



**Cultivating Inclusive Classrooms:
Equipping Pre-Service Teachers for Indigenous
Language Integration**

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Cultivating Inclusive Classrooms: Equipping Pre-Service Teachers for Indigenous Language Integration

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Abstract

Research in South Africa shows that teacher education is often overlooked in language-related studies, despite its central role in preparing educators for increasingly diverse classrooms shaped by migration and multilingualism. Many teachers report feeling inadequately prepared to respond to these realities, with monoglossic pedagogies persisting as a carry-over effect in higher education. This systematic review examined peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025, sourced from databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, and thematically analysed the evidence on how higher education institutions can better prepare teachers for culturally responsive teaching. Findings reveal that while multilingualism is the norm, relevant pedagogical strategies remain limited, leaving teachers under-equipped to meet learners' needs and risking cognitive and equity gaps. The review highlights practical approaches for cultivating inclusive classrooms and offers recommendations for restructuring teacher education to foster competence in multilingual and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Keywords: Culturally responsive pedagogy; Higher education; Multilingualism; Teacher education; Translanguaging

Introduction

South African classrooms have experienced an abrupt increase in diversity in recent years, driven by geopolitical, economic, and social factors (McKinney, 2020). Teachers, administrators, and policymakers have been challenged to respond to this diversity by creating policies and initiatives that address the pressing issues in education (Du Plessis, 2020). However, despite policy developments, classroom practice remains largely monolingual. As Charamba (2022) notes, most learners in South Africa continue to be taught through only two languages, namely English and Afrikaans, while indigenous languages remain marginalised, particularly in higher education (HE).

The roots of this linguistic imbalance lie in South Africa's colonial history, where language was deeply entangled with power, exclusion, and access to socio-economic opportunities (Seethal, 2023). Although the Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) (Department of Education, 1997) and the Language Policy for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2002) were designed to promote multilingualism, their implementation has been limited. Today, most students are still instructed in English, the mother tongue of only 19% of the population (Dhokotera & Makalela, 2022). This ongoing reliance on English reflects the enduring hegemony of colonial languages and undermines the potential of indigenous languages to serve as legitimate mediums of knowledge and academic success. At the same time, teachers face growing challenges in managing cultural and linguistic diversity.

South African educators often feel unprepared to adapt their teaching to multicultural and multilingual contexts, reporting a lack of confidence and professional competence (Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2020; Sefotho, 2022). Professional development research further shows that the need for training in multicultural and multilingual pedagogy now ranks among the most urgent priorities for teachers (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2023), highlighting the systemic gap in preparing teachers, not only in-service, but especially pre-service teachers (PSTs), for the realities of diverse classrooms.

As Charamba (2022) emphasises that indeed classroom diversity has been accelerated by increased cross-border movements and the dynamics of globalisation. However, the South African education system continues to prepare teachers within a monolingual paradigm, leaving them ill-equipped to leverage learners' full linguistic repertoires. Despite progressive LiEP, there remains a persistent gap between policy intentions and classroom realities in South Africa, as teachers, particularly PSTs, are



not adequately prepared to integrate indigenous languages into teaching (Ndhlovana, 2025). This disconnect sustains linguistic inequalities and limits the creation of truly inclusive classrooms. This paper, therefore, aims to explore strategies for cultivating inclusive classrooms by equipping PSTs with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to integrate indigenous languages in meaningful ways. In doing so, it contributes to the broader goal of building an equitable education system that values linguistic diversity as a resource, rather than a barrier.

Literature review: Translanguaging as a culturally responsive pedagogy in HE

Over the past decade, the concept of translanguaging has attracted significant attention as both a pedagogical practice and a theoretical construct. Coined by Williams in 1994, translanguaging originally described the fluid use of multiple languages in Welsh revitalisation classrooms, where teachers taught in Welsh, however, students often responded in English (Williams, 1994). García and Lin (2017) later defined translanguaging as the flexible and strategic use of multiple languages in communication, while Wei (2018) reminds us that it began as a descriptive term for everyday language practices rather than a formal theory. In the South African context, similar practices are common, yet often stigmatised. Scholars such as Charamba (2020) and Yafele (2021) argue that these practices should instead be embraced, as they enable both teachers and learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoires for knowledge construction and problem-solving.

