



Examining students' perceptions of the exclusive use of English as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL) at the North-West University, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

English is widely used in education, and many South African universities use it as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL). Although universities officially encourage several languages as media of instruction, English remains both dominant and seemingly inclusive, while indigenous languages, though recognised in the North-West University (NWU) Mafikeng Campus language policy, are not implemented. Using only English can benefit or disadvantage students, raising concerns about language use in higher education. This qualitative study examined the perceptions of English second language students (L2) of English as the sole LoTL at NWU. Their views were thematically analysed into benefits and disadvantages. The findings show that most students struggle to understand the teaching conducted only in English. Some value English as a gateway to the wider world but still support including African languages to improve comprehension. Therefore, the study recommends using both African languages and English to enhance understanding and academic performance at NWU Mafikeng Campus. This study contributes to scholarship by providing substantive evidence on how English-only instruction affects comprehension and performance among multilingual students at NWU. It contributes to scholarly debates on language policy, elucidates the persistence of structural linguistic inequalities, and advances translanguaging as a theoretically grounded framework for inclusive pedagogical practice. This study offers practical guidance for integrating African languages alongside English to advance equity and multilingualism in higher education.

Keywords: LoTL, interlanguage, linguistic inequality, code-switching, bilingualism, translanguaging

INTRODUCTION

Many schools around the world, including colleges and universities, have embraced the use of English as a Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL), a concept that has previously been used to refer to teaching approaches where scholarly subjects or topics are taught in a language of the minority, a foreign, or second language for most students.¹ In South Africa, most students who pursue higher

¹ Heath Rose et al., "Defining English Medium Instruction: Striving for Comparative Equivalence," *Language Teaching* 56, no. 4 (2023): 539–50.

education in colleges or universities come from secondary schools where different languages are used for teaching and learning. Dörnyei mentions that among students, there are those who were immersed in English-medium schools, which means that they were more exposed to English.² On the other hand, there are students who attended public schools where English was less or rarely used in teaching and learning. The main objective of this paper is to explore the perceptions of English L2 students about the use of only the English language as LoTL at the North-West University (Mafikeng Campus).

English is recognised as a lingua franca or a global language.³ This means that English is a language that most people use and understand globally. In the education sector, there is always a language used as LoTL, which is determined by each country's policy.⁴ Some schools around the world use English as LoTL. Mzangwa explains that the language in education policy in South Africa, however, specifies that schools can choose which language to use as LoTL.⁵ This means that institutions such as the North-West University choose the languages they use in teaching and learning. The use of different languages in teaching and learning is promoted and guided by language policies.⁶ Educational institutions around the world have language policies that help promote the use of languages as media of instruction in teaching and learning. Owu-Ewie further explain that most countries worldwide have sensible language policies in their school systems in theory but need the political will to put them into practice.⁷ Language policies differ in form; there is a general language policy, an official language policy, and an educational policy.

Educational policy is a set of rules, ideologies and practices rooted in the history of a country.⁸ A country's educational language policy determines which languages are recognised as media of instruction. In Japan, for example, the Ministry of Culture, Technology, Sports, Science and Education promotes the internationalisation of higher education by recruiting foreign students and expanding English-medium instruction.⁹ Universities worldwide use English as the LoTL, a main medium of instruction and learning, a key source of knowledge and research, and a tool of modern communication.¹⁰ University rankings and government funding are increasingly tied to the provision of English-medium instruction, and most students must take English courses to graduate. Perceptions of English as LoTL in higher education vary.¹¹ In Ghana, many educators disregard policies that promote Ghanaian languages as LoTL and instead favour English, suggesting positive attitudes toward it.¹² Similarly, Bagwasi notes that many upper-class parents in Botswana who favour elite bilingualism send their children to private English-medium schools.¹³ Many African parents use only English with their children. Buckband added that private schools encourage English monolingualism and exclude other languages, reinforcing the prestige of English.¹⁴ The use of English as LoTL in South African universities is also increasing rapidly.

² Zoltan Dörnyei, "Communicative Language Teaching in the Twenty-First Century: The 'Principled Communicative Approach,'" *Meaningful Action: Earl Stevick's Influence on Language Teaching*, 2013, 161–71.

³ Esma Biricik Deniz, Yonca Özkan, and Yasemin Bayyurt, "English as a Lingua Franca: Reflections on ELF-Related Issues by Pre-Service English Language Teachers in Turkey," *The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal* 16, no. 2 (2016): 144–61.

⁴ John Airey et al., "The Expansion of English-Medium Instruction in the Nordic Countries: Can Top-down University Language Policies Encourage Bottom-up Disciplinary Literacy Goals?," *Higher Education* 73, no. 4 (2017): 561–76.

⁵ Shadrack T Mzangwa, "The Effects of Higher Education Policy on Transformation in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Cogent Education* 6, no. 1 (2019): 1592737.

⁶ Terrence G Wiley and Ofelia García, "Language Policy and Planning in Language Education: Legacies, Consequences, and Possibilities," *The Modern Language Journal* 100, no. S1 (2016): 48–63.

⁷ Charles Owu-Ewie, "The Language Policy of Education in Ghana: A Critical Look at the English-Only Language Policy of Education," in *Selected Proceedings of the 35th Annual Conference on African Linguistics* (Cascadilla Proceedings Project Somerville, MA, 2006), 76–85.

⁸ Teresa L McCarty and Stephen May, *Language Policy and Political Issues in Education* (Springer New York, 2017).

⁹ Nicola Galloway, Takuya Numajiri, and Nerys Rees, "The 'Internationalisation', or 'Englishisation', of Higher Education in East Asia," *Higher Education* 80, no. 3 (2020): 395–414.

¹⁰ Eman Abdulsalam AL-Khalil, "The Role of English in Present Day Higher Education," in *Book of Proceedings*, 2015, 172.

¹¹ Galloway, Numajiri, and Rees, "The 'Internationalisation', or 'Englishisation', of Higher Education in East Asia."

¹² Boakye-Yiadom, Mica Michael, and Kofi Opoku Donkor, "Asante Stool Carvings and Their Cultural Significance in Ghana," *Journal of African Art Education*, 2022.

¹³ Mompoloki Mmangaka Bagwasi, "Education, Multilingualism and Bilingualism in Botswana," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2021, no. 267–268 (2021): 43–54.

¹⁴ Cory Buckband, "Three Languages, Many Multilingualisms: Exploring the Cultural Production of Eliteness in a Trilingual Elementary Charter School" (Arizona State University, 2024).

