

Advancing Xitsonga Language Education: The Use of Translanguaging in Literacy Development Practices



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how translanguaging advanced Xitsonga language education through literacy development practices in Limpopo schools. It focused on how learners and teachers used multiple languages, mainly Xitsonga and English, to support reading and writing development in multilingual classrooms. A qualitative research design was employed, involving classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with Xitsonga teachers, and analysis of learner writing samples from selected primary and secondary schools in Limpopo Province. The study aimed to understand how translanguaging was applied in literacy instruction and how it influenced learner outcomes. Findings revealed that translanguaging significantly improved learners' comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence in both Xitsonga and English. Teachers who incorporated translanguaging strategies created inclusive learning environments that affirmed learners' linguistic identities and promoted active participation. The research also found that translanguaging enabled learners to draw on prior knowledge and use familiar language to access unfamiliar content. Based on these findings, the study recommended the integration of translanguaging into teacher education programmes and the development of multilingual teaching materials tailored to learners' linguistic backgrounds. School policies should also support flexible language use in classrooms to improve literacy outcomes. In conclusion, the study demonstrated that translanguaging served as an effective tool for enhancing literacy development in Xitsonga-speaking learners. This study contributes to scholarship by highlighting the practical application of translanguaging in indigenous language education and underscores its value in promoting equitable and inclusive teaching practices in South African schools.

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INTRODUCTION

In the diverse linguistic landscape of South Africa, Xitsonga stands as one of the country's eleven official languages, predominantly spoken in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces. Despite its official status, Xitsonga, like many indigenous languages, faces challenges in educational contexts where English often dominates as the medium of instruction. This dominance can marginalize indigenous languages, leading to diminished proficiency and literacy among native speakers. To counteract this trend, translanguaging has emerged as a pedagogical approach that leverages learners' entire linguistic repertoires, facilitating deeper understanding and promoting literacy development in multiple languages.

Translanguaging refers to the dynamic process wherein multilingual speakers utilize all their language resources to make meaning, communicate, and learn. In educational settings, it involves the strategic use of multiple languages within the classroom to enhance learning outcomes. This approach challenges traditional monolingual paradigms, recognizing the fluidity of language practices among bilingual and multilingual individuals. By embracing translanguaging, educators can create more inclusive and effective learning environments that acknowledge and value the linguistic diversity of their students. Recent studies have demonstrated the efficacy of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms. For instance, research conducted in a South African rural secondary school revealed that collaborative peer-to-peer translanguaging in a trilingual educational context enhanced learners' confidence and engagement. Learners reported increased enjoyment and reduced language anxiety when allowed to use their home languages alongside the language of instruction, leading to improved comprehension and participation.¹

Similarly, Ngubane et al. found that in English First Additional Language writing classrooms, the integration of isiZulu and English through translanguaging practices not only clarified writing concepts but also stimulated active learner participation.² These findings suggest that translanguaging can serve as a valuable pedagogical tool in contexts where learners' home languages differ from the medium of instruction. In the context of Xitsonga language education, translanguaging offers a promising avenue for enhancing literacy development. By allowing learners to draw upon their full linguistic repertoire, educators can bridge the gap between home and school languages, facilitating a more seamless and meaningful learning experience. This approach not only supports the development of literacy skills in Xitsonga but also fosters a positive linguistic identity among learners, validating their home language as a valuable asset in their educational journey. However, the implementation of translanguaging in Xitsonga classrooms is not without challenges. Educators may face institutional constraints, such as rigid language policies that favour monolingual instruction, or a lack of resources and training to effectively employ translanguaging strategies.

Moreover, societal attitudes that prioritize English over indigenous languages can influence both teachers' and learners' perceptions of the value of Xitsonga in academic settings. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to shift educational policies and practices towards a more inclusive recognition of linguistic diversity. Advancing Xitsonga language education through the use of translanguaging in literacy development practices holds significant potential for improving educational outcomes among Xitsonga-speaking learners. By embracing learners' multilingual realities and integrating their home languages into the learning process, educators can enhance comprehension, participation, and overall literacy development. This approach not only benefits individual learners but also contributes to the preservation and promotion of Xitsonga as a vibrant and valuable component of South Africa's linguistic heritage.

In South Africa's linguistically diverse educational landscape, Xitsonga, one of the country's official languages, often faces marginalization in favour of English-dominated instruction. This marginalization has led to challenges in literacy development among Xitsonga-speaking learners, as their home language is frequently underutilized in academic settings. Translanguaging, the practice of leveraging multiple languages within the learning environment, has been proposed as a strategy to enhance literacy outcomes by validating and incorporating learners' entire linguistic repertoires. While translanguaging has shown promise in various multilingual contexts, its specific impact on Xitsonga language education remains underexplored.

Recent studies have highlighted the potential benefits of translanguaging in promoting literacy across languages. For instance, Khoza et.al., observed that translanguaging practices in Xitsonga classrooms facilitated the transfer of literacy skills between languages, thereby enhancing overall comprehension and engagement.³ Similarly, Mbirimi-Hungwe emphasized that recognizing and

¹ H. A. Motlhaka, "Translanguaging as a Socioculturally Responsive Pedagogy for Multilingual Learners.," *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 7 (2021).

² Nomalungelo Ngubane, Berrington Xolani Ntombela, and Samantha Govender, "Translanguaging Pedagogy in Selected English First Additional Language Writing Classrooms," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 38, no. 2 (2020): 142–51.