Decades of research have demonstrated the benefits of multilingualism, including cognitive flexibility, improved problem-solving, and even health benefits such as delaying dementia (Vega-Mendoza et al., 2019). However, as Tian and Zhang-Wu (2022) note, these benefits only translate into subject proficiency when the instructional model supports them highlighting the crucial role of teacher preparation; and Anderson (2024) stresses that teachers require specific training to harness these advantages effectively. Yet, in many contexts, such training is missing. For instance, in a study of teacher education curricula in Austria and Ireland, Herzog-Punzenberger et al. (2023) found that migration-related linguistic diversity was seldom addressed in compulsory courses. Their qualitative document analysis suggests that teacher education must explicitly equip PSTs with tools for cultural and linguistic sensitivity before they enter the teaching profession.

Research in Jordan underscores this need for pedagogical competence. Khasawneh (2023) found that PSTs benefitted from peer-to-peer strategies such as group discussions and collaborative projects, which improved engagement and achievement. Using interviews, document analysis, and thematic analysis, the study revealed that differentiated instruction is key to meeting diverse learner needs. Yuan and Yang (2023) similarly argue that teacher education programmes must explicitly train PSTs to adapt pedagogy for diverse classrooms. Chang (2024) extends this argument in the Chinese context, showing how bilingual PSTs can develop transformative agency to integrate translanguaging and cultural responsiveness in their practice.

Like other continents as highlighted above, African scholarship reflects similar concerns. A qualitative case study by Mpofu (2021) conducted at a tertiary college in Zimbabwe, found that if the language of instruction remains foreign to the African child, not only does it restrict epistemic access, students also lose touch with their culture. Three English lecturers and 14 final year PSTs majoring in English were purposively selected. The participants were divided into two focus groups where the author (Mpofu, 2021) held discussions with the students, prepared an open-ended questionnaire for the lecturers, had participant observations during five lessons, and thematically analysed data, Mpofu (2021) proposed that Africa should adopt translanguaging pedagogy to ensure adequate pedagogy that caters for all students. Mpofu (2021) further asserts that translanguaging promotes relaxing the classroom atmosphere and enhancing multimodality. This means that if translanguaging can be adopted, South African HE multilingual students can benefit.

Similarly, Simungala and Jimaima (2021) examined the multilingual realities of language contact at the University of Zambia. Through an ethnographic research design, the authors observed the dynamics of the students' language practices both online and in the physical landscape. In their physical conversation and Facebook narratives in which students drew on English and Bemba to illustrate instances of blending and mixing as multilingual practices arising from translanguaging, Simungala and Jimaima (2021) found that the mixing of words and the blending of morphemes from the two different languages gives evidence of how students (re)create, (re)produce, and (re)shape their meaning-making instances. Thus, they connect their prior experiences with the work at hand for improved performance and participation.

Translanguaging has shown itself to be a successful teaching strategy over time in a range of educational environments where the learners' native tongue and the



school language diverge. In the same line of thought, Siqueira (2021) also argued that language and culture are certainly intrinsically related and Eren (2024) asserted that intercultural communicative competence can contribute to this alliance. This implies that, by incorporating translanguaging as a pedagogical practice, students are enabled to cope with intercultural tensions. In line with this, Mokala et al. (2022) conducted a study in South Africa investigating the impact of multilingualism on teaching and learning in a Sesotho home language through semi-structured interviews with twelve students enrolled in Sesotho home language courses and six Sesotho teachers from various universities. The participants advised educators to think about implementing multilingual pedagogical teaching techniques in their home language classes to handle linguistic diversity.

Furthermore, Hannaway and Du Preez (2021) explored South African HE institutions academic cohort and andragogy and point to the notion that prolonging the current course of culturally indifferent education will suppress social justice and democracy, while also resulting in a poor and disjointed society. Through integrating the seminal work of Diamond and Moore (1995) and Gay's (2018) views on culturally responsive teaching and care, Hannaway and Du Preez (2021) interpreted literature and the critical instance case study and argued that there are traces of superficial understanding of culture, cultural relevance, and cultural responsiveness in early childhood education. This insinuates that, to be culturally responsive and relevant to students, there is need for the adoption of translanguaging which allows students to freely draw on their languages and share it with their peers and even their lectures.

