



# A systematic review of key challenges in implementing Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education in South African Schools

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## ABSTRACT

South Africa remains one of the few countries where learners are not fully educated in their mother tongue. To address this gap, the government introduced Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTBBE), endorsed through Circular 18 of 2024, which mandates its phased implementation from 2025 starting in Grade 4. The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities educators face in implementing MTBBE in South African classrooms. A systematic literature review (SLR) was employed to collect, evaluate, and synthesize existing studies on MTBBE within the South Africa context, focusing on policy, practice, and classroom experiences. The findings reveal that while MTBBE promises to uplift indigenous languages and enhance learning outcomes, its implementation is constrained by inadequate teacher preparation, limited teaching resources, insufficient institutional and policy support, and curriculum development gaps. These systemic barriers undermine the government's efforts to ensure equitable multilingual education. The discussion highlights that although MTBBE aligns with the Language in Education Policy (LiEP), which clearly indicates that all languages should receive equal footing in schools, there is a mismatch between policy intentions and classroom realities. Based on the evidence, this study recommends targeted teacher training in bi-/multilingual pedagogy, the development of contextually relevant learning materials, stronger policy monitoring mechanisms, and increased collaboration between schools, communities, and higher education institutions. The study contributes to scholarship by bridging the gap between theoretical advocacy for MTBBE and its practical challenges, offering a framework for sustainable implementation that can strengthen multilingual education in South Africa and beyond.

**Keywords:** Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTBBE)

## INTRODUCTION

In his State of the Nation Address (SONA) on 6 February 2025, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the government's commitment to implementing Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTBBE) from Grade 4 onward to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes.<sup>1</sup> MTBBE is an instructional approach that integrates learners' home languages alongside a second language, typically English, to facilitate

<sup>1</sup> Myolisi Gophe, "A Step towards Multilingualism and Equity in South African Education," UCT News, 2025, <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2025-02-17-a-step-towards-multilingualism-and-equity-in-south-african-education>.

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**PUBLICATION HISTORY** - Received : 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2025 | Accepted: 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2025 | Published: 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2026.

**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE** – Ngwenya, Emmanuel Themba, and Siphesihle Pearl Ngubane. "A Systematic Review of Key Challenges in Implementing Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education in South African Schools." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.2 (2026): 508 - 520. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2026727>

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conceptual understanding and academic achievement. This bilingual strategy promotes educational equity by enabling learners to grasp complex subjects such as mathematics, science, and social studies in familiar linguistic contexts, while simultaneously developing proficiency in English.<sup>2</sup>

Although MTBBE holds considerable promise for enhancing comprehension and preserving linguistic diversity, its implementation presents significant challenges, particularly for educators in linguistically diverse classrooms. A key challenge is language proficiency; lack of resources in indigenous languages; inadequate workshops, and many educators not fully fluent in the local languages that they are expected to teach in, which undermines their confidence and limits their ability to deliver content effectively.<sup>3</sup> As a result, these limitations affect educators' capacity to develop and adapt instructional materials in learners' mother tongue.

The challenges educators face in implementing MTBBE are multifaceted, encompassing language limitations, insufficient resources, and a lack of institutional and communal support.<sup>4</sup> Addressing these issues is essential for the sustainable and effective adoption of MTBBE, which not only enhances learning outcomes but also preserves South Africa's rich linguistic and cultural heritage.<sup>5</sup> As a result, this study systematically examines these challenges of MTBBE implementation in pilot projects and contributes to the development of targeted support strategies for educators engaged in implementing MTBBE. This study aims to elucidate and reconcile this disparity between policy ambitions and classroom realities by providing a comprehensive review of existing literature, identifying these challenges, and suggesting feasible, multifaceted strategies for more effective implementation. The formulation of the review was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the key challenges faced by educators in implementing MTBBE in SA schools? In multilingual classrooms, as identified in the literature?
- How do institutional support, education policies, and resource availability impact the implementation of MTBBE?
- What is the public attitude on implementing MTBBE in SA?

## METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a detailed and methodological approach used to collect, assess, and synthesize existing research on a specific subject. It provides complete coverage by pinpointing and incorporating all pertinent studies, giving a comprehensive summary of current research.<sup>6</sup>

A comprehensive literature review on the obstacles linked to implementing MTBBE was conducted using a variety of sources and search techniques. The table below outlines the platforms that were utilized, the specific strategies applied for each search, and the key factors considered during the search effort.