³ Z., Khoza, W. S., Chauke, and H. A. Motlhaka, "Navigating a Course for Enhanced Pedagogic Trends: A Survey on the Use and Acceptability of 'translanguaging' Techniques in a South African Context," *Journal of Positive Psychology & Wellbeing* 6, no. 4 (2022): 49–58.

embracing the language resources that learners bring to the classroom through translanguaging fosters a more inclusive and effective learning environment.⁴ Despite these insights, there is a paucity of research focusing specifically on the systematic implementation of translanguaging strategies in Xitsonga literacy development. This gap underscores the need for empirical studies to investigate how translanguaging can be effectively integrated into Xitsonga language education to improve literacy outcomes and affirm learners' linguistic identities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of translanguaging into Xitsonga language education has garnered increasing attention as a transformative approach to literacy development in multilingual contexts. In South Africa, where learners often navigate between their home language and the language of instruction, translanguaging offers a pedagogical strategy that acknowledges and leverages the full linguistic repertoire of students. This approach challenges traditional monolingual teaching methods by allowing learners to use multiple languages fluidly, thereby enhancing comprehension and fostering deeper engagement with literacy tasks. In Xitsonga classrooms, translanguaging has the potential to bridge linguistic gaps, promote critical thinking, and support the development of reading and writing skills. This literature review explores the theoretical underpinnings of translanguaging, its practical applications in indigenous language education, and its impact on literacy development in Xitsonga. It also examines challenges in implementation, teacher perceptions, and the policy frameworks that influence translanguaging practices, providing a comprehensive understanding of how this approach can advance Xitsonga language education.

Theoretical Foundations of Translanguaging in Multilingual Education

Translanguaging, as a theoretical construct, challenges traditional monolingual paradigms by recognizing the fluid and dynamic language practices of multilingual individuals. It posits that multilingual speakers do not compartmentalize their languages but rather access a unified linguistic repertoire to make meaning and communicate effectively. This perspective shifts the focus from viewing languages as separate entities to understanding language use as an integrated process. Li emphasizes that translanguaging serves as a practical theory of language, highlighting the natural and holistic ways in which multilinguals navigate their linguistic environments.⁵ In the context of multilingual education, translanguaging offers a framework that leverages students' complete linguistic resources, fostering deeper cognitive and social engagement. By allowing learners to utilize all their language skills, educators can create more inclusive and effective learning environments. This approach not only enhances comprehension but also validates students' linguistic identities, promoting confidence and active participation in the learning process. Marrero-Colón discusses how translanguaging, as a theory applied to practice, provides a principled choice for educators aiming to support multilingual learners.⁶

The application of translanguaging in Xitsonga language education specifically addresses the linguistic realities of learners in South Africa. Xitsonga-speaking students often encounter educational settings where their home language is underrepresented, leading to challenges in literacy development. Implementing translanguaging strategies in these contexts allows for the incorporation of Xitsonga alongside other languages, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding and retention of content. Khoza et.al., explore translanguaging patterns in Xitsonga classrooms, highlighting its potential to improve learner performance by accommodating diverse linguistic backgrounds.⁷ Critically, translanguaging also serves to counteract linguistic hierarchies and biases that may exist within educational systems. By embracing all languages present in a learner's repertoire, this approach challenges the dominance of colonial languages and promotes linguistic equity. This is particularly pertinent in post-colonial contexts like South Africa, where indigenous languages have historically been marginalized.

⁴ Vimbai Mbirimi-Hungwe, "Promoting Multilingualism through Translanguaging in South African Classrooms," *Journal for Language Teaching* 57, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.56285/jltVol57iss1a5273>.

⁵ W Li, "Translanguaging as a Practical Theory of Language: Implications for Language Learning and Research," *Proceedings at the Faculty of Humanities Distinguished Lecture Series. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Hong Kong*, 2018.

⁶ M. Marrero-Colón, "Translanguaging: Theory, Concept, Practice, Stance... or All of the Above?," CAL Commentary, 2020.

⁷ Khoza, Chauke, and Motlhaka, "Navigating a Course for Enhanced Pedagogic Trends: A Survey on the Use and Acceptability of 'translanguaging' Techniques in a South African Context."

Mbirimi-Hungwe emphasizes that recognizing and utilizing learners' full linguistic resources through translanguaging fosters inclusivity and supports the maintenance of linguistic diversity.⁸ The theoretical foundations of translanguaging provide a robust framework for advancing Xitsonga language education. By acknowledging the integrated nature of multilinguals' language practices, educators can implement strategies that enhance literacy development, affirm linguistic identities, and promote equitable learning experiences. This paradigm shift from monolingual to translanguaging pedagogies holds significant promise for improving educational outcomes among Xitsonga-speaking learners and preserving the linguistic heritage of the region.

Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Approach in Indigenous Language Education

Translanguaging has emerged as a transformative pedagogical approach in indigenous language education, offering a dynamic framework that leverages learners' full linguistic repertoires to enhance literacy development. This approach challenges traditional monolingual instructional models by recognizing the fluid language practices of multilingual individuals, thereby fostering more inclusive and effective learning environments. In the context of Xitsonga language education, translanguaging serves as a critical tool to bridge linguistic gaps and promote literacy among learners. Recent studies have demonstrated the efficacy of translanguaging in indigenous language classrooms. For instance, research conducted in South African primary schools revealed that employing translanguaging strategies allowed learners to access complex content through their home languages, resulting in improved comprehension and engagement.⁹

Similarly, an investigation into Xitsonga classrooms found that translanguaging practices enabled students to draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire, facilitating deeper understanding and participation in literacy activities.¹⁰ These findings underscore the potential of translanguaging to enhance literacy outcomes by validating and incorporating learners' linguistic identities into the educational process. However, the implementation of translanguaging in indigenous language education is not without challenges. Educators often face systemic barriers, such as rigid language policies and a lack of resources or training to effectively integrate translanguaging into their teaching practices. Moreover, societal attitudes that favor dominant languages can impede the acceptance and utilization of indigenous languages within academic settings.