Together, these studies demonstrate that translanguaging is not merely a linguistic strategy, but a culturally responsive pedagogical orientation. When PSTs are equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement it, classrooms become spaces where indigenous languages are legitimised and learners' identities affirmed. The literature consistently highlights that without explicit teacher preparation, the benefits of multilingualism remain untapped, and policies promoting diversity risk remaining rhetorical rather than transformative.

Theoretical framework: Culturally responsive teaching

Closely connected to translanguaging is culturally responsive teaching (CRT), an approach that recognises and values students' cultural backgrounds and experiences as assets in the learning process (Gay, 2015; Howard, 2021). CRT emphasises integrating

these experiences into pedagogy, thereby affirming students' identities rather than focusing on deficits (Aronson, 2020). When applied together, CRT and translanguaging both foreground students' cultural and linguistic resources, making classrooms more inclusive and equitable.

The concept of CRT was first systematically articulated by Gay (2000), who defined it as teaching that uses the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for effective teaching. Building on the earlier work of Ladson-Billings' (1995) *Towards a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, Gay (2000) extended the framework to teacher preparation, emphasising the need for teachers to develop a knowledge base about cultural diversity, design culturally relevant curricula, and foster learning environments that affirm learners' identities. CRT, thus, emerged as a direct response to the deficit-oriented models that positioned minority students' cultural and linguistic resources as barriers rather than strengths. At its core, the framework calls for teachers to be both academically demanding and culturally affirming, recognising that effective teaching must engage the whole learner.

This framework is particularly relevant to the South African context of the current study, where indigenous languages and cultural identities have historically been marginalised by colonial and apartheid-era education policies (Carnes, 2019). By situating indigenous languages as central to learning, CRT aligns with translanguaging practices that allow learners to use their full linguistic repertoires for meaning-making. For PST education, CRT provides the theoretical grounding for equipping future teachers with the dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary to integrate indigenous languages into classroom instruction (Krause, 2023). In this way, CRT not only supports inclusivity, it also advances the project of decolonising education by challenging entrenched monolingual ideologies and positioning indigenous languages as legitimate vehicles of knowledge creation.

Methodology

For the purposes of the current study, researchers employed a systematic review methodology to synthesise using existing scholarship on how to equip PSTs for indigenous language integration. This approach was chosen because of the substantial body of literature on translanguaging pedagogy, which warranted systematic analysis to generate a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain, systematic reviews entail the methodical



identification, examination, synthesis, and contextualisation of existing studies on a given topic. Similarly, Impellizzeri and Bizzini (2012) where the best evidence can be gathered from randomized controlled trials (RCTs) emphasise that systematic reviews are among the most popular reviews and are “considered to provide the highest level of evidence” (p. 495). This methodology not only enables the location and selection of relevant studies, it also provides structured procedures for evaluating contributions, analysing and synthesising findings, and presenting evidence in a manner that allows for clear conclusions about established knowledge and persisting gaps.

Peer-reviewed journal articles or book chapters published between 2020 and 2025 that focused on multilingualism, translanguaging, or indigenous language integration within pre-service teacher education contexts, particularly in South Africa or comparable multilingual settings in the Global South, were included in the current study. Eligible studies employed qualitative or mixed methods design and were theoretically informed by frameworks such as translanguaging, culturally responsive pedagogy, or decolonial perspectives. Non-peer-reviewed studies, published before 2020, conducted in monolingual or irrelevant contexts, focused solely on learners or in-service teachers without relevance to teacher education, relied exclusively on quantitative methods, or addressed language policy without explicit links to pedagogy or classroom practice, were excluded from the current study.

To explore the concept of cultural classrooms and PST education in South Africa, the current study incorporated ten peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025. This time frame was deliberately chosen to capture the most recent and relevant scholarship in the field. The studies were sourced from reputable electronic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, ensuring both breadth and credibility in the search process. Only studies that had undergone rigorous peer review and employed qualitative or mixed method designs were included, thereby maintaining methodological consistency and reliability. Search terms used included: ‘multilingualism education’ OR ‘translanguaging education’ OR ‘pedagogical translanguaging’ AND ‘culturally responsive teaching’ AND ‘pre-service teacher’ OR ‘student teachers’ OR ‘teacher education’. The thematic analysis of these studies provided the basis for identifying patterns, convergences, and solutions for CRT within the South African context.