English has long been the dominant official language of instruction in South African schools and higher education. The 1976 Soweto massacre, triggered by the nationalist government's plan to force students to learn in English or Afrikaans, exposed the links between language, world affairs and ideology.¹⁵ As in many former British colonies, English remains the main language of learning and teaching (LoTL), but its post-colonial dominance is increasingly contested. South Africa has eleven official languages, including English, yet English continues to dominate in the post-apartheid era.¹⁶ Universities bring together linguistically and socio-culturally diverse staff and students, but Kamwangamalu notes that, despite official recognition, nine African languages are still regarded as inferior and largely confined to local, informal use, while English and Afrikaans remain the primary languages of instruction.¹⁷

Although English is widely used in communication and business, some scholars view it as a threat to indigenous languages, reflecting negative attitudes towards English in schools.¹⁸ Post-apartheid policies sought to promote African languages, for example, through LoTL for English and science,¹⁹ and to create multilingual institutions. Section 12 of the 2002 Higher Education Language Policy formed part of these reforms,²⁰ aiming to foster multilingualism, improve equity in learning, and expand access to higher education. Emsley and Modiba note that the policy promotes multilingualism in universities and the use of African languages as languages of instruction.²¹ However, it lacks an implementation plan and clear enforcement responsibility,²² indicating that any language policy must include an implementation strategy and designated accountability.

English is still the main medium of instruction in higher education, yet many universities, such as North-West University in South Africa, have revised their language policies to show a commitment to multilingualism. Internationally, language planning in education yields mixed results and is contentious, especially when promoting indigenous languages.²³ Nekvapil and Sherman use "language policy and planning" as an umbrella term for research on various aspects of often tightly regulated language behaviour.²⁴ Hendus sees higher education language policy as part of institutions' socialising role, particularly in developing students' language competence.²⁵ Plüddemann argues that language policy should be seen as action ("a verb"), not an abstract idea.²⁶ Although English dominates in South Africa and globally, the 1996 Constitution recognises eleven official languages, of which only Afrikaans and English are non-African.²⁷ South Africa's higher education language policy does not prescribe instruction in English-only; it promotes the use of all official languages. The 2002 Higher Education Language Policy specifically identified African languages for development and use as languages of teaching and learning in higher education.²⁸

¹⁵ Brenda Leibowitz, "The Problems with Language Policy and Planning," *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 14, no. 1 (2015): 36–49.

¹⁶ Anzanilufuno Munyai and Moses Retselisitsoe Phooko, "Is English Becoming a Threat to the Existence of Indigenous Languages in Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa?," *De Jure Law Journal* 54, no. 1 (2021): 298–327.

¹⁷ Nkonko M Kamwangamalu, "Language Policy and Mother-Tongue Education in South Africa: The Case for a Market-Oriented Approach," *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics*, 2000, 119–34.

¹⁸ Salmon Pandaranga, "Received: 12 Th Mei 2015; Revised: 19 Th August 2015; Accepted: 25 Th October 2015," *Education* 2, no. 2 (2015): 188–201.

¹⁹ Richard N Madadzhe, "Using African Languages at Universities in South Africa: The Struggle Continues," *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus* 2019, no. 58 (2019): 205–18.

²⁰ Noluthando Purity Zikode, "An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Language Policy for Higher Education: African Languages as Medium of Instruction at Selected South African Universities" (University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2017).

²¹ Maletsema Ruth Emsley and Mokgadi Asnath Modiba, "Multilingualism in South African Universities Is a Fallacy: A Critical Realist Perspective," *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning* 8, no. 3 (2024): 150–67.

²² Bob Hudson, David Hunter, and Stephen Peckham, "Policy Failure and the Policy-Implementation Gap: Can Policy Support Programs Help?," *Policy Design and Practice* 2, no. 1 (2019): 1–14.

²³ J R Rammala, "Language Planning and Social Transformation in the Limpopo Province: The Role of Language in Education (South Africa)," 2004.

²⁴ Jiří Nekvapil and Tamah Sherman, "An Introduction: Language Management Theory in Language Policy and Planning," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2015, no. 232 (2015): 1–12.

²⁵ Ulrike Hendus, "'See Translation': Explicit and Implicit Language Policies on Facebook," *Language Policy* 14, no.4 (2015): 397–417.

²⁶ Peter Plüddemann, "Unlocking the Grid: Language-in-Education Policy Realisation in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Language and Education* 29, no. 3 (2015): 186–99.

²⁷ Neville Alexander, *Thoughts on the New South Africa* (Jacana Media, 2013).

²⁸ Stephanie Rudwick, "Language, Africanisation, and Identity Politics at a South African University," *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 17, no. 4 (2018): 255–69.

Moreover, Zikode adds that the language policy for higher education was formulated to encourage multilingualism and to guarantee that languages are not barriers to access and excelling in tertiary education.²⁹ It is apparent that language policies in education serve the purpose of reforming and elevating the status of indigenous South African languages. Mutasa, in the study titled “Language policy implementation in South African Universities VIS-A-VIS the speakers of indigenous African languages’ perception”, mentions that North-West University is determined to develop into a true institution that embraces and promotes multilingualism.³⁰ Therefore, it is evident that North-West University has a language policy that encourages the use of several languages.

Kaplan *et al.* explain that planning is unsuccessful because of the failure to have resources and many faults in the way the educational language policy linkage is theorised.³¹ The first fault is the tendency to regard language policy as a technical and logical tool that depends on its efficacy and is applied in a controlled fashion, rather than transforming a speaker's attitudes. Leibowitz states that another fault is failing to define language as a design created in the era of colonialism.³² In addition, many people in South Africa cannot enter tertiary institutions due to language barriers. Indigenous languages are not granted official space to serve as scientific and academic languages, even though the Constitution of South Africa recognises them as official.³³ The language policies for higher education in 2002 do not apply only to a few but to all institutions in South Africa. Of 26 universities in South Africa, the current study focuses on the North-West University (Mahikeng Campus). Therefore, language policy in learning institutions controls the languages used to transfer knowledge to different levels.

The South African education system faces serious challenges regarding languages of lesser diffusion. The 1996 National Education Policy Act (No. 27) authorised the Minister of Education to develop a national policy on language use in education.³⁴ This framework is meant to promote all official South African languages and ensure their equal development. It also aims to sustain linguistic diversity and protect language rights in all areas of public life.³⁵ However, in practice, these goals are often ignored, particularly in education. Strong government policies are not effectively implemented, and only a few universities have comprehensive policy frameworks, support systems, and management structures to enforce them.³⁶

North-West University is considered one of the most advanced institutions. Phaahla notes that lecturers at NWU teach in English as LoTL, while tutors explain lessons in languages familiar to students. However, some students still do not understand these languages.³⁷ For instance, if a tutor is bilingual only in Setswana and English, non-Setswana-speaking students may struggle to follow and understand the lessons. Phaahla notes that NWU does not view its teaching and learning strategy as difficult.³⁸ However, the strategy used on the Mafikeng campus can hinder the learning of some students, even though the academic success of all students is vital. The Mafikeng campus is diverse in race,

²⁹ Zikode, “An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Language Policy for Higher Education: African Languages as Medium of Instruction at Selected South African Universities.”