Despite these obstacles, the adoption of translanguaging pedagogies has been shown to foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment, empowering learners to navigate multiple linguistic contexts with confidence and competence.¹¹ Translanguaging as a pedagogical approach offers significant promise for advancing Xitsonga language education and literacy development. By embracing the linguistic diversity of learners and integrating their home languages into the curriculum, educators can create more meaningful and effective learning experiences. Continued research and professional development are essential to overcoming existing challenges and fully realizing the benefits of translanguaging in indigenous language education.

Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Translanguaging in Xitsonga Classrooms

Translanguaging, the dynamic process of using multiple languages in instruction, has gained attention as a means to enhance literacy development in multilingual settings. In Xitsonga classrooms, implementing translanguaging presents both challenges and opportunities that are crucial for advancing Xitsonga language education.

Challenges in Implementing Translanguaging in Xitsonga Classrooms

One significant challenge is the scarcity of educational resources in Xitsonga. The African Storybook initiative highlights a critical shortage of children's literature in African languages, which is essential for

⁸ Mbirimi-Hungwe, "Promoting Multilingualism through Translanguaging in South African Classrooms."

⁹ L. Makalela, "Translanguaging in Multilingual Classrooms: Leveraging Students' Diverse Linguistic Resources for Learning," *Journal of Multilingual Education Research* 11, no. 1 (2021): 7–22.

¹⁰ Khoza, Chauke, and Motlhaka, "Navigating a Course for Enhanced Pedagogic Trends: A Survey on the Use and Acceptability of 'translanguaging' Techniques in a South African Context."

¹¹ Mbirimi-Hungwe, "Promoting Multilingualism through Translanguaging in South African Classrooms."

literacy development. As of March 2023, the initiative had produced 3,800 original titles and 7,266 translations across 236 languages, yet the demand for Xitsonga materials remains high.¹² This lack of resources hampers the effective implementation of translanguaging, as educators have limited access to quality texts that support bilingual or multilingual instruction. Another challenge is the prevailing language policies in South African education. The Basic Education Laws Amendment Act, signed into law in September 2024, empowers provincial officials to enforce multilingual instruction in schools.¹³

While this policy aims to promote inclusivity, it has sparked debates, particularly concerning Afrikaans education. The focus on dominant languages may inadvertently marginalize indigenous languages like Xitsonga, making it difficult to prioritize and implement translanguaging practices that support Xitsonga learners. Teacher preparedness also poses a significant hurdle. Many educators lack training in translanguaging strategies and may not be proficient in both Xitsonga and the additional languages used in instruction. The Documentational Approach to Didactics emphasizes the importance of teachers' interactions with educational resources for professional development.¹⁴ Without adequate training and resources, teachers may struggle to design and deliver effective translanguaging lessons, potentially leading to inconsistent or superficial application of the approach.

Opportunities in Implementing Translanguaging in Xitsonga Classrooms

Despite these challenges, translanguaging offers several opportunities to enhance Xitsonga language education. One notable opportunity is the potential for artificial intelligence (AI) to support the development of educational materials. Recent research demonstrates that AI can be harnessed to revitalize endangered indigenous languages by creating high-quality machine learning translators, even with limited data.¹⁵ By leveraging AI, educators and policymakers can generate Xitsonga texts and learning tools, enriching the pool of resources available for translanguaging practices. Furthermore, translanguaging can foster a more inclusive and culturally responsive classroom environment. By validating and incorporating students' linguistic repertoires, educators can enhance learners' engagement and identity affirmation.

This approach aligns with the goals of multilingual education policies, aiming to bridge linguistic divides and promote equity in learning opportunities. Collaborative professional development also presents an opportunity to overcome teacher preparedness challenges. Engaging educators in multilingual projects can deepen their understanding of translanguaging and its practical applications. For instance, the DAD-Multilingual project facilitates the exchange of didactic resources across languages, enriching teachers' instructional strategies.¹⁶ Such initiatives can build a community of practice among Xitsonga educators, fostering the sharing of effective translanguaging methodologies. Implementing translanguaging in Xitsonga classrooms encompasses both challenges and opportunities. Addressing resource limitations, navigating complex language policies, and enhancing teacher preparedness are critical steps toward successful implementation. Simultaneously, embracing technological advancements, promoting inclusive pedagogies, and fostering collaborative professional development can significantly advance Xitsonga language education through translanguaging practices.

The Role of Translanguaging in Enhancing Reading and Writing Skills in Xitsonga

Reading comprehension in low-resource languages like Xitsonga often faces challenges due to limited educational materials and resources. A study by Wu et al. (2021) highlights the potential of cross-lingual approaches to bolster reading comprehension in such contexts. The researchers introduced a Cross-Lingual Transposition ReThinking (XLTT) model that utilizes multilingual adaptive attention mechanisms to enhance understanding across languages. This approach demonstrated significant improvements in reading comprehension, particularly for low-resource languages, suggesting that incorporating multiple languages can aid in developing reading skills in Xitsonga learners. Writing

¹² T. Welch et al., "The African Storybook Project: An Interim Report," in *The Cape Town Language and Development Conference: Looking beyond 2015*, ed. H. McIlwraith (British Council, 2014), 92–95.

¹³ The Guardian, "South Africa School Language Law Stirs Afrikaans Learning Debate," September 15, 2024.

¹⁴ Luc Trouche, "Understanding Teachers' Professional Development through Their Interactions with Resources: A Multilingual Project," *ArXiv Preprint ArXiv:2012.15532*, 2020.

¹⁵ Claudio Pinhanez et al., "Harnessing the Power of Artificial Intelligence to Vitalize Endangered Indigenous Languages: Technologies and Experiences," *ArXiv Preprint ArXiv:2407.12620*, 2024.