Data

Table 1 gives a summary of the reviewed studies highlighting the names of the authors and year of publication, the purpose of the study, the participants, and the methodology and findings of the studies.

Table 1: Summary of the reviewed studies

Number, Author(s) and Year		Purpose or Aim of Study	Research Setting and Participants	Research Design and Nature of Data Analysis	Findings of the Articles
1	Adigun (2021)	Investigate PSTs' attitudes towards inclusive education	South African HE; PSTs	Quantitative survey research and qualitative interviews	Found generally positive attitudes, but limited preparation for multilingual/inclusive practices.
2	Ajani (2025)	To explore how PSTs education in South Africa can be decolonised through socially just pedagogies, integrating indigenous knowledge systems and fostering inclusivity.	South Africa; North-West University; curriculum studies lecturers across multiple campuses	Qualitative case study; semi-structured interviews with lecturers; thematic analysis	PST education often reflects Eurocentric paradigms. Integration of indigenous knowledge systems and socially just pedagogies can transform curriculum, foster equity, and prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms.

Number, Author(s) and Year	Purpose or Aim of Study	Research Setting and Participants	Research Design and Nature of Data Analysis	Findings of the Articles
3 Batyi (2022)	To explore how translanguaging can enhance students' academic literacies.	South African university; undergraduate students in multilingual classrooms	Qualitative case study; classroom observations, student writing samples, and discourse analysis	Translanguaging helped students better engage with academic texts, improved comprehension, and facilitated deeper critical thinking by drawing on their full linguistic repertoires.
4 Mahan et al. (2024)	Examine translanguaging strategies in early childhood teacher preparation	Early childhood education; teacher preparation context	Qualitative case study using interviews	Teachers used home languages for scaffolding comprehension; recommended formal training in translanguaging.
5 Malindi et al. (2023)	Explore educators' views on Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education in mathematics classrooms	Mathematics classrooms in SA; educators	Qualitative interviews and focus groups	Teachers lacked understanding of MTBBE's value; highlighted need for awareness campaigns and training.
6 Martin and Bertram (2024)	Analyse PSTs' learning from an online inclusive education module	South African Higher Education Institutes; PSTs	Qualitative content analysis of reflective assignments	Inclusion strategies were evident, however, multilingualism barely addressed in reflections.

Number, Author(s) and Year	Purpose or Aim of Study	Research Setting and Participants	Research Design and Nature of Data Analysis	Findings of the Articles
7 Mbirimi-Hungwe (2023)	To investigate the development of a multilingual environment in a South African university.	Case study of one South African university; staff and students	Mixed methods; surveys, interviews, and document analysis	The institution's policies promoted multilingualism, but English remained dominant; implementation was uneven, highlighting tensions between policy and practice in creating inclusive multilingual spaces.
8 Olawale et al. (2024)	Investigate bilingual strategies used by mathematics teacher educators	SA mathematics teacher education programmes; lecturers	Qualitative study; interviews with thematic analysis	Teacher educators used ad hoc bilingual strategies but lacked systemic support; urged inclusion in training.
9 Sefotho (2025)	Explore teachers' perceptions of translanguaging as a decolonial pedagogy	Multilingual primary schools in South Africa; in-service teachers	Qualitative study; interviews and thematic analysis	Teachers resisted multilingualism due to monolingual ideologies; translanguaging seen as a decolonial strategy for inclusion.
10 Sibanda and Tshehla (2025)	Examine the shift from mother tongue to English in foundation-phase township schools	Foundation-phase township schools; teachers and parents	Qualitative case study; document review and interviews	English-only policies disadvantaged learners; transition undermined pedagogy and equity.

Data analysis

Data was extracted from 10 studies, coded, and thoroughly analysed using a thematic analysis process. A thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), entails finding, examining, and analysing recurrent themes in the data. This method was chosen because it was efficient and helpful in arranging the data to locate recurring themes in the research, analyse the data, create a thorough report of the results, and ultimately accomplish the goals of the study.