<sup>2</sup> Wanga Gambushe, "Stakeholder Perspectives on the Integration of African Languages in Higher Education Learning: A South African Case Study," *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura* 29, no. 3 (2024).

<sup>3</sup> Thuan Phan Kim, "Reviewing the Significance of Practice in Learning English as a Second Language: Challenges, Impacts, and Strategies," *Journal of Knowledge Learning and Science Technology ISSN: 2959-6386 (Online)* 2, no. 2 (2023): 62–67; Matefu L Mabela and Thabo Ditsele, "Exploring Intellectualisation of South African Indigenous Languages for Academic Purposes," *Literator-Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies* 45, no. 1 (2024): 1980.

<sup>4</sup> N. Spaul and ELIZABETH Pretorius, "Coming or Going? The Prioritisation of Early Grade Reading in South Africa," *Early Grade Reading in South Africa*, 2022, 253.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Ramadiro, "Implementing Multilingual Teacher Education: Reflections on the University of Fort Hare's Bi/Multilingual Bachelor of Education Degree Programme," *Education as Change* 26, no. 1 (2022): 1–21.

<sup>6</sup> Derek Cabrera and Laura L Cabrera, "The Steps to Doing a Systems Literature Review (SLR)," *Journal of Systems Thinking Preprints*, 2023.

**Table 1: Data coding and quality criteria**

Source Type	Database/Platform	Search Strategy	Key Considerations
Online Search Engines	Google, Google Scholar	Advanced search filters, and keywords such as "Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education challenges," "MTBBE barriers," "bilingual education obstacles."	Ensure relevance by filtering recent and peer-reviewed articles.
Academic Databases	EBSCOhost, JSTOR, Sabinet, ProQuest	Apply specific search terms and subject filters (e.g., "Education," "Linguistics," "Policy Studies"). Utilize citation tracking.	Check access restrictions and institutional subscriptions.
Institutional Repositories	ResearchGate, Academia.edu, University Libraries	Look for Theses, dissertations, and working papers focusing on MTBBE challenges.	Verify credibility and peer-reviewed status.
Government & NGO Reports	UNESCO, Local Education Departments	Search for policy papers, evaluation reports, and international studies on MTBBE implementation.	Assess for bias and policy-driven perspectives.
Conference Proceedings	ERIC, Conference Websites	Searched for recent conference papers on bilingual education challenges.	May contain cutting-edge but non-peer-reviewed research.
Multilingual Sources	Local language research journals, Non-English Google Scholar	Used translation tools to access studies in different languages.	Evaluate accuracy and context in translated materials.

The diverse range of sources and tailored search strategies helped ensure a balanced and in-depth understanding of the topic. Emphasis was placed on accessing recent, credible, and contextually relevant literature, particularly from peer-reviewed academic journals, policy reports, and institutional publications. This multifaceted approach strengthened the foundation for identifying recurring themes, gaps in the literature, and practical insights into the implementation challenges of MTBBE in the SA classroom.

SLR focused on the Criterion and Inclusion Criteria concerning the difficulties of implementing MTBBE in classroom settings by educators. To maintain both relevance and thoroughness during the literature selection, defined inclusion and exclusion criteria were utilized. The detailed guidelines outlined below directed the source screening and evaluation for the study.

**Table 2: Data Screening**

Criterion	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<b>Publication Type</b>	Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference papers, and official reports	Non-peer-reviewed sources, blog posts, and opinion articles
<b>Language</b>	Studies published in English or the target mother tongue languages	Studies in languages without accessible translations