³⁰ Davie E Mutasa, “Language Policy Implementation in South African Universities Vis-à-Vis the Speakers of Indigenous African Languages’ Perception,” *Per Linguam: A Journal of Language Learning= Per Linguam: Tydskrif Vir Taalaanleer* 31, no. 1 (2015): 46–59.

³¹ Robert B Kaplan, Richard B Baldauf Jr, and Nkonko Kamwangamalu, “Why Educational Language Plans Sometimes Fail,” *Current Issues in Language Planning* 12, no. 2 (2011): 105–24.

³² Leibowitz, “The Problems with Language Policy and Planning.”

³³ Munyai and Phooko, “Is English Becoming a Threat to the Existence of Indigenous Languages in Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa?”

³⁴ Connie L McNeely, “Prescribing National Education Policies: The Role of International Organizations,” *Comparative Education Review* 39, no. 4 (1995): 483–507.

³⁵ T. Adekunle, G. Mheta, and M Rapeane-Mathonsi, “Exploring Linguistic Landscapes in Selected South African Universities: A Case Study of the University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape,” *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus* 56, no. 1 (2019): 123–53.

³⁶ Phyllis Palmiero, “Best Practices in University Governance,” *Senate Finance Committee. Roundtable Discussion-March 3* (2006): 2006.

³⁷ Pinkie Phaahla, “Indigenous African Languages as Agents of Change in the Transformation of Higher Education Institutions in South Africa: Unisa,” *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 23, no. 1 (2014): 26.

³⁸ Phaahla, “Indigenous African Languages as Agents of Change in the Transformation of Higher Education Institutions in South Africa: Unisa.”

society, culture, economy, and language, and many students must negotiate their identities in higher education to excel academically.

Shinga and Pillay note that all eleven official languages in South Africa, including English, have equal status.³⁹ Although Sokoyet argues that English provides learners with social advantages, power, and preparation for higher education, some students struggle with the language.⁴⁰ These difficulties can result in poor academic performance, as shown in recent public-school exams in which learners performed poorly in English and communication skills.⁴¹ The results further show that students entering tertiary institutions have differing attitudes toward the use of English. However, little research has examined how students, particularly at the tertiary level, perceive the language used for teaching and learning. Therefore, this study explores the perceptions of English L2 students at North-West University (Mafikeng Campus) regarding the use of English as the sole LoTL. The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions that English L2 students who are on the Mafikeng Campus of NWU have about the use of only English as LoTL. The study further seeks to evaluate the perceptions of English L2 students about the use of only English as LoTL at North-West University (Mafikeng Campus). It also aims to determine the challenges that English L2 students encounter in the use of only English as LoTL.

The following questions underlie the study:

- How do English L2 students perceive the use of English as LoTL at North-West University (Mafikeng Campus)?
- Do students encounter any challenges with the use of only English as LoTL?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceptions of students on the use of only English

Research has been conducted on teachers' and learners' attitudes toward the use of English only. Vulchanova *et al.* noted that people's views on language are shaped by factors such as culture, implying a mutual dependence between language and culture, as language expresses culturally specific experiences.⁴² Sahan *et al.* found that university students in Vietnam and Thailand prefer English-only instruction, viewing it as important to improve overall English proficiency.⁴³ Ngidi and Mncwango highlighted policy misalignment and student perspectives on shifting from a dual-medium to a monolingual English policy.⁴⁴ Similarly, Alnasser reported that a Saudi Arabian English department is prepared to adopt an English-only policy.⁴⁵ Conversely, Jan and Alam examined both the challenges and benefits of English-only instruction.⁴⁶ Dobinson *et al.* showed how English-only norms at an Australian university negatively affect Chinese students' translanguaging practices.⁴⁷ Chen reported Chinese students' views on English-only policies and their consequences in Canadian programmes.⁴⁸

Language and culture are interdependent: language expresses culturally rooted experiences. Vulchanova *et al.* note that culture-specific words may seem meaningless to outsiders, yet they make sense within oral traditions such as storytelling.⁴⁹ Perception, defined by Dwinata as how people try to

³⁹ Sibongile Shinga and Ansurie Pillay, "Why Do Teachers Code-Switch When Teaching English as a Second Language?," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. sup1 (2021): S1–7.

⁴⁰ Mzee Sokoyet, "Effects of Code Switching in English Language Teaching in Public Primary Schools among the Maasai in Tanzania: A Case Study of Simanjiro District Council" (Mzumbe University, 2018).

⁴¹ Karim Sadeghi and Jack C Richards, "Teaching Spoken English in Iran's Private Language Schools: Issues and Options," *English Teaching: Practice & Critique* 14, no. 2 (2015): 210–34.

⁴² Mila Vulchanova et al., "Language and Perception: Introduction to the Special Issue 'Speakers and Listeners in the Visual World,'" *Journal of Cultural Cognitive Science* 3, no. 2 (2019): 103–12.

⁴³ Kari Sahan, Nicola Galloway, and Jim McKinley, "'English-Only' English Medium Instruction: Mixed Views in Thai and Vietnamese Higher Education," *Language Teaching Research* 29, no. 2 (2025): 657–76.

⁴⁴ Sizakele A Ngidi and Elliot M Mncwango, "University Students' Perspectives on an English-Only Language Policy in Higher Education," *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 18, no. 1 (2022): 1189.

⁴⁵ Suliman M N Alnasser, "Exploring English as a Foreign Language Instructors' Self-Derived English Language Policies at Higher Education Level: A Case Study in the Saudi Context," in *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 7 (Frontiers Media SA, 2022), 865791.

⁴⁶ Habibullah Jan and Arsh Alam, "Students' Perceptions of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Non-English Major Course," *Transformative Pedagogies* 1, no. 5 (2025): 8–15.

⁴⁷ Toni Dobinson et al., "Translanguaging and 'English Only' at Universities," *Tesol Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2024): 307–33.

⁴⁸ Le Chen, "Problematising the English-Only Policy in EAP: A Mixed-Methods Investigation of Chinese International Students' Perspectives of Academic Language Policy," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 41, no. 8 (2020): 718–35.

⁴⁹ Vulchanova et al., "Language and Perception: Introduction to the Special Issue 'Speakers and Listeners in the Visual World.'"

understand the world, gives meaning to sensory data.⁵⁰ Bukve examined how Norwegian policies align with students' experiences and perceptions of language in teaching and learning, finding that students were confident in their English skills and viewed English-only instruction positively.⁵¹ In contrast, Hultgren *et al.* reported diverse views among Finnish university staff and students on English as a medium of instruction.⁵² Adriosh and Razi studied students' views on the dominance of English over their home languages,⁵³ while Ahmed investigated perceptions of English among 238 first-language English speakers at the University of Malaysia.⁵⁴ Overall, English use in higher education can generate varied attitudes and perceptions for different reasons, and the literature highlights the need to prioritise both English and home languages in university teaching and learning.