Emerging research themes and findings

The reviewed studies converge on two interrelated themes that illuminate both the opportunities and challenges of language use in South African education. First, the reality of multilingualism in classrooms and universities underscores the need to embrace learners' linguistic repertoires as valuable resources rather than barriers to learning. This theme highlights how multilingual practices, when recognised and legitimised, can enhance participation, equity, and epistemic access. Second, translanguaging emerges not only as a practical strategy for mobilising learners' full linguistic resources, but also as a transformative pedagogy for equipping PSTs to respond to cultural and linguistic diversity. Together, these themes illustrate that cultivating inclusive classrooms requires both structural recognition of multilingual realities and pedagogical innovation through translanguaging practices that affirm learners' identities and dismantle entrenched monolingual ideologies.

Theme I: Embracing the multilingual reality in the classroom

Multilingualism is a lived reality in South African universities and schools, shaped not through formal instruction, but through socialisation and everyday contact with diverse linguistic communities (Charamba & Ndhlovana, 2025; Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2023). As Dhokotera and Makalela (2022) argue, no language exists independently in the multilingual mind, which means that PSTs must reconceptualise learners' linguistic repertoires as resources for meaning-making rather than barriers to learning. Indeed, studies show that students themselves often organise and support one another in ways that embrace translanguaging practices, demonstrating how multilingual realities are already embedded in classroom interaction (Ajani, 2025) the education system has endeavoured to ensure not only physical access but also epistemological access to learning for all students. Consequently, the imperative of basic education is to deliver

a curriculum that is equitable and inclusive. Higher education institutions' teacher education programs serve as crucial social agents capable of driving transformative curricula grounded in a framework of social justice. This study seeks to explore the potential of decolonizing pre-service teacher education for equity and inclusivity through socially just pedagogies (SJPs). At Nelson Mandela University, Batyi (2022) illustrated how bilingual tutorials in English and isiXhosa expanded students' repertoires and enhanced their academic literacies, underscoring the benefits of intentional pedagogical strategies that legitimise the use of multiple languages in HE.

Educators are often ill-prepared to teach in linguistically diverse classrooms, which perpetuates the gap between policy ideals and classroom realities (Ndhlovana, 2025). Scholars suggest that giving PSTs opportunity to learn indigenous languages themselves can deepen their appreciation of linguistic diversity, while also strengthening their pedagogical competence (Makalela, 2022). However, research reveals that monolingual practices in HE frequently 'carry over' into teachers' professional repertoires, reinforcing exclusionary practices in their classrooms (Dhokotera & Makalela, 2022). For this reason, Sefotho (2025) calls for advocacy at political and institutional levels to ensure that policies move beyond symbolic recognition toward actively supporting multilingual practices in teaching and learning.

The reviewed studies also show that while teachers and PSTs often express positive attitudes toward inclusion, they are rarely provided with systematic preparation for multilingual pedagogy (Adigun, 2021; Martin & Bertram, 2024). Even where bilingual strategies are used, Olawale et al. (2024) argues that these remain ad hoc rather than formally integrated into teacher education programmes. In early childhood education, Mahan et al. (2024) notes that candidates intuitively draw on learners' home languages to scaffold comprehension, however, they emphasise the need for formal training and planning tools to transform improvisation into intentional design. Empirical evidence demonstrates that when translanguaging is legitimised, it significantly enhances students' engagement with academic texts, improves comprehension, and fosters critical thinking (Baty, 2022; Malindi et al., 2023). However, in mathematics classrooms, for example, educators acknowledge its potential without always knowing how to implement it effectively, which points to the urgent need for awareness campaigns, exemplars, and practice-based professional development.

A persistent tension also exists between supportive policy rhetoric and actual classroom practice. Universities may promote multilingual environments in principle,



yet English continues to dominate as the default medium of instruction (Ajani, 2025). Similarly, in schools, shifts toward English-only instruction in the foundation phase as observed by Sibanda and Tshehla (2025), reduce participation and deepen inequities, reflecting parental prestige ideologies and assessment-driven pressures, rather than pedagogical necessity. These examples reveal that permission to use languages does not automatically translate into planned, resourced, or assessed multilingual teaching (Charamba & Ndhlovana, 2025). At the heart of this problem are entrenched ideological barriers that frame African languages as unsuitable for high-status learning. Several studies show that these ideologies constrain teachers' willingness to adopt multilingual strategies, even when they recognise their benefits (Sefotho, 2025; Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025). Reframing translanguaging as a decolonial pedagogy shifts the focus from accommodation to epistemic justice, legitimising indigenous languages as vehicles of disciplinary knowledge and enabling their recognition as central to academic practice (Ajani, 2025).