<b>Study Population</b>	Studies involving in-service educators implementing MTBBE	Studies focusing on policy makers or general education without teacher-specific insights
<b>Time Frame</b>	Publications from the last 10 years (From 2015 –present)	Studies published before the set time frame
<b>Geographical Scope</b>	Studies focusing on countries implementing MTBBE policies	Studies unrelated to MTBBE or implemented in non-bilingual settings
<b>Challenges Addressed</b>	Research discussing challenges such as lack of resources, teacher preparedness, curriculum constraints, parental attitudes, and student adaptation	Studies not discussing the obstacles faced by teachers in MTBBE implementation.
<b>Methodology</b>	Qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods studies analyzing MTBBE implementation	Studies without empirical data or theoretical papers without practical application
<b>Education Level</b>	Studies focusing on early childhood, primary, and secondary education settings	Studies exclusively focused on higher education institutions.
<b>Policy and Framework Alignment</b>	Studies aligning with national language policies and bilingual education frameworks	Studies that do not address policy implications for MTBBE

Applying these criteria ensured that the reviewed literature was focused, high-quality, and directly relevant to the research objectives. By narrowing the scope to studies involving educators and MTBBE-specific challenges within appropriate educational contexts and timeframes, the selection process helped maintain consistency and academic rigor throughout the review. Table 3 indicates some of the main themes on the challenges highlighted in the literature associated with MTBBE implementation in SA schools.

**Table 3: Challenges to MTBBE implementation**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Key findings</b>
1. Educator Training and Capacity	Lack of formal MTBBE training	Cekiso et al., 2023; Khanyile & Awung, 2023; Mini & Botha, 2020; Mwiinga, 2024	Most educators lacked theoretical and practical training in MTBBE, leading to weak lesson planning, ineffective teaching strategies, and poor assessment.
	Low educator confidence and resistance	Tonio & Ella, 2019; Bretuo, 2021; Gambushe, 2015	Educators often felt unprepared and overwhelmed with implementing MTBBE, which reduced their willingness to adopt MTBBE methodologies.
	Inadequate bilingual proficiency	Singh, 2025; Nieto Moreno de Diezmas & Fernández Barrera, 2021	Educators were not proficient in both their mother tongue and English, impacting instructional quality.

2. Financial and Policy Constraints	Insufficient government funding	Kafu, 2018; Abiyo, 2017; Qazi, 2023	MTBBE programs were underfunded compared to national language education, often relying on donors.
	Lack of professional incentives	Monje et al., 2021; Amanti, 2019	Educators did not have resources and professional advancement opportunities.
	System-level underinvestment	Ramadiro, 2022; Sheik et al., 2024	Systemic neglect led to poor implementation of infrastructure and a lack of sustainability for MTBBE programs.
3. Instructional Materials	Scarcity of mother tongue materials	Leighton, 2022; Malindi et al., 2023; Gqontshi, 2019	Educators lacked access to textbooks, visual aids and standardized tests in learners' home languages.
	Low-quality and inconsistent materials	Chabata, 2023; Mahapatra & Anderson, 2023	Materials available were poorly translated and inconsistent, leading to fragmented learning experiences.
	Production and distribution challenges	Crawford & Marin, 2021; Babazade, 2024; Escarda et al., 2024	Limited publishing infrastructure and logistical hurdles delayed the development and dissemination of resources.
4. Curriculum and Pedagogy	Improvisation and code-switching	Ramadiro, 2022; Malindi et al., 2023	Educators often switch between languages without a pedagogical structure, which confuses learners and disrupts language development.
	Unclear pedagogical expectations	Saneka & de Witt, 2019; Ngaka, 2021	Educators lacked clear guidelines and models for effective MTBBE implementation.
	Limited transition strategies	Tonio & Ella, 2019; Singh, 2025	Schools struggle to guide learners from mother tongue instruction to English or other national languages.
5. Cultural and Contextual Relevance	Lack of culturally responsive content	Parker, 2022; Merino & Metila, 2024; Gibney et al., 2021	Materials did not reflect learners' realities, limiting engagement and identity affirmation.
	Linguistic diversity and dialects	Hemchayart, 2024; Chabata, 2023	Developing resources for multiple languages/dialects is expensive and complex, especially without standardized orthographies.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Challenges associated with implementing MTBBE in SA

Educators face several challenges in effectively implementing MTBBE, many of which originate from inadequate training, limited resources, and a general lack of institutional support.<sup>7</sup> These systematic issues create significant barriers to the successful implementation of MTBBE, leaving educators ill-equipped to meet the diverse needs of bilingual learners. Kafu notes that the implementation of MTBBE on a large scale faces significant financial barriers, primarily due to the high costs associated with teacher training, curriculum development, and resource production, since the government prioritizes national and global languages in education, leaving MTBBE programs underfunded and reliant on external donors, making sustainability a challenge.<sup>8</sup>