Using English as a Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL)

Many countries in Africa face the challenge of having few indigenous languages that do not play the same role as the official languages of their countries. Djorbua *et al.* posit that English, as a language, has played and continues to play a role since the beginning of colonialism, as it is employed in law, trade and education.⁵⁵ This points out that English is also given first preference in education as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL). South Africa is currently working to promote the use of English and maintain it as LoTL at higher levels of education. According to Rose *et al.*, English as the LoTL refers to a teaching approach where academic subjects are taught in a minority language, usually a foreign language for most students.⁵⁶ Section 19 of the 2005 report, which promotes African "indigenous languages as LoTL" at universities, states that languages are used to teach core academic content.⁵⁷ It allows higher education institutions to use two or more instructional languages, depending on their dominance and need. The four basic language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing develop best when students are taught in a language that they use and understand.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, most South African tertiary institutions use English as the LoTL for teaching and learning languages, including North-West University (NWU), where English is one of the instructional languages.

Fostering and Restricting Multilingualism and Bilingualism in Higher Education

The definitions of bilingualism are limited and based on monolingual norms. Wei states that to be considered bilingual, one must be competent in two native languages, but assessing L2 competency is difficult.⁵⁹ Dewaele notes that this first definition is theoretically and methodologically problematic: it is too broad, hard to apply, and ignores non-linguistic factors.⁶⁰ Wei also defines a bilingual as someone with at least slight proficiency in one of the four language skills in an additional language or who understands more than two languages.⁶¹ Thus, the criteria have become both more detailed and more

⁵⁰ Erna Dwinata, "Language and Perception," *BRIGHT: A Journal of English Language Teaching, Linguistics and Literature* 1, no. 1 (2018).

⁵¹ Trude Bukve, "Students' Perspectives on English Medium Instruction: A Survey-Based Study at a Norwegian University," *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 17, no. 2 (2018): 215–42.

⁵² Anna Kristina Hultgren, Christian Jensen, and Slobodanka Dimova, "English-Medium Instruction in European Higher Education: From the North to the South," *English-Medium Instruction in European Higher Education* 3 (2015): 1–15.

⁵³ Mohamed M Adriosh and Ozge Razi, "Investigating Nigerian University Students' perception Towards English Language Dominance Over Their Indigenous Languages," *The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational and Social Sciences* 5 (2016): 206–13.

⁵⁴ Shameem Ahmed, "Attitudes towards English Language Learning among EFL Learners at UMSKAL.," *Journal of Education and Practice* 6, no. 18 (2015): 6–16.

⁵⁵ Charles Djorbua, Elizabeth Orfson-Offei, and Jemima Asabea Anderson, "The Role of English as Medium of Instruction in Lower Primary Schools in a Selected Community in Ghana," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 45, no. 5 (2024): 1552–65.

⁵⁶ Rose *et al.*, "Defining English Medium Instruction: Striving for Comparative Equivalence."

⁵⁷ Zikode, "An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Language Policy for Higher Education: African Languages as Medium of Instruction at Selected South African Universities."

⁵⁸ Lorena Manaj Sadiku, "The Importance of Four Skills Reading, Speaking, Writing, Listening in a Lesson Hour," *European Journal of Language and Literature* 1, no. 1 (2015): 29–31.

⁵⁹ Qi Wei, *Language Practice in Chinese American Families Raising a Child with Autism: Relations between Language Exposure, Language Strategies, and Child Bilingual Acquisition* (University of Oregon, 2022).

⁶⁰ J M Dewaele, "Bilingualism and Multilingualism. K. Tracy, C. Ilie, & T. Sandel (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, (Pp. 1â€11)" (John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367854850-2>, 2015).

⁶¹ Wei, *Language Practice in Chinese American Families Raising a Child with Autism: Relations between Language Exposure, Language Strategies, and Child Bilingual Acquisition*.

ambiguous. In South Africa, the shift to democracy in 1994 brought challenges, including the implementation of multilingual policies.⁶² Many studies have explored perceptions of multilingualism and proposed multilingual policies, mainly in higher education.⁶³ To promote multilingualism, Indigenous/African languages should be developed to function alongside English as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL). Romaine argues that South African universities must support cultural and linguistic diversity and education policy should clearly specify how African languages should be used across all institutions.⁶⁴ African languages help students from diverse linguistic backgrounds communicate more easily and better understand classroom interaction.⁶⁵ However, they lack the status of English and are not fully defined for university use.⁶⁶ They must therefore be promoted so they can contribute to learning as extensively as English.

Most universities in South Africa still do not introduce some of the African languages that students use as their home languages. This appears to be one of the reasons students have varying attitudes and perceptions toward the language of instruction at the institution. Nkosi, one of the scholars who fully investigated the use of isiZulu as a LoTL, revealed some problems that need to be addressed.⁶⁷ Naidoo *et al.* state that many students who use isiZulu or any other language as a second language have negative attitudes towards isiZulu and are not interested in enhancing their proficiency.⁶⁸ Primarily, Doochin alludes to the idea that English is taken as a language that unifies people who use different African or Indigenous languages to communicate.⁶⁹ Klapwijk and van der Walt further argue that English is a “linguistic currency” that enables university students to acquire sufficient knowledge.⁷⁰ However, not all students understand when discussions or teaching take place in lecture rooms. This means that using English and other languages would be beneficial for some students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

English is widely used as a global language and as a medium of instruction in schools. Milligan and Tickly note that most colonised low- and middle-income countries use English as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL) in high schools and universities, and increasingly in pre-schools and primary schools, even though few learners speak it at home.⁷¹ Rose *et al.* describe English LoTL as teaching academic subjects in a minority, foreign, or second language for most students.⁷² Therefore, it is essential to clearly define the theoretical framework of English LoTL.⁷³ This study adopts Cen Williams' theory of translanguaging. Liu and Fang explain translanguaging as the complex linguistic practices of bilingual and multilingual speakers, reflecting multilingualism and bilingualism as multistep processes.⁷⁴ Originating in planned pedagogical practices in Welsh bilingual education, translanguaging

⁶² Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela and Yeukai Angela Mlambo, “Access and Equity and South African Higher Education: A Review of Policies after 20 Years of Democracy,” *Comparative Education Review* 61, no. 4 (2017): 780–803.

⁶³ Morris Thembhani Babane and Mzamani Johannes Maluleke, “The Role of Multilingualism in an Academic Milieu at a Selected South African University,” *South African Journal of African Languages* 40, no. 1 (2020): 47–52.

