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The Teacher Education Through Flexible Learning in Africa journal is an independent, open-access publication, and serves as a medium for articles of interest to researchers and practitioners in distance teacher education. The journal provides a unique platform for researchers from faculties of education to share knowledge on educational issues that especially affect Africa. It gives particular issue preference to research presented at the DETA Conference, which takes place biennially.

The views expressed in the journal are those of the respective authors.

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Contents

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TETFLE TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH FLEXIBLE LEARNING IN AFRICA JOURNAL

Retraction

The article titled Madhav, N., 2024. Optimising Open Educational Resources and practises to Enable Inclusive Education. *Teacher Education through Flexible Learning in Africa (TETFLE)*, 6, 165-184 has been retracted due to ethical compromise.

Editorial

Teacher Education Practices in a Flexible, Higher Education Environment

Fostering Inclusive Education through Multilingualism: Towards more Equitable Education?

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Abstract

For over 40 years now, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has been celebrating International Literacy Day by reminding the international community that literacy is a human right and the foundation of all learning. In the year 2017, International Literacy Day was celebrated across the globe under the theme of 'Literacy in a digital world'. For statistical purposes, UNESCO defines a literate person as someone who can read and write a short simple statement about their life. In recognising its impact on poverty, health, active citizenship, and empowerment, the development community recognises that "illiteracy is a condition that denies people opportunity" (UNESCO, 2018:6). Literacy, besides being a fundamental human right, is a foundation for reaching the overarching goal of reducing human poverty. Institutions today continue to witness an increase in the number of students who are being taught in a language different from their home language. This desktop study is aimed to unpack the trend of language and literacy from the pre- to post-colonial era in sub-Saharan Africa and how this affects learning. The authors reviewed purposively sampled documents relevant to the aim of the study. The article unpacks the trend of language and literacy from the pre- to post-colonial eras and recommends the incorporation of multilingual pedagogies in the present-day classroom and distance education.

Keywords: Distance education; epistemic access; monolingualism; multilingualism; pre-colonial; post-colonial.

Introduction

In addition to being a right, literacy allows the pursuit of other human rights. It confers a wide set of benefits and strengthens the capabilities of individuals, families, and communities to access health, educational, economic, political, and cultural opportunities. Although literacy has been high on the development agenda over the past decades, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (2018) data show that 750 million adults—two-thirds of whom are women—still lack basic reading and writing skills. One hundred and two million of the illiterate population were between 15 and 24 years old (UNESCO, 2018). The global adult literacy rate was 86% in 2016, while the youth literacy rate was 91%. Comparatively, the literacy rate for sub-Saharan Africa rose from 52% to 65% between 1990 and 2016 (UNESCO, 2018).

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics data, most countries missed the Education for All (EFA) goal of reducing adult illiteracy rates by 50% between the years 2000 and 2015. At the global level, the adult and youth literacy rates are estimated to have grown by only 4% each over this period. In addition, over 27% of all illiterate adults live in sub-Saharan Africa where 72% of adult males and 57% of females are literate. Formal schooling is a driving force for literacy expansion provided children who have access to it complete school and receive an education of good quality. Yet, in half of the sub-Saharan African countries, of a cohort of pupils who enrol in primary education, less than 60% reach the highest grade. The survival rate varies from 22% in Malawi to nearly 98% in Mauritius (UNESCO, 2018). Even among those who reach the highest grade, large numbers possess weak literacy and numeracy skills (Charamba & Zano, 2019).

Results from the second round of the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) study (2000–2002), conducted in 13 Southern Africa countries and one territory, showed that hardly any Grade 6 students in Lesotho, Malawi, and Zambia reached one of the highest four levels of the numeracy scale, while more than one-third did so in Kenya, Mauritius, and Seychelles (Charamba, 2019). The EFA report goes on to suggest that the extent of underachievement is confirmed by other international student assessments such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). TIMSS 2015 data on Grade 8 students show that in the participating sub-Saharan African countries (Botswana, Ghana, South Africa), between 68% and approximately 90% of students failed to reach the low benchmark in mathematics (Charamba, 2019).