A major concern is the shortage of qualified teachers who possess both linguistic proficiency in the mother tongue and the second language, as well as the pedagogical skills necessary for bilingual instruction.<sup>9</sup> Studies indicate that educators have not received formal training in MTBBE methodologies, which makes it challenging for them to design effective lesson plans, develop appropriate instructional strategies, and implement assessment tools that support learners navigating two languages simultaneously.<sup>10</sup> This gap in teacher preparation on MTBBE undermines the quality and consistency of instruction in using indigenous languages simultaneously with English across SA schools.

One of the most significant consequences of limited funding is the inadequate training of teachers in bilingual instruction. Many educators enter the classroom without the pedagogical tools or linguistic proficiency needed to deliver MTBBE effectively. As a result, teaching methods may become inconsistent or ineffective, which undermines the goals of the program. Furthermore, the absence of professional development opportunities leads to low teacher confidence and increased resistance to adopting MTBBE approaches.<sup>11</sup>

The lack of comprehensive teacher training programs significantly impacts the success of MTBBE initiatives.<sup>12</sup> Without adequate support, teachers might not receive the essential training for delivering bilingual instruction, because when teachers do not receive specialized training in bilingual education, they may feel unprepared and lack confidence in using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction.<sup>13</sup> This can lead to ineffective teaching practices, inconsistencies in language use, and difficulties in transitioning students from mother tongue instruction to a national or second language.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, teachers who do not receive adequate professional development may resist MTBBE due to concerns about increased workload, unclear pedagogical expectations, and limited career incentives.<sup>15</sup> Without continuous training, mentoring, and institutional support, the successful implementation of

<sup>7</sup> Ayub Sheik et al., *Future-Proofing STEAME Education in South Africa* (AOSIS, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> H. B. Kafu, "Challenges in Teaching IsiXhosa Home Language in Rural Eastern Cape Secondary Schools" (University of South Africa, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Akhil Kumar Singh, "From Policy to Practice: Challenges and Pathway for Advancing Multilingual Education through India's National Education Policy 2020," *Policy Futures in Education* 23, no. 4 (2025): 746–65.

<sup>10</sup> Buyiswa M Mini and Christoffel R Botha, "Eastern Cape's Language-in-Education Policy Implementation Initiative for Bilingual Education: A Historical and Onion Metaphor Conceptualisation," *South African Journal of African Languages* 40, no. 2 (2020): 139–47; C. Mwiinga, "Analysis of the Use of Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Strategies by Teachers in Lower Primary Grades in Chongwe Rural District" (The University of Zambia, 2024); Madoda Cekiso, Thenjiwe Meyiwa, and Mashudu Mashige, "Foundation Phase Teachers' Experiences with Instruction in the Mother Tongue in the Eastern Cape," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 9, no. 1 (November 25, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v9i1.658>; Khanyile Snenhlanhla and Awung Felix, "Challenges of Mother-Tongue Education in IsiZulu: A Case Study of Selected Schools in UThungulu District of KwaZulu-Natal," *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2023): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v5i1.1069>.

<sup>11</sup> Priscilla Bretuo, "Using Language to Improve Learning: Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on the Implementation of Bilingual Education in Ghana," *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 34, no. 3 (2021): 257–72.

<sup>12</sup> Willy Ngaka, "The Role of Communities in Uganda's Mother Tongue-Based Education: Perspectives from a Literacy Learning Enhancement Project in Arua District," *Applied Linguistics Review* 12, no. 4 (2021): 545–63.

<sup>13</sup> J Tonio and J Ella, "Pre-Service Teachers' Attitudes towards the Use of Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction," *Asian EFL* 21, no. 2.3 (2019): 231–53.

<sup>14</sup> Nora E Saneka and Marike de Witt, "Barriers and Bridges between Mother Tongue and English as a Second Language in Young Children," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–8.

<sup>15</sup> W. Gambushe, "Implementation of Multilingualism in South African Higher Education: Exploring the Use of IsiXhosa in Teaching and Learning at Rhodes University" (Rhodes University, 2015).