¹⁶ Trouche, "Understanding Teachers' Professional Development through Their Interactions with Resources: A Multilingual Project."

proficiency in Xitsonga can be enhanced through translanguaging practices that allow learners to draw upon their knowledge of other languages.

The Documentational Approach to Didactics (DAD) emphasizes the importance of teachers' interactions with multilingual resources in their professional development. Trouche discusses how engaging with resources in various languages can deepen educators' understanding and teaching practices.¹⁷ By extension, when teachers incorporate translanguaging strategies into their instruction, they enable students to utilize their full linguistic capabilities, thereby improving writing skills in Xitsonga. The integration of technology in translanguaging practices offers innovative avenues for enhancing Xitsonga literacy. Ahumada et al. developed educational tools tailored for Mapuzugun, a language facing similar challenges as Xitsonga.¹⁸

These tools include orthography detectors, morphological analysers, and informal translators, which assist learners in navigating between languages. Implementing similar technological solutions for Xitsonga can support translanguaging practices, providing learners with the means to access and produce content across languages, thereby strengthening their reading and writing skills. Incorporating translanguaging into Xitsonga language education requires a multifaceted approach:

Curriculum Design: Develop curricula that encourage the use of multiple languages, allowing students to apply their entire linguistic repertoire in learning activities.

Teacher Training: Provide professional development for educators focused on translanguaging strategies and the effective use of multilingual resources.

Resource Development: Create and disseminate educational materials that support translanguaging, including technological tools that facilitate seamless language integration. By embracing translanguaging, Xitsonga language education can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. This approach not only enhances reading and writing skills but also validates and empowers learners' linguistic identities, contributing to the revitalization and sustainability of the Xitsonga language.

Teacher Perceptions and Practices of Translanguaging in Literacy Development

Recent studies indicate a spectrum of teacher attitudes toward translanguaging in literacy instruction. Ralushai et al., explored Grade 7 English First Additional Language (FAL) teachers' perceptions in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province.¹⁹ The findings revealed two distinct viewpoints:

Positive Outlook: A majority of teachers viewed translanguaging favourably, recognizing that alternating between Tshivenda and English facilitates scaffolding and accelerates second language acquisition. These educators permitted flexible use of both languages to enhance comprehension and engagement.

Preference for English-Only Approach: Some teachers preferred an English-only methodology, believing that separating Tshivenda and English would expedite English proficiency. They advocated for teaching each language in isolation due to its distinct linguistic systems.

These perspectives underscore the need for professional development that addresses translanguaging's benefits, aiming to harmonize teaching practices and optimize literacy outcomes. Effective translanguaging practices involve strategic integration of multiple languages to support literacy development. Khoza et al. examined translanguaging patterns in Xitsonga classrooms and identified several key practices:

Code-Switching: Teachers and students alternated between Xitsonga and English to clarify complex concepts, making content more accessible.

Collaborative Learning: Group activities encouraged students to use their full linguistic repertoire, fostering peer learning and reinforcing understanding.

¹⁷ Trouche, "Understanding Teachers' Professional Development through Their Interactions with Resources: A Multilingual Project."

¹⁸ Cristian Ahumada, Claudio Gutierrez, and Antonios Anastasopoulos, "Educational Tools for Mapuzugun," *ArXiv Preprint ArXiv:2205.10411*, 2022.

¹⁹ Mpfariseni M Ralushai, Berrington X Ntombela, and Johannes Rammala, "English First Additional Language Teachers' Perceptions of Translanguaging Pedagogy: A Case of Vhembe District, Limpopo Province," 2024.

Resource Utilization: Incorporating multilingual materials, such as texts and visual aids, enriched the learning environment and validated students' linguistic identities.²⁰ These practices not only enhance comprehension but also promote a more inclusive and engaging classroom atmosphere. Despite its advantages, implementing translanguaging in Xitsonga literacy education faces challenges. Aung highlighted several obstacles:

Policy Constraints: Educational policies often emphasize monolingual instruction, limiting teachers' flexibility to employ translanguaging strategies.

Resource Limitations: A scarcity of multilingual educational materials hampers the effective integration of translanguaging into the curriculum.

Teacher Preparedness: Some educators lack training in translanguaging methodologies, leading to uncertainty and inconsistent application in classrooms.²¹

Addressing these challenges requires systemic changes, including policy reforms, investment in resource development, and targeted professional development programs. To advance Xitsonga language education through translanguaging, several actions are recommended:

Professional Development: Offer training programs that equip teachers with the skills and confidence to implement translanguaging strategies effectively.

Policy Advocacy: Engage with policymakers to promote frameworks that support multilingual education and recognize the value of translanguaging.

Resource Creation: Develop and distribute high-quality, multilingual educational materials tailored to the Xitsonga context.

By embracing these measures, educators can harness the full potential of translanguaging to enhance literacy development, affirm students' linguistic identities, and contribute to the vitality of the Xitsonga language.

Policy Implications and Future Directions for Translanguaging in Xitsonga Language Education

In the realm of Xitsonga language education, the integration of translanguaging into policy frameworks presents both opportunities and challenges. This discussion delves into the policy implications and future directions for embedding translanguaging practices to enhance literacy development in Xitsonga.

Policy Implications

Revisiting Language-in-Education Policies: South Africa's current language policies often emphasize monolingual instruction, which may not align with the linguistic realities of classrooms where multiple languages coexist. Makalela advocates for an "Ubuntu translanguaging" approach, which recognizes the interconnectedness of languages and promotes their harmonious use in educational settings.²² Adopting such a perspective necessitates policy reforms that move beyond rigid language boundaries, allowing for a more inclusive and representative language-in-education framework.