ISSN 2788-6298

Among the factors that may explain the poor learning achievements in the region, as the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 points out, is poor mastery of the curriculum, rigid teaching practices, lack of textbooks and other teaching materials, as well as insufficient instructional time (vital for better learning), and chiefly a lack of appropriate language, book, media and information policies to develop environments in which literacy can flourish and be valued (Charamba & Zano, 2019). The presence of printed and visual materials in households, neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, and the community in languages understood by all, encourages individuals to become literate and to integrate their literacy skills into their everyday lives.

The link between poverty and illiteracy is also observed at the household level. In six sub-Saharan African countries with particularly low overall literacy rates (Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo), the literacy gap between the poorest and wealthiest households is more than 40 percentage points (UNESCO, 2018). Sub-Saharan Africa urgently needs an education paradigm shift where education planners must look beyond counting the number of children sitting in classrooms and start to focus on learning, paying special attention to overhauling teacher recruitment, training, and support systems, and embracing linguistic and cultural diversity to deliver effective classroom instruction (Ndhlovana, 2025a).

The authors argue that monolingual pedagogy in distance education reduces some students to be speechless and underperform academically due to low proficiency in the language of instruction. Lessons learned over recent decades show that meeting the goal of universal literacy calls not only for more effective efforts, but also for renewed political will and for doing things differently at all levels—locally, nationally, and internationally. This undoubtedly includes embracing cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom (UNESCO, 2018). For this to happen, there is need to decolonise education. Decolonisation of education in Africa, at all levels and forms, should encompass the incorporation of epistemic perspectives, knowledge, thinking, and languages from the African continent. With regards to post-colonial studies focusing on distance education, language has become a "weapon and a site of intense neocolonial conflict" (Charamba, 2021: 6) enabling cognitive oppression to prevail in schools. The issue of multilingual education has far-reaching consequences for teacher education, as institutions should also equip preservice teachers with the requisite skills to handle diverse classes and incorporate multilingual pedagogies.

Decolonial theory

The origins of this theory are entrenched in the Latin American scholarship. For example, Quijano (2000) suggests that when countries attained political independence, colonialism left enduring systems of racial, epistemic, and economic domination that continue to shape global hierarchies today. Over the years, the decolonial theory has evolved as a collective intellectual project, adapted and adopted globally to acknowledge and challenge the persistence of colonial logics in contemporary societies. Maldonado-Torres (2007) and Mignolo (2011) came up with the broader Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD) framework, which is an expansion of the decolonial theory which seeks to further critique Eurocentric modernity, calling for epistemic delinking from colonial paradigms.

Decolonial theory is both an intellectual and political movement that critiques the persistence of the coloniality of power, being and knowledge which are the enduring structures through which colonial hierarchies continue to shape contemporary societies even after the formal end of colonisation (Ndhlovana, 2025). In education, perpetual coloniality can be seen in the privileging of Eurocentric epistemologies as universal truths, while presenting respective Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as being inferior, unscientific, or anecdotal (Heleta, 2016; Le Grange, 2018).

In the education fraternity, this theory questions curricula that privilege Western knowledge, learning and assessment systems while marginalising local languages, IKS, and cultural ways of knowing. Such an approach produces graduates who are bound to reproduce monolingual and monocultural educational practices. A decolonial approach to education would redefine education as a site of epistemic justice, where learning acknowledges and draws on IKS to affirm learners' cultural identities, validate multilingual practices and resist colonial hierarchies of knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023).

Methodology

For the purposes of the current study, several documents were reviewed. These included the UNESCO (2003) Education Position Paper, the UNESCO (2018) global report, Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (Studies 1; 2; and 3) education white papers for Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe post-colonial era. When reviewing the documents, the intension was to

ISSN 2788-6298

establish the languages of instruction used in the respective countries before and after colonisation, as well as to unpack and understand the linguistic texture of the respective communities during the period covered.