MTBBE remains a challenge, ultimately affecting student learning outcomes and the long-term sustainability of the program.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, recruiting and training teachers proficient in both the mother tongue and second language demands continuous investment in professional development programs, which many education systems struggle to afford.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to training, underfunding discourages educators participation by failing to provide adequate incentives and support. Funding shortages severely impact critical aspects of MTBBE implementation, hindering progress at both systemic and classroom levels.<sup>18</sup> Classroom resources such as technology, libraries, and assessment tools are often unavailable, further reducing the effectiveness of MTBBE programs.<sup>19</sup> When financial support is lacking, education departments struggle to sustain the infrastructure and support systems necessary for effective bilingual education.<sup>20</sup> Teachers often face heavier workloads when tasked with developing bilingual materials or translating content without institutional backing.<sup>21</sup> This added burden, combined with a lack of financial recognition or career advancement opportunities, can result in low morale and disengagement. Ultimately, the success of MTBBE is compromised when educators are unsupported, and resources are insufficient to meet the demands of the program.<sup>22</sup>

Compounding these difficulties is the lack of adequate learning materials in indigenous languages. Educators often face classrooms where there are no suitable textbooks, visual aids, or standardized assessment tools available in the mother tongue. This scarcity forces them to improvise or translate content on their own, which is time-consuming and often leads to inconsistencies in content delivery. Without reliable resources, educators struggle to create structured and engaging learning environments that support meaningful bilingual education.<sup>23</sup>

This challenge is particularly acute in under-resourced schools, where educators are often expected to create their own instructional materials to support teaching and learning. While this approach is intended to encourage innovation and contextual relevance, it is both time-consuming and demanding. Many educators lack the necessary training and linguistic expertise to develop high-quality materials in indigenous languages, especially for content subjects like mathematics and science. As a result, instructional quality is frequently compromised, further exacerbating educational inequalities.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, the lack of appropriate teaching resources, such as textbooks, visual aids, and digital tools in indigenous languages, continues to hinder effective instruction for educators. These resources are critical for facilitating comprehension and engagement in the classroom, especially when using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Without adequate support materials, teachers struggle to convey subject content effectively, which undermines the goals of mother tongue-based bilingual education.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ramadiro, “Implementing Multilingual Teacher Education: Reflections on the University of Fort Hare’s Bi/Multilingual Bachelor of Education Degree Programme.”

<sup>17</sup> Ester Luisa Nieto Moreno de Diezmas and Alicia Fernández Barrera, “Main Challenges of EMI at the UCLM: Teachers’ Perceptions on Language Proficiency, Training and Incentives,” 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer D Monje et al., “‘Starting Where the Children Are’: Process Evaluation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Program Implementation,” *Research Paper Series (Philippine Institute for Development Studies)*, no. 2 (2021): I–81.

<sup>19</sup> Ngaka, “The Role of Communities in Uganda’s Mother Tongue-Based Education: Perspectives from a Literacy Learning Enhancement Project in Arua District.”

<sup>20</sup> Seher Qazi, “Inadequate Support for Bilingual/ELL Teachers in Addressing Language Barriers,” 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Cathy Amanti, “The (Invisible) Work of Dual Language Bilingual Education Teachers,” *Bilingual Research Journal* 42, no. 4 (2019): 455–70.

<sup>22</sup> Brian A Collins and Carla España, “Sustaining and Developing Teachers’ Dynamic Bilingualism in a Re-Designed Bilingual Teacher Preparation Program,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Zwelivumile Malindi, Clever Ndebele, and Berington Zanoxolo Gobingca, “Examining Teachers’ Views on the Adoption of Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education in Mathematics Teaching and Learning: A South African Context,” *South African Journal of Education* 43, no. si2 (2023): S1–12.

<sup>24</sup> Malindi, Ndebele, and Gobingca, “Examining Teachers’ Views on the Adoption of Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education in Mathematics Teaching and Learning: A South African Context”; Ramadiro, “Implementing Multilingual Teacher Education: Reflections on the University of Fort Hare’s Bi/Multilingual Bachelor of Education Degree Programme.”

<sup>25</sup> U. Gqontshi, “Learning Dynamics in the 21st Century: Challenges of an under-Resourced High School in Rural South Africa” (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 2019).