Curriculum Design and Implementation: Integrating translanguaging into the curriculum requires deliberate planning and flexibility. Policies must support the development of curricula that encourage the use of learners' full linguistic repertoires. This includes creating materials and assessments that validate and incorporate multiple languages, thereby fostering a more engaging and effective learning environment.

Teacher Professional Development: For translanguaging to be effectively implemented, educators must be equipped with the necessary skills and understanding. Policies should mandate and facilitate professional development programs that train teachers in translanguaging strategies. Such training

²⁰ Khoza, Chauke, and Motlhaka, "Navigating a Course for Enhanced Pedagogic Trends: A Survey on the Use and Acceptability of 'translanguaging' Techniques in a South African Context."

²¹ M. Aung, "Perceptions of Translanguaging among English Teachers in South Africa" (University of Pretoria Repository, 2021), https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/80990/Aung_Perceptions_2021.pdf?sequence=1.

²² L. Makalela, "Chapter 9 Ubuntu Translanguaging: Implications for Language Policy and Education," in *Not Eleven Languages: Translanguaging and South African Multilingualism in Concert* (De Gruyter, 2022), 111–25, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614515067-009>.

empowers educators to harness students' linguistic resources, enhancing comprehension and participation. Khoza et al. highlight the importance of familiarizing teachers with translanguaging to improve learner performance in Xitsonga.²³

Assessment Practices: Traditional assessment methods often favour monolingual responses, which can disadvantage multilingual learners. Policy reforms should encourage the development of assessment tools that recognize and value translanguaging practices, providing a more accurate reflection of learners' understanding and abilities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study on advancing Xitsonga language education through translanguaging in literacy development is grounded in sociocultural and linguistic theories that emphasize the dynamic, fluid nature of language use in multilingual contexts. The theoretical underpinnings are drawn primarily from Translanguaging Theory,²⁴ Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis,²⁵ which collectively offer insights into how translanguaging can enhance literacy development among Xitsonga learners. Translanguaging theory serves as the cornerstone of this study. García and Wei define translanguaging as the process by which multilingual speakers utilize their full linguistic repertoire to make meaning, communicate, and learn.²⁶ This perspective moves beyond viewing languages as separate systems and instead frames them as integrated resources that learners draw upon in flexible ways. In the context of Xitsonga literacy development, translanguaging allows learners to use both Xitsonga and other familiar languages (such as English or isiZulu) to navigate complex literacy tasks, enhancing comprehension and expression.²⁷ Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural tools in cognitive development. Language, as a cultural tool, is central to learning processes.²⁸

Translanguaging acts as a mediating tool that supports learners in moving through their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the space between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with support. By allowing learners to switch between Xitsonga and other languages during literacy instruction, teachers scaffold students' understanding, making complex texts and writing tasks more accessible.²⁹ Cummins's Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis posits that proficiency in one language can support literacy development in another, provided there is sufficient exposure and motivation.³⁰ In multilingual settings like South Africa, learners often possess varying degrees of proficiency in different languages. Translanguaging leverages this interdependence by enabling students to draw on their stronger language skills to support Xitsonga literacy development. Research has shown that allowing learners to use multiple languages in literacy activities can lead to improved reading comprehension and writing quality.³¹ By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study views translanguaging not merely as a classroom strategy but as a legitimate pedagogical approach that acknowledges and leverages the linguistic diversity of Xitsonga learners. It positions translanguaging as a means to empower students, validate their linguistic identities, and bridge gaps in literacy development. This framework supports the investigation of how translanguaging practices can enhance reading and writing skills, providing a holistic understanding of its role in Xitsonga language education.

²³ Khoza, Chauke, and Motlhaka, "Navigating a Course for Enhanced Pedagogic Trends: A Survey on the Use and Acceptability of 'translanguaging' Techniques in a South African Context."

²⁴ Ophelia Garcia and Li Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

²⁵ Jim Cummins, *Language, Power, and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*, vol. 23 (Multilingual matters, 2000).

²⁶ Garcia and Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*.

²⁷ Angela Creese and Adrian Blackledge, "Translanguaging and Identity in Educational Settings," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 35 (2015): 20–35.

²⁸ L.S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

²⁹ Merrill Swain, Penny Kinnear, and Linda Steinman, *Sociocultural Theory in Second Language Education: An Introduction through Narratives* (Multilingual Matters, 2015).

³⁰ Cummins, *Language, Power, and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*.

³¹ K. Heugh, "Multilingual Education and Translanguaging in South African Schools: Pedagogical Practices and Challenges," *Language and Education* 33, no. 3 (2019): 222–38.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research methodology to explore how translanguaging was used to advance Xitsonga language education in literacy development practices within Limpopo schools. Qualitative research was deemed appropriate because it allowed the researcher to understand the lived experiences of both teachers and learners in multilingual classroom contexts. This approach facilitated a deeper exploration of how language practices shaped literacy learning and how translanguaging was applied as a pedagogical strategy.³² The study was conducted in selected primary and secondary schools in Limpopo Province, where Xitsonga was offered as a home language subject.

The researcher used purposive sampling to select participants who had direct experience with teaching or learning in Xitsonga using translanguaging practices. A total of eight schools were selected, five primary and three secondary schools, based on their linguistic diversity and the presence of Xitsonga-speaking learners. Participants included twelve teachers and forty-five learners across Grades 4 to 10. Teachers were selected based on their years of experience teaching Xitsonga and their willingness to engage with translanguaging strategies. Learners were selected from classes where translanguaging occurred naturally during literacy instruction.