Language and education in pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa

Literacy and education are among the most necessary ingredients for human development in today's knowledge world, or as Nelson Mandela (2010: 2) puts it "education is the most powerful weapon, which we can use to change the world". For one to comprehend how those two (literacy and education) have evolved and their contemporary state in the sub-Saharan Africa, it is important to understand the countries' colonial and post-colonial history, since it contributes to the countries' institutional policies and foundation.

Like in any region, literacy in sub-Saharan Africa is defined according to the UNESCO (2003) definition that regards literacy as the ability to read and write with understanding a simple statement related to one's daily life. Literacy, therefore, involves a continuum of the reading and writing skills and usually encompasses basic numeracy. Formal education in sub- Saharan Africa is said to have been introduced in the seventeenth century following the arrival of the clergy, as it was mainly part of their missionary work and advancing colonial interests in the region. The content of the colonial education was usually Western-oriented and generally given to a few selected individuals to support the colonial administrations (Marupi & Charamba, 2022). All educational activities were delivered in the colonial master's language.

Consequently, in all the British colonies in Southern Africa English became the sole official language much as was Portuguese in former Portuguese colonies (Marupi & Charamba, 2022). This led to sidelining indigenous languages, relegating them to play no role at all in the classroom after the third grade, and their non-use in the governance of the colonial states. When these British and Portuguese colonies eventually gained political independence, English and Portuguese retained their status as either the sole official language (for example in Malawi, Botswana, and Zimbabwe); or co-official language (for example in Lesotho, South Africa, and Swaziland).

Therefore, socio-functionally, the relationship between English and Portuguese and the African languages can rightly be described as diglossic, with the former as the H(igh) languages, and the latter as the L(ow) languages (Zano, 2024). This created a small number of elites with educated people, which even after independence during the late 1950s and early 1960s, lived on, and the privileged groups used their

advantages to gain political power in the newly independent African states. Colonial education and the following post-colonial era had similar goals regardless of colonial power and state ideology (Marupi & Charamba, 2022).

Historical development of monolingual education in sub-Saharan Africa

Through the chronicle of mankind, language has been used as an instrument of pre-eminence, and colonisation to amalgamate power and produce controllable liegemen (Ndhlovana, 2025). When Britain gained control of parts of the region, they proclaimed English as the lingua franca (Marupi & Charamba, 2022). The language was then considered to be the enlightened means of communication and spoken mostly by the aristocratic. Because of its status, even the other elite settlers such as the Dutch ended up using the English language in their day-to-day communication, making it the language of the government, education, judiciary, and business (Khosa, 2013).

The buoyancy and power of the English language are palpable, not only in former British colonies but the entire region, regardless of colonial history. An interesting case being Namibia, a country that was never colonised by Britain but willingly embraced the English language. Another case in point is Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony which has become a member of the English-speaking [British] Commonwealth of Nations, creating considerable linguistic pressure on its official language, Portuguese (Vilela, 2002).

Some linguists argue that the choice of English in both countries was based on the prominence the language has in the sub- Saharan African region (Ndamba 2010; Setati 2011). In all countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the official or co-official language became the language of instruction in all academic institutions and the language of trade for all transactions, axiomatically eclipsing or rather drowning the indigenous languages. This, however, did not sit well with the locals and some religious sects. At the request of various missionary societies which were operating within the borders of the African continent coupled with assistance from the British government, a United States of America based Phelps-Stokes Fund financed two education commissions to African British colonies whose mandate was to investigate the effectiveness of the British education system in colonial Africa. The commissions of inquiry produced two reports, namely Education in Africa in 1922, and Education in East Africa in 1925.

Two alluring recommendations in line with education emanated from their findings. The first dealt with language policy and practice in colonies visited. Pertaining to language policy and practice, the Commission put forward four basic principles:

- Each individual has an inherent right to their native tongue,
- The multiplicity of tongues shall not be such as to develop misunderstandings and distrust amongst individuals who should be friendly and cooperative.
- All groups must be able to communicate directly with those to whom the government is entrusted; and
- An increasing number of native people shall know at least one of the languages of the civilised nations (Marupi & Charamba, 2022).