Materials in mother tongue languages remain in short supply.<sup>26</sup> These challenges emphasize the need for more robust policy structures, sufficient funding, and institutional backing to ensure the effective integration of MTBBE into mainstream educational systems.<sup>27</sup> Since the lack of instructional materials plays a crucial role in the success of MTBBE implementation. When well-developed textbooks, teacher guides, and supplementary learning resources in the mother tongue are missing, teachers are forced to improvise. Many resort to code-switching or default to national or dominant languages, which creates inconsistency in instruction and weakens the intended benefits of mother tongue education.<sup>28</sup> This inconsistency can lead to confusion among students, making it difficult for them to develop strong language foundations in either language.

Developing learning materials in multiple mother tongues requires extensive research, linguistic standardization, and production, which can be costly, especially in multilingual regions.<sup>29</sup> Escarda, et al., notes that developing quality learning materials in MTBBE faces several obstacles, primarily due to the lack of written resources in many local languages,<sup>30</sup> insufficient funding, and limited expertise in curriculum development (Many indigenous or minority languages have no standardized orthography, making it difficult to create consistent and high-quality educational materials.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, even when written forms exist, there is often a shortage of skilled writers, translators, and educators who can develop textbooks, storybooks, and teaching aids in these languages. Financial constraints further hinder material production, as publishing in multiple mother tongues can be expensive, especially in multilingual regions where different dialects must be accommodated.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, logistical challenges such as printing, distribution, and accessibility in remote areas exacerbate the problem, leaving many schools without adequate instructional resources.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the absence of engaging and culturally relevant learning materials can significantly reduce student motivation and participation. Without content that reflects their lived experiences and linguistic background, students may struggle to connect with the curriculum, which negatively impacts literacy development and overall academic achievement,<sup>34</sup> and lack of financial resources hinders the creation of high-quality, culturally relevant textbooks, teacher guides, and supplementary materials, forcing educators to rely on poorly adapted or non-existent instructional aids.<sup>35</sup> To address these challenges, it is essential to invest in the research, development, and distribution of high-quality, localized instructional materials. Such resources not only support teachers in delivering effective instruction but also empower learners by validating their cultural and linguistic identities within the educational system.<sup>36</sup>

### **Institutional support and education policies**

Government bodies and educational institutions crucially influence the success or failure of MTBBE. A lack of political determination and governmental commitment frequently leads to insufficient funding,

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Leighton, "Mother Tongue Reading Materials as a Bridge to Literacy," *Economics of Education Review* 91 (2022): 102312.

<sup>27</sup> Amanda Siegrühn and Julie Grant, "Locating Spaces for San Mother-Tongue Education in the South African Education Framework," in *Rethinking Khoen and San Indigeneity, Language and Culture in Southern Africa* (Routledge, 2022), 181–98.

<sup>28</sup> G Edzordzi Agbozo and Elvis ResCue, "Educational Language Policy in an African Country: Making a Place for Code-Switching/Translanguaging," *Applied Linguistics Review* 12, no. 4 (2021): 503–22.

<sup>29</sup> Worawan Hemchayart, "Guidelines for Organizing Bi-Multilingual Learning Experiences Using the Mother Tongue-Based in Early Childhood Development Centers within Diverse Social Contexts.," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education* 18, no. 2 (2024).

<sup>30</sup> G Escarda et al., "Exploring English Teachers' Experiences on Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)," *International Multidisciplinary Journal of Research for Innovation, Sustainability, and Excellence (IMJRISSE)* 1, no. 3 (2024): 1–10.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Crawford and Sergio Venegas Marin, "Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning. A World Bank Policy Approach Paper.," *World Bank*, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Emmanuel Chabata, "Reflections on the Development of Corpora for Zimbabwe's Understudied Languages," *Studies in African Linguistics* 52, no. Supplement. 13 (2023): 317–26.

<sup>33</sup> Yasin Babazade, "Digital Language Trends: How Technology Is Shaping Multilingualism," *Acta Globalis Humanitatis Et Linguarum* 1, no. 1 (2024): 60–70.

<sup>34</sup> Kimberly N Parker, *Literacy Is Liberation: Working toward Justice through Culturally Relevant Teaching* (AScD, 2022).