⁶⁴ Suzanne Romaine, “Language Endangerment and Language Death,” *The Routledge Handbook of Ecolinguistics*. Routledge, 2017.

⁶⁵ Babane and Maluleke, “The Role of Multilingualism in an Academic Milieu at a Selected South African University.”

⁶⁶ Madadzhe, “Using African Languages at Universities in South Africa: The Struggle Continues.”

⁶⁷ Zinhle P Nkosi, “IsiZulu as a Vehicle towards Teaching and Conducting Research in Higher Education: Challenges and Prospects,” *South African Journal of African Languages* 37, no. 2 (2017): 225–33.

⁶⁸ Shamila Naidoo, Roshni Gokool, and Hloniphani Ndebele, “The Case of IsiZulu for Non-Mother Tongue Speakers at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa—Is the Compulsory Language Module Promoting Social Cohesion?,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 39, no. 4 (2018): 356–68.

⁶⁹ David Doochin, “English as an International Universal Language,” *Babbel Magazine*, 2019.

⁷⁰ Nanda Klapwijk and Christa Van der Walt, “English-plus Multilingualism as the New Linguistic Capital? Implications of University Students’ Attitudes towards Languages of Instruction in a Multilingual Environment,” *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 15, no. 2 (2016): 67–82.

⁷¹ Lizzi O Milligan and Leon Tikly, “English as a Medium of Instruction in Postcolonial Contexts: Moving the Debate Forward,” *Comparative Education* (Taylor & Francis, 2016).

⁷² Rose *et al.*, “Defining English Medium Instruction: Striving for Comparative Equivalence.”

⁷³ Li Jiang, Lawrence Jun Zhang, and Stephen May, “Implementing English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in China: Teachers’ Practices and Perceptions, and Students’ Learning Motivation and Needs,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 22, no. 2 (2019): 107–19.

⁷⁴ Yang Liu and Fan Fang, “Translanguaging Theory and Practice: How Stakeholders Perceive Translanguaging as a Practical Theory of Language,” *RELC Journal* 53, no. 2 (2022): 391–99.

encompasses typical multilingual and bilingual tasks.⁷⁵ Liu and Fang describe it as a spectrum of discourse through which bilinguals make sense of their lives.⁷⁶ Translanguaging thus challenges rigid language boundaries and frames bilingual and multilingual behaviours in terms of user practices rather than separate languages. This theory underpins the study, which examines the exclusive use of English as LoTL and the suppression of other languages students bring to the classroom.

Translanguaging foregrounds the broad language skills of bilingual and multilingual speakers as communicative tools and builds on ideas such as code-switching. It includes using home languages such as LoTL, and previous research has examined its frequency in bilingual classrooms. Burton *et al.* argue that translanguaging is neither simply mixing named languages nor a fallback when speakers lack vocabulary in one language; rather, students draw on their full linguistic repertoire to meet communicative needs.⁷⁷ From this view, Mazak treats language instruction as an initial, informal stage, not as simply adding a separate language such as English to students' existing skills.⁷⁸ Instead, language instruction is a continuous process that uses students' diverse linguistic resources to construct meaning.⁷⁹ The lecturer's role is to engage in complex discourses that incorporate most students' linguistic practices, developing new linguistic activities, and maintaining existing ones. Thus, translanguaging theory is relevant to this study, as excluding African indigenous languages may either hinder or benefit some students in classroom discussions.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a broad qualitative method because it enabled the researcher to formulate and ask questions that cannot be quantified to understand the thoughts and experiences of the respondents. It mainly included discussions or interviews that yielded non-numerical findings.⁸⁰ Although this study used a qualitative design, some results are presented as percentages. These figures are not intended to support statistical generalisation. Rather, they demonstrate how frequently particular themes and views appeared among participants. This, in turn, enhances the clarity and interpretation of the qualitative findings. The current study used semi-structured interviews to ensure that the researcher was well-prepared and confident when the interview took place. The interviews were relevant to this study, as they allowed the researcher to reflect, fully understand and examine the perceptions, experiences, and behaviours of the respondents. The dataset was analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework.⁸¹ First, transcripts were repeatedly read for familiarity. Second, inductive codes were developed to capture key aspects of participants' responses. Third, related codes were grouped into initial themes reflecting recurring trends in students' perceptions. Fourth, these themes were checked against the coded excerpts and full dataset to ensure coherence and distinctiveness. Fifth, themes were refined to represent both advantages and challenges of English-only instruction. Finally, the analysis was reported with illustrative quotations for each theme. This structured, iterative process strengthened the rigor, clarity, and data-driven nature of the analysis.

Research Design

⁷⁵ Bryn Jones, "Translanguaging in Bilingual Schools in Wales," *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 16, no. 4 (2017): 199–215.

⁷⁶ Liu and Fang, "Translanguaging Theory and Practice: How Stakeholders Perceive Translanguaging as a Practical Theory of Language."

⁷⁷ Jennifer Burton, Wales Wong, and Shakina Rajendram, "Translanguaging for Critical Multilingual Language Awareness: Preparing Teacher Candidates to Support Multilingual Learners in Classrooms," *International Multilingual Research Journal* 18, no. 3 (2024): 208–31.

⁷⁸ Catherine M Mazak, "1. Introduction: Theorizing Translanguaging Practices in Higher Education," *Translanguaging in Higher Education*, 2016, 1–10.

⁷⁹ Doreen Granpeesheh et al., *Evidence-Based Treatment for Children with Autism* (Elsevier, 2014).

⁸⁰ Andrew England, "Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods," in *Research for Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences* (Springer, 2022), 71–96.

⁸¹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

The descriptive research design allowed the researcher to explore and explain the distribution of one or more patterns without referring to theories. The study population consisted of students from the Mafikeng Campus of the North-West University and did not aim to evaluate attitudes towards English at one university in South Africa.

Sampling Method

A purposive sampling strategy was employed for the study. This means that the sampling strategy used in the research work depended on the features of the target population, the required power, the significance level, and, lastly, the research question. Furthermore, students who participated in the ongoing study were sampled to authorise the collection of information on linguistic challenges.

Table 1: Study Participants

Sample group	Sample size
Undergraduates	10
Postgraduates	8
Total	18

Data Collection

The researcher signed a confidentiality contract before interviewing all willing respondents. Contact interviews were conducted, and all willing respondents answered questions from a semi-structured guide. All interviews were recorded and saved on a free cloud-based space or storage that allowed the researcher to save and access the data online at any time of choice. In addition, the data were secured and not made available to anyone else except the researcher. The data was also not easily accessed as it was protected with a password. The researcher transcribed the information that was gathered for analysis purposes. The researcher ensured that the interviews were held in one of the free discussion rooms. The interviews were held in one of the free discussion rooms at the NWU library on the Mafikeng Campus. Since noise and interruptions are not allowed in the library, the researcher chose to use the discussion rooms, and most respondents were comfortable being interviewed in a place with no clutter.

