indigenous and minority language groups have equal opportunities to access education. The research carried out by Patterson and Gardyne in the Vhembe district of South Africa draws attention to the significant role played by Tshiveña, an indigenous language, as a medium of instruction in fostering the intellectual and educational development of learners.⁵⁰

The objective of incorporating multilingual language policies into South African universities, including the UCT, is to advance equal access and achievement for all students in higher education. These policies reflect the wider social, cultural, and political contexts of South Africa, where the significance and value of linguistic diversity is acknowledged as integral to the nation's heritage and identity. The implementation of multilingual education in traditionally white English universities, such as UCT, recognises the necessity of addressing language disparities and providing opportunities for students from various linguistic backgrounds. The presence of agentive and implementational spaces for multilingual education at UCT signifies the institution's commitment to establishing an inclusive and supportive learning environment that honours and commemorates linguistic diversity.⁵¹

The inclination towards incorporating English in the execution of multilingual policies signifies wider sociopolitical dynamics and the predominance of English as a global language. The disputed nature of language education policy in South Africa reflects broader social and political discussions concerning linguistic diversity, identity, and power dynamics. These interactions between multilingual education policies and wider social, cultural and political contexts in South Africa underscore the intricacies and obstacles to achieving effective language instruction and support for students in multilingual classrooms.⁵²

From the reviewed literature, it could be deduced that a discrepancy exists between the current education policy's approach to multilingualism and the actual multilingual experience of students. It was also drawn that there is a disconnection between constitutional and government policies, which advocate for a multilingual approach but are implemented through an assimilatory push towards English. This implies that the appropriate strategies needed for the implementation of multilingual education have not yet been concluded.

Consequently, the findings showed that the implementation of multilingual education has encountered obstacles, and some of the strategies used have proven ineffective. It was also found that curriculum changes have primarily focused on administrative procedures rather than classroom practices of multilingualism. The lack of involvement of applied linguists or sociolinguists with expertise in language acquisition within linguistically complex contexts in the curriculum review team has resulted in misunderstandings of the additive bilingual and multilingual policy.

This study has some implications. The investigation of multilingual education policies has the potential to contribute to the advancement of policy development and reform in South Africa. The knowledge gained from this study can serve as a guide in the formulation of policies that are more comprehensive and better adjusted to the linguistic diversity of the country. Also, the ramifications of

⁴⁹ Mbirimi-Hungwe, "Towards the Development of a Multilingual Environment: A Case of a South African University."

⁵⁰ Patterson and Gardyne, "Indigenous Multilingual Education in Vhembe, South Africa."

⁵¹ Madiba, "Multilingual Education in South African Universities: Policies, Pedagogy and Practicality."

⁵² Heugh, "Multilingual Education Policy in South Africa Constrained by Theoretical and Historical Disconnections."

equity and access to high-quality education can be addressed. Multilingual policies hold promises in bridging educational disparities and fostering inclusivity among students with varying linguistic backgrounds. Finally, the consequences of language preservation are considered. The research underscores the significance of upholding Indigenous languages, which may trigger increased efforts in safeguarding and promoting these languages within the educational framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature reviewed and the findings from this study, the study recommends the adoption of multilingualism, particularly through translanguaging as an important policy in academia for both communicative and academic purposes however, care should be taken in aligning policy with the linguistic reality. It also recommends incorporating translanguaging practices, as this could improve students' comprehension of academic materials, especially for non-speakers of a particular language who are learning it for communicative purposes. Recognising and using multilingualism in teaching and learning contexts is crucial, as multilingual students possess valuable kinds of knowledge that deserve recognition. Adopting a translanguaging approach in teaching can provide equitable access to education and foster social justice for multilingual learners.

The Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MLE) Framework



Figure 1 Framework: Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MLE)

Since it has now been established that the inclusion of a multilingual education policy is mandatory in SA universities while noting the challenges students are facing in its implementation, it, therefore, becomes apparent to develop a framework that includes a mother tongue that could enhance the implementation of multilanguage education.

Mother tongue education goes beyond changing the language in the textbook or any language used in the classroom. It is about challenging the power dynamics in the learning process so that students can direct their learning in ways that can make meaning for them. It borders on re-envisioning learning to centre on critical thinking and wider social skills needed in a rapidly changing world. Mother Tongue-Multilingual Education requires the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction in the classroom. Mother Tongue-Multilingual Education (MT-ME) is about properly preparing children to learn these languages well.

To implement a more balanced multilingual education, teachers must integrate these concepts:

Translanguaging approach: This is the ability to move fluently between languages. Teachers should be trained to acquire the skill to move from a specific mother tongue to another language.

Language exclusion: The curriculum should be language-friendly, and no language should be excluded.

Inclusion of Critical Content: Incorporate critical content into teacher education coursework to foster changes in preservice teachers' perceptions and abilities to support multilingual learners.

Speech Language Therapy (SLT): The need for an increased number of multilingual SLTs, particularly those fluent in African languages.

Indigenous language: The indigenous language should be preserved because it promotes a connection between students and their cultural heritage, enhancing their participation in acquiring knowledge.

Language Rights: Universities need to examine their language policies and implementation and how they either promote or infringe upon the language rights of students.

CONCLUSION

This systematic study has reviewed the impact of multilingual education policies in South Africa focusing on the impact on learning outcomes. The findings from the literature reviewed have shown that the realisation of multilingual education as a right in South Africa remains controversial despite constitutional and legislative support for it. Although some studies suggest promising trends in promoting multilingual education in certain institutions of higher learning. However, there is still a lack of preparation and risk-taking in using languages other than English and Afrikaans as media of instruction in South African universities. It was also found that the exclusion of African languages from the curriculum in some primary schools undermines linguistic diversity. The failure to promote multilingualism hampers the creation of an inclusive institutional environment and does not adequately meet the needs of the country and the Constitution. Thus, universities need to examine their language policies and implementation and how they either promote or infringe upon the language rights of students.

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