<sup>35</sup> T D Gibney et al., "Addressing the Bilingual Teacher Shortage. CCNetwork," 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Phoebe Maria Blanca S Merino and Romylyn A Metila, "Localizing for Learning: A Designed Teacher Training Program and Its Developed Localized Materials for Mother Tongue Education," *Language and Education* 38, no. 6 (2024): 1080–97.

inadequate teacher training, and poor allocation of resources. Sometimes, policymakers regard MTBBE as a lesser priority compared to other educational projects, causing delays or erratic implementation.<sup>37</sup> The implementation of MTBBE in diverse educational environments encounters various policy and execution barriers. One of the main obstacles is the absence of clear and consistent language policies.<sup>38</sup> In numerous countries, including SA education policies have failed to explicitly endorse MTBBE, until recently, although the pilot project of MTBBE implementation revealed several challenges which including inconsistency, and in some areas disorganized implementation. Additionally, some revealed tensions between national and regional language policies add further complications.<sup>39</sup> While some regions promote the use of local languages in early education, national policies often prioritize more dominant local languages, restricting the scope of MTBBE initiatives,<sup>40</sup> resulting in the exclusion of other non-dominant local languages.

### Public Attitude on MTBBE Implementation

Parental and community attitudes play a crucial role in determining the success of MTBBE programs, as their support or resistance directly affects enrolment, implementation, and sustainability.<sup>41</sup> This perception often stems from concerns that MTBBE may limit access to higher education and employment, making them reluctant to support the initiative.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, some communities associate the use of indigenous languages in education with lower social status or backwardness, further discouraging participation.<sup>43</sup> Conversely, in regions where communities recognize the value of cultural preservation and the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, there is greater acceptance and advocacy for MTBBE.<sup>44</sup>

Several sociocultural factors significantly influence the adoption and success of MTBBE in different regions. In societies where the mother tongue is regarded as a core element of cultural identity, there is generally stronger support for MTBBE initiatives. Communities that take pride in their linguistic heritage are more likely to perceive mother tongue instruction not only as an educational strategy but also as a means of preserving and affirming their cultural values.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to cultural identification, the presence of active language revitalization movements and strong local leadership plays a crucial role in advancing MTBBE. Regions where community-based organizations and indigenous education advocates are active tend to experience higher levels of awareness and engagement around the benefits of using the mother tongue in education.<sup>46</sup> These grassroots efforts often contribute to more effective implementation by fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment within the community.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Mabela and Ditsele, "Exploring Intellectualisation of South African Indigenous Languages for Academic Purposes."

<sup>38</sup> Buyiswa M Mini and Rudolph Botha, "Attitudes towards IsiXhosa-in-Education in the Eastern Cape: Advocacy for Increased Informedness about Benefits of Mother-tongue-Based Bilingual Education and Relevant Legislative Provisions for It.," *Journal for Language Teaching* 52, no. 1 (2018): 24–44.

<sup>39</sup> Mini and Botha, "Eastern Cape's Language-in-Education Policy Implementation Initiative for Bilingual Education: A Historical and Onion Metaphor Conceptualisation."

<sup>40</sup> Michael M Kretzer and Everlyn Oluoch-Suleh, "(Hidden) Potentials for African Languages in Curriculum Reforms: Examples from Kenya and South Africa," *SN Social Sciences* 2, no. 8 (2022): 154.

<sup>41</sup> Kretzer and Oluoch-Suleh, "(Hidden) Potentials for African Languages in Curriculum Reforms: Examples from Kenya and South Africa."

<sup>42</sup> Zhongyan Wan and Xuesong Gao, "'Home Away from Home': Understanding Chinese Parents' Ideological Beliefs and Involvement in International School Students' Language Learning," *Current Issues in Language Planning* 22, no. 5 (2021): 495–515.

<sup>43</sup> Abida Kosar and Abdul Qadir Khan, "Preserving Linguistic Diversity: Uncovering Teachers and Students' Attitudes towards Local Languages in Muzaffarabad," *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review* 8, no. 2 (2024): 872–89.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret J Probyn, "Multilingual Literacies for Learning: Shifting Ideologies, Developing Praxis," *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Literacy Association of South Africa* 15, no. 1 (2024): 505.