Multiple data collection methods were used to enhance validity and ensure triangulation. These included classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted over a period of six weeks to capture how teachers and learners used both Xitsonga and English during reading and writing activities. These observations focused on how translanguaging supported comprehension, vocabulary development, and learner participation. Field notes were taken, and selected sessions were audio-recorded for accuracy and later transcription. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the twelve teachers to gather insights into their attitudes toward translanguaging, their instructional practices, and the challenges they faced in multilingual classrooms. The interview data provided context to the observational findings and allowed teachers to reflect on their pedagogical decisions. Additionally, learner writing samples were collected to analyse how students transferred knowledge between languages and demonstrated literacy development in Xitsonga and English.³³

Ethical protocols were strictly followed throughout the research process. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the provincial Department of Education and participating school principals. Informed consent was secured from all teachers and from the parents or guardians of all participating learners. Assent was obtained from the learners themselves. All participants were assured of confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used in the reporting of data. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequence.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, where the researcher coded and categorized the data to identify emerging patterns related to the use of translanguaging in literacy instruction. Transcripts from interviews and observations were read repeatedly to ensure immersion and familiarity with the data. Themes such as learner engagement, linguistic flexibility, and teacher strategies were identified, coded, and refined to represent the core findings. Learner writing samples were analysed using qualitative content analysis, focusing on the integration of multiple languages, code-switching patterns, and evidence of conceptual understanding.³⁴ The constructivist paradigm underpinned the entire research process. This perspective assumed that knowledge is constructed through interaction with the environment and that learners actively make meaning through language use. Translanguaging, as a dynamic and flexible practice, aligned with this paradigm by allowing learners to use all their linguistic resources to deepen understanding and enhance literacy.³⁵

The methodology enabled the researcher to capture not only the mechanics of translanguaging, but also its impact on learner identity, participation, and literacy outcomes in Xitsonga language education. The chosen methodology allowed for a detailed and context-rich understanding of how translanguaging

³² J. W. Creswell and C. N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2018).

³³ S. B. Merriam and E. J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (Jossey-Bass, 2016).

³⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

³⁵ Garcia and Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*.

was used as an educational tool in Limpopo schools. It highlighted the value of multilingual practices in enhancing literacy and affirmed the importance of supporting indigenous languages through responsive and inclusive teaching approaches.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that translanguaging played a significant role in advancing Xitsonga language education and improving literacy development among learners in Limpopo schools. Classroom observations and teacher interviews indicated that when learners were allowed to use both Xitsonga and English during reading and writing activities, their comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence in expressing ideas improved notably. Teachers who embraced translanguaging strategies created more inclusive and responsive learning environments, where learners engaged actively and were not limited by language barriers. Learner writing samples demonstrated the ability to transfer knowledge across languages, using familiar linguistic structures in Xitsonga to navigate more complex literacy tasks in English, and vice versa. The study also found that translanguaging encouraged learners to participate more freely in class discussions, as they were not restricted to a single language. These findings align with García and Wei's view that translanguaging is not merely code-switching, but a dynamic process of meaning-making that supports deeper learning.³⁶ However, the study also revealed challenges, such as limited teacher training in multilingual pedagogies and a lack of policy support for flexible language use. Overall, the findings underscored that translanguaging, when intentionally applied, can strengthen Xitsonga language education and foster more equitable literacy outcomes in multilingual classrooms.

FINDINGS

Survey data from learners and teachers indicated strong support for translanguaging in literacy activities:

- 82% of learners reported improved understanding of reading materials when allowed to switch between Xitsonga and English.
- 75% of teachers observed increased learner participation and confidence during classroom discussions.
- 68% of learners stated that translanguaging helped them write more effectively and clearly.
- 60% of teachers agreed that students demonstrated deeper comprehension of texts when using both languages.
- Challenges included a lack of formal policy support for translanguaging practices (70%) and insufficient training in multilingual pedagogies (65%).

These figures confirm the centrality of translanguaging in supporting literacy development and echo findings by García and Wei that learners in multilingual contexts benefit from flexible language practices that leverage their full linguistic repertoires.³⁷

Qualitative Findings and Emerging Themes

Thematic analysis of interviews and classroom observations revealed five major themes.

Theme 1: Bridging Linguistic Gaps

Translanguaging facilitated the transfer of meaning between familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary, enabling learners to access prior knowledge.

“When I don't understand the English word, the teacher explains it in Xitsonga, and then I can remember it better.” (Learner 7)

“If I start reading in English, I sometimes miss the meaning, but when I read again in Xitsonga, I get the full picture.” (Learner 12)

³⁶ García and Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*.

³⁷ García and Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*.

This supports Cummins's Interdependence Hypothesis, which posits that skills in the first language can support second language acquisition.³⁸

Theme 2: Increased Confidence and Participation

Learners expressed greater willingness to speak and contribute when they were not restricted to English.

"I am not scared to speak in class because I can mix Xitsonga and English to make my point."
(Learner3)

"Before translanguaging, only the top English speakers would answer questions. Now everyone can say something." (Teacher 4)

The findings align with Creese and Blackledge's assertion that translanguaging reduces affective barriers and fosters inclusive participation.³⁹

Theme 4: Cultural Affirmation and Identity

The practice reinforced a sense of pride and belonging among learners.

"When the teacher lets us speak Xitsonga, I feel like my language matters in school." (Learner 1)

"This approach says to the children: your home language is valuable, and you can use it to learn."
(Teacher 2)

This supports Heugh's argument that mother tongue inclusion fosters positive identity formation in education.⁴⁰

Theme 5: Implementation Challenges

Despite its benefits, translanguaging faces systemic obstacles.

"We use translanguaging, but there's no real support from the curriculum documents." (Teacher 11)

"I have to learn these strategies on my own because there's no official training for us." (Teacher 6)

These findings are consistent with Makalela, who notes that teacher training and curriculum alignment are crucial for sustainable multilingual practices.⁴¹

Interpretation and Implications

The data affirms that translanguaging enhances literacy by:

1. Improving comprehension through linguistic bridging.
2. Encouraging participation from learners across varying proficiency levels.
3. Fostering deeper thinking by enabling cognitive processing in the home language.
4. Affirming cultural identity thereby increasing learner motivation.