Ethical considerations

Explicit explanations of the purpose, objectives, and significance of the project guided all the students enrolled in the two foundational modules to participate in this survey. In this study, ethical approval was not required as the participants were students enrolled in the course. Moreover, informed consent was sought prior to students' participation in this study. Therefore, participation in this study was voluntary, and students were at liberty to withdraw from the research at any time without any direct or indirect implication to the study or their enrolled course.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research examined students' perceptions of the use of English as the only Teaching and Learning Language (LoTL) at the Mafikeng Campus of NWU. The target population of the study was students at North-West University (Mafikeng Campus).

Interview Responses

During interviews, the researcher sought to understand students' views on the use of English as the only LoTL at North-West University (Mafikeng Campus). The interviews were influenced by the questions listed in Addendum A. These questions were useful to the researcher, as they helped achieve the study objectives. Numerous themes emerged from the collected data, and they will be explained below. Five themes emerged from the data interviews: language exposure, language satisfaction, language challenges, perceptions, and language benefits.

Language Exposure

The interpretation of the insights from participants in this study shows the extent to which students are exposed to home languages other than English. This section outlines a theme, “language exposure”, which emerged from the contributions of the participants. Participants were expected to respond to the question, “What is your home language?” This question seeks to evaluate students’ exposure to English and other home languages. In response to the interview question, the collected data showed that of the 18 students interviewed, 20% use isiZulu, 40% use Sesotho, and 40% use Setswana as their home languages. As a result, the data indicate that the students enrolled at the North-West University Mahikeng Campus come from different cultural and language backgrounds, and their needs should be met. This statement is consistent with Stentiford and Koutsouris, who highlighted that inclusive curriculum programs should consider, reorganise and accommodate all students with different needs and experiences.⁸² Among all the participants who contributed to this ongoing study, not a single one has stated that English is their home language. However, English non-native speakers are not accommodated, as they are not encouraged to use their home languages in teaching and learning. Although that may be the case, the participants appear proficient in English because it is encouraged from the foundation phase, particularly grades one to four. Their exposure to home languages, including English as a second language, qualifies them as bilinguals regardless of proficiency level. Thus, it can be argued that they are fluent in both languages, even though they still face challenges with English in understanding instructions and explanations during teaching and learning. Nag *et al.* further note that children’s literacy achievement can slow when the language of instruction differs from their home language, underscoring the importance of using both English and a home language in teaching and learning.⁸³

Language Satisfactory

This section presents and discusses participants’ responses. The theme identified and outlined in this section emerged from the students’ insights. Additionally, the interview question sought to evaluate whether the students were satisfied using only English as the language of teaching and learning (LoTL). This aligns with the aim of this study, which sought to explore the perceptions of English L2 students regarding the use of English only as LoTL on the North-West University Mahikeng campus. The contributions of the students revealed how unhappy they are with the use of only English in lecture rooms. According to the data collected, not all students are satisfied with using English as the only LoTL at the university. For example, one participant stated that *“Uhhh not really, I would appreciate it if my mother tongue, which is IsiZulu, would be given the same preference as English (...) yeah because there are some certain modules where you find they are translated to Afrikaans, which gives an advantage to those who speak Afrikaans fluently, you know and grasping the content so yeah, I think it would be very beneficial for other people.”* This response indicates that there are some students who study at the North-West University and are not satisfied with receiving education in only English. On that note, the response also shows that there are students at NWU who are not opposed to the use of English but to using only English as LoTL. Additionally, most students whose home language is not English face challenges in using L2 as LoTL. However, teaching English to students who are not native speakers of the language requires the use of appropriate strategies.⁸⁴ Therefore, the data collected indicate that students prefer to be taught in both English and their native languages.

The NWU has multilingual repertoires in the classrooms, but none of them is in English. This assertion aligns with Teh, who explained that NWU has formulated language policies with the intention of promoting multilingualism, but implementation challenges persist.⁸⁵ Moreover, the same participant points out that it would be much more beneficial to students if IsiZulu were given the same preference

⁸² Lauren Stentiford and George Koutsouris, “Critically Considering the ‘Inclusive Curriculum’ in Higher Education,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 43, no. 8 (2022): 1250–72.

⁸³ Sonali Nag et al., “Home Language, School Language and Children’s Literacy Attainments: A Systematic Review of Evidence from Low-and Middle-income Countries,” *Review of Education* 7, no. 1 (2019): 91–150.

⁸⁴ Nurul Hasanah and Pratiwi Tri Utami, “Emerging Challenges of Teaching English in Non-Native English-Speaking Countries: Teachers’ View,” *English Language Teaching Educational Journal* 2, no. 3 (2019): 112–20.

⁸⁵ Albert Chenwi Teh, “Students’ Perspectives on Multilingualism: A Case Study of One South African Higher Education Institution” (Doctoral thesis, Walter Sisulu University, viewed 16 November 2025, from~..., 2024).

as English in teaching and learning at the NWU Mafikeng Campus. The information provided by the respondents indicates that, of the 18 students interviewed, 80% state they are satisfied with English being used as the only LoTL. The data also indicate that 20% of students report dissatisfaction with the use of English only in teaching and learning. This highlights that more students at the North-West University Mahikeng Campus are happy with English as the only LoTL. However, there are students who would appreciate being taught in their home languages to understand when discussions are held in classrooms. The students' attitudes towards the use of English only in lecture rooms led the researcher to ask whether students face any challenges with the language as LoTL.

Language Challenges

This section presents and discusses the challenges associated with language in the NWU. The theme of "language challenges" was derived from the responses of the participants, and the interview question was based on exploring the lived experiences of the students using only English as a language of teaching and learning. Research data indicate that using only English in teaching and learning can be challenging for non-native English speakers admitted to the NWU. This is congruent with Ntshauba, who stated that some of the university students seem to be unwilling to express themselves, especially in English.⁸⁶ Similarly, Teh reported that prioritising English use creates language barriers for non-English speakers and exacerbates inequalities in education systems.⁸⁷ The interview question sought to examine the challenges that students face when using only English as LoTL. In response to the interview question, Participant one said, *"No (...) at first yes but now no, obviously growing in a rural area and stuff it's rare to find people whom you surround with speak English now and then, but now I feel like university I have progressed uhhh I have progressed I have improved over the years my English is much better than it was before"*. This response implies that the student acknowledges the importance of using English and that there were challenges associated with using only English. At the same time, the response reveals that students typically face challenges with language use but ultimately overcome them. Additionally, the participant's response indicates that some students believe living in an English-dominant environment can help improve their English. This aligns with Zhang, who explained that "a good learning environment can improve the effectiveness and motivation of learners and promote the positive development of English learning."⁸⁸ In contrast, another participant responded: *"Yes, often I do. I do science terms; I would preferably have them explained in my language to better understand the terms"*. This response shows that the participant is linguistically challenged and believes that explanations of scientific terms would help facilitate education.