Ultimately, the studies converge on the conclusion that teacher preparation is the hinge for embracing multilingual realities in education. Without explicit coursework, modelled lessons, and assessment practices that validate multilingual products, PSTs fall back on monolingual routines, despite supportive attitudes (Mahan et al., 2024; Martin & Bertram, 2024; Olawale et al., 2024). Integrating African indigenous knowledge alongside translanguaging practices further broadens what counts as legitimate academic knowledge, dismantling the 'epistemic wall' that excludes local ways of knowing and speaking (Krause, 2023). The evidence, therefore, demonstrates that classrooms in South Africa are already inherently multilingual; what is lacking is systematic, designed multilingual pedagogy supported by aligned teacher education, curriculum reform, and institutional cultures. Translanguaging can only fulfil its transformative potential when it is explicitly taught, planned, and assessed and when PSTs are equipped to view linguistic and cultural diversity as central to disciplinary learning rather than peripheral to it.

Theme 2: Translanguaging as a transformative pedagogical strategy for equipping teachers

From the reviewed studies, translanguaging emerges as a powerful pedagogical strategy that mobilises students' full linguistic repertoires, enabling them to engage more effectively with complex texts and disciplinary content while developing academic language practices (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; García & Kleifgen, 2020). It also affirms

learners' multilingual identities, fostering their social and emotional well-being by creating classroom spaces where their linguistic and cultural resources are recognised as assets rather than deficits (Charamba, 2020). Practical strategies identified in the literature include the use of multilingual word walls and classroom labels (Pretorius & Stoffelsma, 2021), providing resources in multiple languages, or explaining monolingual texts through learners' indigenous languages (Erath et al., 2021). Teachers may also pair students with similar language backgrounds but varying proficiency levels to encourage peer scaffolding (Charamba, 2021) and model flexible language use that supports exploratory talk and the testing of new ideas and linguistic forms (Baty, 2022). These examples highlight that translanguaging is not a spontaneous or compensatory strategy, but a structured resource that enhances meaning-making and participation.

The evidence further shows that translanguaging plays a critical role in advancing social justice, particularly by challenging the hegemony of English and Afrikaans in South African classrooms. While some teachers continue to resist multilingual practices due to entrenched monolingual ideologies, others view translanguaging as a decolonial practice that disrupts linguistic hierarchies and fosters equity (Sefotho, 2025). The persistence of English-only policies, especially in township foundation-phase schools, has been shown to disadvantage learners and undermine pedagogical equity (Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025), making translanguaging both an educational and political stance against exclusionary practices. This policy-practice gap highlights the need for systemic curriculum alignment, resource provision, and professional development.

Central to bridging this gap is the preparation of teachers. Studies with PSTs and in-service teachers reveal that although many support inclusive education, they often lack the pedagogical tools to manage multilingual classrooms effectively (Adigun, 2021; Martin & Bertram, 2024). Even when teacher educators use bilingual strategies in mathematics classrooms, these practices remain ad hoc and unsystematic due to insufficient institutional support (Olawale et al., 2024). The integration of indigenous knowledge into teacher education also encounters epistemic barriers that hinder full adoption of multilingual pedagogies. Collectively, the findings suggest that teacher education is the most decisive lever for embedding translanguaging as a transformative pedagogical strategy. Thus, equipping PSTs with the skills to integrate learners' linguistic resources into teaching is, therefore, essential if classrooms are to become inclusive, equitable, and responsive to South Africa's multilingual reality.



Discussion of findings

The reviewed literature strongly indicates that multilingualism and translanguaging are not peripheral practices in South African classrooms, but central to fostering equity, inclusion, and epistemic justice. Translanguaging enables learners to mobilise their full linguistic repertoires, granting them access to complex content, strengthening their academic literacies, and shaping more robust multilingual identities (Baty, 2022; Mahan et al., 2024). However, the studies also highlight persistent ideological and structural barriers. Monolingual ideologies continue to frame African languages as unsuitable for academic work, thereby perpetuating the dominance of English and limiting both learner participation and teachers' willingness to embrace multilingual pedagogies (Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025; Sefotho, 2025). This tension underscores the persistent policy–practice gap between South Africa's multilingual education policies and classroom realities, where English remains the *de facto* language of instruction.