<sup>45</sup> Mini and Botha, "Attitudes towards IsiXhosa-in-Education in the Eastern Cape: Advocacy for Increased Informedness about Benefits of Mother-tongue-Based Bilingual Education and Relevant Legislative Provisions for It."

<sup>46</sup> Dhan Bahadur Tamang, "Empowering and Enriching Ethnolinguistic Communities through Mother Tongue-Based Initiatives," *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Studies* 19, no. 2 (2024): 103.

<sup>47</sup> Ngaka, "The Role of Communities in Uganda's Mother Tongue-Based Education: Perspectives from a Literacy Learning Enhancement Project in Arua District."

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on bridging the divide between the theoretical advantages and the practical hurdles of adopting MTBBE in multilingual settings. Although MTBBE is acclaimed for boosting cognitive growth, literacy skills, and safeguarding cultural heritage, the research points out that its application is frequently hindered by several systemic challenges, including Limited teacher training and resources, lack of support from institutions and policies, budgetary constraints and insufficient community involvement.

Addressing the challenges associated with the implementation of MTBBE requires a coordinated approach involving policy reform, educator preparation, resource development, community engagement, and sustainable funding. Therefore, this study made the following suggestions that the governments should establish coherent language-in-education policies that explicitly support MTBBE and align with both national education goals and local linguistic contexts. The policies must offer clear guidance on curriculum integration, language use, and assessment procedures.

Educators' in-service trainings must be strengthened to equip educators with the pedagogical skills necessary for bilingual instruction. This includes, and not limited to, training in language development strategies, material creation, and classroom language management. There is also a need for significant investment in the development of high-quality instructional materials in indigenous languages that will cater for mother tongue instruction and those resources should be culturally relevant, pedagogically sound, and readily accessible across all educational levels.

Furthermore, community engagement should be promoted through targeted awareness campaigns that address misconceptions about MTBBE and highlight its cognitive, academic, and cultural benefits. Engaging parents, school leadership, and local stakeholders is essential for fostering supportive environments for bilingual education. Therefore, awareness campaigns should be made available for parents to encourage them to buy into the idea of MTBBE, more especially because they are the ones responsible for choosing the schools' language policy, since they form part of SGBs. Without raising public awareness of MTBBE and its benefits would be difficult to get school principals to support the idea at schools, as they also need parental support when new policies are implemented.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to evaluate the challenges and opportunities surrounding the implementation of MTBBE with the aim of highlighting its potential contribution to literacy development, cognitive growth, and cultural preservation in multilingual societies. In conclusion, although the implementation of MTBBE presents significant challenges, its potential to enhance literacy, promote cognitive development, and preserve linguistic heritage makes it a vital strategy for multilingual societies. Through coherent policy alignment, robust teacher preparation, adequate resource provision, active community participation, and reliable funding, MTBBE can be effectively integrated into the education system. A collaborative commitment from policymakers, educators, and communities is essential to ensure that learners receive high-quality education in their home languages, contributing to improved academic outcomes and social equity.

The role of the school and broader community is equally critical, and successful MTBBE implementation depends on the collective support of school leaders, colleagues, parents, and community members. Inadequate collaboration and a lack of mentorship or encouragement can leave educators feeling isolated and overwhelmed, ultimately diminishing their classroom effectiveness. Therefore, to ensure the success and sustainability of MTBBE, governments and stakeholders must allocate sufficient funding, explore cost-effective solutions, and integrate MTBBE into national education budgets rather than treating it as an optional or donor-dependent initiative. For MTBBE programs to thrive, there must be effective community engagement, awareness campaigns, and inclusive policies that address sociocultural concerns while highlighting the long-term educational and cognitive advantages of bilingual education. Consistent and adequate funding must be allocated to support teacher training, resource production, and program monitoring. Long-term financial commitment from governments and education partners is critical for the sustainability and scalability of MTBBE initiatives. Ultimately, the

sustainability and scalability of MTBBE initiatives require a long-term financial commitment from governments and education partners, backed by collaborative effort across all levels of society. Only through such unified action can MTBBE fulfil its promise of improved academic outcomes, greater equity, and the affirmation of learners’ linguistic and cultural identities.

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