The key challenge is that scientific terms are harder to understand when taught in students' second language. However, explaining some terms in indigenous languages is also difficult for students who do not use English at home or lack proficiency in it. This aligns with Jimenez *et al.*, who note that students often struggle to express ideas in their home language due to limited vocabulary, often caused by insufficient exposure to that language.⁸⁹ Consequently, it should be noted that using English or any other home language can pose challenges to some students. The information gathered for this study reveals that, of the 18 respondents, 61% reported that they face challenges with using only English as LoTL. This shows that most students at North-West University are concerned about the use of English only in teaching and learning. However, 39% of students alluded that they do not face any challenges when using only English as the LoTL. Therefore, the above-discussed responses raise students' perceptions of using only English as LoTL.

Perceptions of Students

⁸⁶ K.T. Ntshauba, "How Using English as the Medium of Instruction Affects Teaching and Learning at a TVET College: Lecturers and Students' Experiences" (University of South Africa (South Africa), 2024).

⁸⁷ Teh, "Students' Perspectives on Multilingualism: A Case Study of One South African Higher Education Institution", 29.

⁸⁸ Jiani Zhang, "The Impact of the Learning Environment on English Language Learning," *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences* 23 (2023): 69–72.

⁸⁹ M M D Jimenez et al., "Challenges Encountered by College Students in Academic Writing," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 8, no. 3 (2024): 1440–51.

This section introduces the theme “*perceptions*”, which surfaced from an interpretation of responses from participants. The responses were guided by the interview question that sought to examine how English L2 students view the use of English only on the NWU Mahikeng Campus as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL). This question is congruent with the aim of the current study. One of the participants who contributed to this study stated, “(...) *I think every language in South Africa should be given the same courtesy. I mean the same attention because I feel like it would feel like it would be beneficial for someone like me because there are certain words, I struggle to understand them so I think the university should develop a language policy*”. While another participant made a similar contribution by reporting that “*My perception is honestly tainted with the fact that South Africa is a multilingual lingual uhhh country, so which languages are going to be taught, which languages are not going to be taught. So, I am a bit in the middle (-) like I want to be the only language, but I still want the other languages to be incorporated*”. Mudau notes that South Africa’s constitution grants equal recognition to all eleven official languages.⁹⁰ However, participants reported ongoing challenges caused by the exclusive use of English in teaching and learning. Their views support Gupta, who highlights tensions between promoting English and preserving indigenous languages in multilingual contexts.⁹¹ Participants stressed that using all official languages in instruction would better accommodate students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and improve their access to university education.

On the other hand, another participant responded to the interview question saying, “I think there are some people who struggle to understand English and to them it’s a disadvantage because maybe from where they come from, they are not familiar with English and (...) some grow up without learning English”. Similarly, another participant reported that “*My perception about English being used as a sole language when it comes to teaching and learning is that most of the students come from disadvantaged schools to say whereas the language that dominates is a local language so the information when it is presented to students becomes difficult to understand since English is not their mother tongue so the benefit of it, I don’t really see the benefit of it*”. The responses correspond to Hussain *et al.*, who reported that the use of English as LoTL at the university level affects the performance of students and contributes to inequality in learning opportunities.⁹² This implies that using only English at some universities is a challenge rather than a solution. Taken together, the participants’ responses are congruent and underscore the need for and importance of inclusive education that promotes multilingualism.

Furthermore, the interview responses indicate that most students oppose the use of English as the LoTL only. However, the participants emphasise that indigenous South African languages should be prioritised in the same way that English is prioritised in education. This statement is congruent with Munyai and Phooko, who state that the persistent use of English and insufficient provisions for indigenous languages erode native languages.⁹³ One of the respondents explained that South African languages should be used in teaching and learning in the same way that English is. The findings reveal that 85% of the participants believe that challenges of language could be mitigated if students from different backgrounds use their home languages during teaching and learning at the North-West University, Mahikeng Campus. This implies that including other home languages could positively affect students’ performance. The findings also show that 15% of the participants believe that using only English is beneficial. It was noted that none of the few students thinks about the inclusion of home languages in teaching and learning. This implies that 15% of students favour using only English, as they already view it as a language of high prestige. The findings of the current study align with those of Sahan *et al.*, who investigated the perspectives of teachers and students towards the use of English-only in universities situated in Vietnam and Thailand and reported that students prefer to be taught in English

⁹⁰ Paul Mudau, “Decentralisation and Constitutionalism in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of South Africa and Zimbabwe,” 2019.

⁹¹ Nandini Gupta, “English Language Policy in Multilingual Societies Challenges and Opportunities,” *Journal of International English Research Studies (JIERS)*, ISSN: 3048-5231 1, no. 2 (2023): 46–53.

⁹² Sajjad Hussain, Muhammad Nawaz, and Muhammad Issa, “Impact of Medium of Instruction on Learning Outcomes at Tertiary Level: A Study on English Language Barriers in Baltistan, Pakistan,” *Journal of Contemporary Trends and Issues in Education* 4, no. 1 (2024): 17–45.

⁹³ Munyai and Phooko, “Is English Becoming a Threat to the Existence of Indigenous Languages in Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa?”

only.⁹⁴ Additionally, students perceive the English-only method as significant because it can help in enhancing their overall English language understanding and skills.

Language Benefits

In this section, participants' responses are presented, interpreted, and thoroughly discussed. The theme of “language benefits” was derived from the insights shared by the students on the NWU Mahikeng Campus. The participants responded to the interview question that follows: What are the benefits of using only English as LoTL? The participants' views reveal that there are students who continue to believe that the use of only English is beneficial to their academics. Additionally, one of the benefits of using only English is assimilating what is being explained and required by a lecturer in class. However, using only English will mostly benefit students who were exposed to the language, as well as first-language English speakers. This implies that using only English could disadvantage some students who enrolled on the NWU Mahikeng campus.

The participants' responses in this study highlighted the benefits of using only English as LoTL. For example, one of the participants stated that, *“I mean firstly I would say it is an international language, English is mostly spoken by almost (...) half of the population across the world, and it is much easier to communicate, you know, maybe you want to go to Asia or in Africa, some certain countries, you find that there are people who can speak English. So, it bridges that gap, the barrier in communicating with specific people.”* This response implies that some students perceive English as a language that bridges the language barriers between people who speak different languages. The statement is consistent with Mehmood *et al.*, who reported that language serves as “a destroyer of bridges of human relations because it separates people from each other.”⁹⁵ However, provided that English is associated with better economic opportunities, non-English speakers will remain disadvantaged.⁹⁶ For example, students who use English as a second language and are less exposed to it may face language challenges and say they do not benefit from using it. This means that more benefits could be derived from the languages they use at home, since they know how to use them.