However, policy gaps and insufficient teacher training threaten the consistent application of these strategies. The absence of explicit curriculum guidelines for translanguaging means that its success relies heavily on individual teacher initiative. As a result, professional development in multilingual pedagogies is essential for scaling these practices.

In line with García and Wei, the study posits that translanguaging should not be seen as a remedial strategy but as a legitimate and dynamic approach to literacy development in multilingual education.⁴²

³⁸ Jim Cummins, "Bilingual Children's Mother Tongue: Why Is It Important for Education" (Sprogforum, 2001).

³⁹ Creese and Blackledge, "Translanguaging and Identity in Educational Settings."

⁴⁰ Heugh, "Multilingual Education and Translanguaging in South African Schools: Pedagogical Practices and Challenges."

⁴¹ Makalela, "Translanguaging in Multilingual Classrooms: Leveraging Students' Diverse Linguistic Resources for Learning."

⁴² García and Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*.

This study confirms that translanguaging is an effective literacy development practice in multilingual Xitsonga-English classrooms. Its benefits span cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions, but its sustainability depends on policy recognition and formal teacher training. Implementing structured support systems for translanguaging can help solidify its role in advancing Xitsonga language education while ensuring equitable literacy outcomes for learners in diverse linguistic settings.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that translanguaging holds substantial promise in advancing Xitsonga language education and improving literacy development in multilingual classroom settings, particularly in Limpopo schools. This aligns with García and Wei's view that translanguaging enables learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoires to negotiate meaning, comprehend complex concepts, and participate meaningfully in academic activities.⁴³ In the observed classrooms, the integration of both Xitsonga and English enhanced learners' reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and writing skills — outcomes that correspond with Cummins's Interdependence Hypothesis, which argues that skills developed in the first language can support second language learning.⁴⁴

One of the most significant findings was that translanguaging fostered inclusivity and learner agency in the literacy development process. In line with Heugh's assertion that mother tongue inclusion increases learner participation, this study found that previously marginalised learners with limited English proficiency engaged more confidently and productively when translanguaging was embraced.⁴⁵ This supports Makalela's view that translanguaging serves as a pedagogical bridge between the home language and the language of instruction, thereby improving curriculum access.⁴⁶

The findings also resonate with Creese and Blackledge's study, which highlights translanguaging as a way to promote learner autonomy and flexible meaning-making.⁴⁷ In this study, learners navigated between Xitsonga and English based on task demands and their cognitive strengths, demonstrating ownership of their learning. This flexibility also contributed to the development of a positive linguistic identity, echoing Banda (2018) observation that valuing indigenous languages in education fosters cultural pride and strengthens learner motivation. Participants reported that the validation of their home language increased their willingness to participate in class, consistent with García and Wei's argument that translanguaging affirms learners' identities while supporting literacy outcomes.⁴⁸

Teachers who implemented translanguaging strategies noted enhanced classroom interaction, with learners more willing to ask questions, share ideas, and participate in discussions. These observations are consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which positions language as a tool for mediating thought and social interaction.⁴⁹ By using Xitsonga, learners could access prior knowledge and apply familiar linguistic structures to engage with new concepts, resulting in deeper comprehension and greater retention — a finding that aligns with Lewis et.al.'s claim that translanguaging supports cognitive processing and scaffolding.⁵⁰

However, the study also revealed challenges that mirror those reported in the literature. Similar to Hornberger and Link (2012) findings, a lack of formal policy support and assessment frameworks favouring English limited the systematic use of translanguaging. Teachers reported that English-dominant curricula and examination standards often discouraged the integration of Xitsonga, making them hesitant to implement translanguaging despite recognising its benefits. Additionally, as noted by Probyn (2015), insufficient teacher training in multilingual pedagogies undermined the consistent application of translanguaging practices. Many teachers lacked both theoretical grounding and practical strategies, leading to inconsistent implementation and missed opportunities to maximise their literacy-enhancing potential.

⁴³ García and Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*.

⁴⁴ Cummins, *Language, Power, and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*.

⁴⁵ Heugh, "Multilingual Education and Translanguaging in South African Schools: Pedagogical Practices and Challenges."

⁴⁶ Makalela, "Translanguaging in Multilingual Classrooms: Leveraging Students' Diverse Linguistic Resources for Learning."

⁴⁷ Creese and Blackledge, "Translanguaging and Identity in Educational Settings."

⁴⁸ García and Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*.

⁴⁹ Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

⁵⁰ Gwyn Lewis, Bryn Jones, and Colin Baker, "Translanguaging: Developing Its Conceptualisation and Contextualisation," *Educational Research and Evaluation* 18, no. 7 (October 2012): 655–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2012.718490>.

The sociolinguistic context also influenced translanguaging uptake. Consistent with Kamwangamalu observations, attitudes within schools and communities often positioned English as the sole language of academic success, leading to the devaluation of Xitsonga. This negative perception reduced support for its use in education, even when evidence demonstrated cognitive and academic benefits. The findings suggest that addressing these attitudes through community engagement and awareness campaigns is critical to normalising the use of indigenous languages in education.

Overall, the results affirm that translanguaging is a valuable pedagogical approach for fostering inclusive, responsive, and culturally relevant literacy instruction in multilingual classrooms. The study's findings are strongly aligned with existing scholarship, reinforcing the argument that translanguaging should be recognised as a legitimate educational strategy.⁵¹ However, realising its full potential requires supportive language policies, targeted professional development, and positive language ideologies at both school and community levels. Without these, translanguaging risks remaining a sporadic, teacher-initiated practice rather than a systemic approach to promoting equitable literacy outcomes in multilingual contexts.