Teacher education emerges as a crucial lever for addressing this gap. While PSTs and in-service teachers often express positive attitudes toward inclusion, their training seldom provides them with systematic tools for multilingual pedagogy (Adigun, 2021; Martin & Bertram, 2024). Where bilingual or translanguaging strategies are employed, they tend to be *ad hoc* rather than intentionally designed or assessed (Olawale et al., 2024). Such limited preparation entrenches reliance on monolingual methods even in linguistically diverse classrooms. The evidence suggests that PST education must go beyond rhetorical commitments to diversity and include explicit modelling of translanguaging practices, integration of African indigenous knowledge, and assessment frameworks that recognise multilingual products as legitimate academic outputs (Ajani, 2025). Without such reforms, the transformative potential of translanguaging risks remaining constrained by systemic inertia.

Several scholars have long argued for the adoption of African languages in education (Chebanne & Van Pinxteren, 2021; Ndhlovana, 2025; Oduro & Mesu, 2020). Their arguments generally emphasise epistemic access and the potential for improved academic performance. While these positions remain valid, the current study advances the discussion by foregrounding culturally responsive considerations, highlighting how inclusive language practices can affirm learners' identities and enable teachers to remain relevant within the societies they serve. By adopting this perspective, language integration is not only about cognitive or academic gains, it is also about building classrooms that reflect and honour the cultural and linguistic diversity of all learners.

In today's increasingly diverse and multicultural society, cultivating inclusive classrooms requires education systems to embrace indigenous languages as integral to teaching and learning. Equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills, and resources to implement such practices empowers them to design environments that both respect linguistic diversity and foster intercultural competence. Evidence suggests that PSTs benefit significantly from observing and learning alongside more experienced educators, as these opportunities build their competence in collaborative and group instruction (Khasawneh, 2023). Moreover, embracing translanguaging has been shown to ease the burden for both teachers and students by making learning more accessible and meaningful by using familiar languages (Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2023). Ultimately, integrating indigenous languages into HE classrooms is not only a pedagogical necessity, it is also a pathway toward building inclusive, culturally responsive, and socially just education.

Conclusion

In summary, the literature demonstrates that translanguaging is both a practical pedagogical resource and an ideological stance that challenges colonial hierarchies embedded in South African education. By affirming students' multilingual identities and recognising indigenous languages as legitimate carriers of knowledge, translanguaging has the capacity to transform classrooms into inclusive spaces where all learners can thrive. However, the potential of translanguaging is not fully realised due to entrenched monolingual ideologies, policy–practice misalignments, and insufficient teacher preparation. Thus, while multilingualism is already the lived reality of South African classrooms, the absence of intentional, designed pedagogical frameworks limits its ability to foster equitable learning outcomes. The studies converge on the recognition that PST education is the hinge for sustainable change, as it is within this space that future educators can be empowered to shift from improvisational multilingual practices toward deliberate, transformative pedagogy.

Recommendation

Based on these insights, three key recommendations emerge. First, teacher education curricula must be redesigned to integrate translanguaging not only as a pedagogical technique, but as a core orientation to teaching and learning. This involves modelling classroom strategies, developing task banks, and creating assessment rubrics that legitimise multilingual products. Second, policymakers and HE institutions need to



move beyond symbolic commitments to multilingualism by ensuring that policies are resourced, implemented, and monitored at classroom level. This requires investing in materials, professional development, and institutional cultures that support multilingual practices. Third, more attention must be paid to dismantling monolingual ideologies by reframing translanguaging as a decolonial and socially just pedagogy. Doing so will help PSTs to view indigenous languages not as auxiliary tools, but as vehicles for disciplinary knowledge and epistemic justice. By embracing these recommendations, South Africa can cultivate a generation of teachers who are equipped to harness linguistic diversity as an asset, thereby aligning classroom practices with the multilingual ideals embedded in policy and society.

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