Furthermore, a respondent's response shows that using English can open some employment opportunities. As a result, the researcher asked whether students would benefit when African languages were included in teaching and learning. This theme relates to the theme “Language benefits”, and one of the respondents answered the interview question by saying, *“How would I benefit? I think in some subjects it depends on the type of subject that is taught. The way of communication will be easy. I would find it much easier to understand when being taught”. This response indicates that the respondent would benefit if his or her home language were included in teaching and learning because the person sees it as facilitating learning.* The response is in line with Mudau, who elaborated that where a home language is not the same as LOLT, cognitive and pedagogical challenges could be featured in the choice of language in teaching and learning.⁹⁷ This demonstrates that when English is used as the only LoTL, students face language challenges and cannot be satisfied with using the language. Taken together, the findings revealed that 86% of the 18 participants stated they would benefit if African languages or their home languages were included in teaching and learning. Only 14% of the students indicated that learning would be difficult for them if their home languages were included as Languages of Teaching and Learning (LoTL). These students argue that using their home languages could pose linguistic challenges to their learning process.

Discussion Summary

This study was guided by two objectives. The first objective was to evaluate the perceptions of English L2 students regarding the use of English as the only LoTL at the North-West University (Mafikeng

⁹⁴ Sahan, Galloway, and McKinley, “‘English-Only’ English Medium Instruction: Mixed Views in Thai and Vietnamese Higher Education.”

⁹⁵ Khalid Mehmood, Shumaila Memon, and Fayaz Ali, “Language Barriers to Effective Communication in Speaking English: A Phenomenological Study of Pakistan International Cricketers,” *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review* 8, no. 1 (2024): 107–14.

⁹⁶ Marike De Witt and Nora E Saneka, “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.

⁹⁷ Mudau, “Decentralisation and Constitutionalism in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of South Africa and Zimbabwe.”

Campus). From the findings, it can be concluded that students consider the use of only English in teaching and learning a benefit. This indicates that students receive a certain percentage of benefits. However, most of them encounter challenges with English as a LoTL. The second objective of the study was to determine the challenges English L2 students encounter when using only English as LoTL. The findings from the language exposure theme revealed that some students are bilingual, with both their home languages and English as L2. These students can use both languages, even though they still encounter some challenges with English in understanding what is required or what is being explained when teaching takes place in a classroom. The above theme relates to one of the study's research questions: whether students encounter any challenges with using only English as LoTL.

One of the themes derived from this study was language satisfaction, which indicates that there are students who are satisfied with the use of only English as LoTL. However, some students remain dissatisfied with using English as LoTL alone. The results indicated that 20% of students who reported dissatisfaction with English-only use in teaching and learning also reported dissatisfaction with English-only use in teaching and learning. This highlights that many students at North-West University are satisfied with the use of English as the only LoTL. However, some students would appreciate it if their home languages were included in teaching and learning, as they find it difficult to understand when discussions are held in classrooms. The students' attitudes toward the use of English as LoTL prompted the researcher to ask whether students faced any challenges with its use. This theme shows some correspondence, namely whether students face challenges or not, with the use of only English in teaching and learning. In line with the theme of language challenges, the findings revealed that 61% of the participants reported facing challenges with using only English as LoTL. This indicates that there is still concern about the use of English alone in teaching and learning. However, 39% of the participants stated that they do not encounter challenges when using only English as LoTL. This implies that fewer students prefer using only English as LoTL than those who find it difficult to participate in classroom discussions due to a lack of full understanding of the teachings in English-only.

The researcher interviewed 18 respondents to find perceptions of English being used as the only LoTL. The findings showed that out of a total of eighteen participants, a majority pointed out that if North-West University fosters the use of their home languages in teaching and learning, they could benefit a lot. This means that students will gain more understanding and be able to participate when lessons are conducted or presented in classrooms. Therefore, most students believe that the status of English and their home languages should be equivalent. The researcher found, from respondents' responses, that a few students see the use of only English as beneficial. The above-mentioned theme of language challenges is related to the second research question in the study, which seeks to determine whether students are challenged when using only English as LoTL. Additionally, the findings indicated that some students believe that English bridges communication between speakers of different languages and can open up employment opportunities. However, using only English creates a barrier for students who do not use it at home or do not know it. Only 14% of participants stated that excluding their home languages from teaching and learning makes learning more difficult. Those who said excluding African languages would hinder learning also noted that using their home languages might bring linguistic challenges. Overall, students still view English as a prestigious language but want their home languages included in teaching and learning to aid understanding. This final theme relates to the research question on how English L2 students perceive the exclusive use of English as the LoTL at North-West University (Mafikeng) and highlights their varied views on using only English in teaching and learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the research findings, the current study regards bilingualism as a method which should be considered in tertiary institutions. Therefore, the study recommends that English should be used as a language of teaching and learning since it appears to be important to the education of students. Additionally, the present study recommends that African indigenous languages should be recognised and embraced in universities. This is to help improve students' understanding in class and mitigate the challenge of the language barrier. Using African languages for instruction will therefore help facilitate a better understanding of English than English-only teaching methodologies. This statement is consistent

with Madadhze, who pointed out that English and indigenous languages can be used meaningfully in teaching and learning to provide students with a good quality education. Moreover, respondents view English as a better language that will be more useful in their future than their African languages or home languages. So, there are still power relations between languages. As a result, the researcher recommends research that will make speakers of African languages perceive their languages as important as English.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how English second-language (L2) students at North-West University (Mafikeng Campus) perceive the exclusive use of English as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL). The findings show that, while students value English for its global status and links to socio-economic and academic opportunities, many struggle to fully grasp academic content and classroom discourse when only English is used. This highlights English's dual role as both a gateway to international academic and professional fields and a structural barrier to equitable learning. The study also shows that excluding African languages from higher education classrooms reinforces linguistic hierarchies and widens academic performance gaps. It argues that translanguaging pedagogies and the intentional use of African languages alongside English can foster inclusion, deepen conceptual understanding, and enhance academic achievement. The study's main contribution is to centre student voices in debates on language policy in South African higher education, urging a move from symbolic commitments to multilingualism toward practical implementation that treats language as a resource for epistemic access and empowerment, rather than a tool of exclusion.

Limitations of the study

As mentioned above, the limitations of this study were that most of the students were unable to participate in the interviews as they were still preparing for their final exams. Hence, students from other faculties of study were not interviewed. Secondly, the sample size had to be changed, as some of the students who agreed to be interviewed ended up not being available for the interviews. Therefore, the findings of the study may reflect the perceptions of the students that are not accurate.

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