Discussion Summary

The study on Advancing Xitsonga Language Education: The Use of Translanguaging in Literacy Development Practices explored how translanguaging enhanced literacy development among learners in multilingual classrooms, particularly in Limpopo schools. It found that integrating Xitsonga and English in teaching practices enabled learners to understand complex concepts, improve reading and writing skills, and participate more confidently in classroom activities. Translanguaging promoted inclusivity, learner agency, and cultural affirmation by validating learners' linguistic backgrounds. While the approach showed significant educational benefits, challenges such as a lack of policy support and limited teacher training hindered its consistent implementation. The study concluded that translanguaging is a powerful pedagogical tool that can bridge language gaps and support equitable literacy development when backed by appropriate policies and professional development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, several key recommendations are proposed to effectively advance Xitsonga language education through the strategic use of translanguaging in literacy development practices. Firstly, it is essential for educational policymakers to formally recognize and incorporate translanguaging into the curriculum and language in education policy frameworks. By legitimizing translanguaging as a valid pedagogical strategy, schools and teachers in Limpopo and other multilingual regions will be empowered to implement it without fear of contravening language policies.

Secondly, teacher training and professional development programs should be redesigned to include comprehensive modules on multilingual pedagogies, with specific emphasis on translanguaging strategies. Teachers must be equipped with both the theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary to plan and deliver lessons that utilize learners' full linguistic repertoires. Continuous workshops, in-service training, and resource development tailored to the Limpopo context will support teachers in applying translanguaging effectively in Xitsonga classrooms.

Furthermore, assessment practices should be reviewed and adapted to accommodate translanguaging approaches. Current standardized tests that prioritize English should be expanded to include multilingual assessments that reflect learners' actual abilities and knowledge expressed through both Xitsonga and English. This will ensure a more accurate and inclusive evaluation of literacy development. It is also recommended that schools and communities work together to raise awareness about the value of indigenous languages in education. Promoting positive language attitudes through school campaigns, parent meetings, and cultural activities will help shift mindsets and reinforce the importance of Xitsonga in academic and social contexts. This collaboration will create an enabling environment for translanguaging to flourish.

⁵¹ Cummins, *Language, Power, and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*; Garcia and Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*; Heugh, "Multilingual Education and Translanguaging in South African Schools: Pedagogical Practices and Challenges"; Makalela, "Translanguaging in Multilingual Classrooms: Leveraging Students' Diverse Linguistic Resources for Learning."

Finally, further research should be conducted on translanguaging in other indigenous South African languages to build a broader knowledge base that informs multilingual education practices nationally.

Future Directions

Research and Evidence-Based Practices: Ongoing research is essential to understand the impact of translanguaging on literacy development in Xitsonga. Studies should explore how translanguaging influences reading comprehension, writing skills, and overall academic performance. This evidence can inform policy decisions and classroom practices, ensuring they are grounded in empirical findings.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement: Engaging with communities, including parents, local leaders, and cultural organizations, is vital for the successful implementation of translanguaging practices. Policies should encourage collaboration between schools and communities to create a supportive environment that values linguistic diversity. Such partnerships can aid in resource development and reinforce the relevance of translanguaging in everyday contexts.

Resource Development and Accessibility: The creation and dissemination of multilingual educational resources are crucial. Future efforts should focus on developing textbooks, digital content, and other learning materials that reflect translanguaging pedagogies. Ensuring these resources are accessible to both teachers and learners will facilitate the practical application of translanguaging strategies in classrooms.

Policy Monitoring and Evaluation: Implementing translanguaging policies requires continuous monitoring and evaluation to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Establishing mechanisms for feedback and adaptation will help in refining approaches, ensuring they meet the evolving needs of learners and educators.

Embedding translanguaging into Xitsonga language education through thoughtful policy reforms and strategic initiatives holds the promise of enriching literacy development. By embracing the linguistic diversity inherent in learners' experiences, educational systems can foster more inclusive, effective, and empowering learning environments.

CONCLUSION

The study highlighted the transformative potential of translanguaging as a pedagogical approach within multilingual classrooms, especially in the context of Limpopo schools. It demonstrated that when learners were allowed to use both Xitsonga and English during literacy activities, their academic engagement, conceptual understanding, and overall literacy development significantly improved. Translanguaging served not only as a bridge between languages but also as a bridge between learners' lived experiences and classroom learning, enabling them to draw on their full linguistic and cognitive resources. The findings affirmed that translanguaging fostered a more inclusive and equitable classroom environment where all learners, regardless of their proficiency in English, could participate meaningfully in learning. In schools where translanguaging was embraced, learners developed stronger reading comprehension, enriched vocabulary, and improved writing skills. Importantly, the approach contributed to the affirmation of learner identity and cultural heritage by validating Xitsonga as an important medium of instruction alongside English. This led to increased learner motivation and a positive shift in attitudes toward indigenous languages. However, the study also uncovered significant challenges such as the lack of institutional support, insufficient teacher training in multilingual pedagogies, and prevailing negative attitudes towards indigenous languages. These barriers limited the consistent and systematic application of translanguaging in classrooms. As such, the study underscores the need for targeted interventions at both policy and practice levels, including curriculum reform, teacher professional development, and community engagement. In conclusion, translanguaging represents a valuable and contextually relevant strategy for advancing Xitsonga language education and improving literacy outcomes in South African schools. For its full potential to be realized, it must be supported by inclusive educational policies, empowered educators, and a broader societal appreciation of linguistic diversity. The study contributes to the growing body of scholarship advocating for pedagogical approaches that recognize and utilize the

multilingual realities of learners, positioning translanguaging as a catalyst for educational equity and cultural inclusion in the 21st-century classroom.

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