Based on these conventions, the Commissions recommended that:

- A *lingua franca* of African origin should be introduced in the middle classes of the school if the area is occupied by large native groups speaking diverse languages.
- The tribal languages should be used in the lower elementary standards or grades (Ndamba, 2010).

Under normal circumstances, the education fraternity, parents, and other stakeholders would have, at face value, celebrated these recommendations.

The second recommendation paved the way for the colonial power's language to be taught in the upper grades. This recommendation turned out to be the most combative, principally because Africans were considered unassimilable due to high levels of primitivism (Molosiwa, 2009). The Phelps-Stokes Commission articulated the preeminent objective of teaching African languages as building the cognitive foundations for literacy in a European language (Lopes 1998; Molosiwa 2009). The recommendations did not change the status quo of the English language neither did they resuscitate the indigenous languages. The death of the African languages continued over the years, becoming highly noticeable.

In another development in later years, sub-Saharan African countries called for the *Africanisation* of education—specifically the replacement of former colonial languages with the indigenous languages as a medium of instruction (Ndamba, 2010). This call is evident in the "Language Plan of Action for Africa" proposed by the then Organization of African Unity (OAU, 1986), which was replaced by the African Union (AU). In particular, the "Language Action Plan for Africa" had amongst its goals:

1. to liberate the African peoples from undue reliance on the utilization of nonindigenous languages as dominant, official languages of the state in favour of the gradual takeover of appropriate and carefully selected indigenous languages in this domain;
2. to ensure that African languages by appropriate legal provision and practical promotions assume their rightful role as the means of official communication in public affairs of each member state in replacement of European languages which have hitherto played this role (OAU, 1986: 21).

Contrary to the recommendations, all sub-Saharan African countries continued to adopt language-in-education policies, which continued to put former colonial languages on a pedestal compared with the indigenous languages despite each country in the region having its own linguistic culture (Zano, 2024). For various reasons, among them elitism and vested interests, ethnolinguistic rivalries among language groups, financial constraints, and the lack of political will, to name a few, the ruling elite continued to follow the inherited colonial policies, which promoted former colonial languages at the expense of the indigenous African languages (Lopes 1998; Molosiwa 2009; Ndamba 2010).

This is evident from the multiple functions, as highlighted earlier, which English/ Portuguese performs in the life of each individual state in sub-Saharan Africa. The keeping of former colonial languages as main working languages in the whole administrative machinery of sub-Saharan African region does not emanate (Zano, 2022) from valid reasons, but rather from the desire, conscious or unconscious on the part of the minority elite, to keep and protect their short term privileges inherited from the colonial era (Charamba & Ndhlovana, 2025).

Considering the few examples cited above, it could be concluded with no doubt that sub-Saharan African countries must still resolve many linguistic issues, especially in the educational rudder. Linguists, educational psychologists, and researchers in education agree that the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction has proven advantageous, especially where the development of intellection is concerned (Baker, 2011; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Howe & Lisi, 2014). Research has demonstrated that academic use of a language that is not the child's home language results in cognitive and pedagogical difficulties (Botes & Mji, 2010; Madiba, 2014; Marupi & Charamba, 2022; Setati, 2011).

Language and education in post-colonial Africa

Present-day sub-Saharan Africa is denoted by a myriad of language policies and attitudes concerning its indigenous languages. This, as described earlier, emanates from its history of colonisation. At independence, each country in the region had to decide what language or languages it would use for its nationalistic needs (Zano, 2024). Sadly, maybe due to instilled language ideologies by the colonial powers, no country in the region chose any of its indigenous languages as a national language. The countries went for their colonial masters' languages and accorded them official or national language status (Charamba, 2019).

The chosen languages became the respective countries' *lingua franca* and the languages of instruction in the respective countries' institutions of education. Countries in the region still follow colonial practices where children's home languages are used in the first two or three grades of primary school education. From Grade 4 onwards and except during the few periods allotted to African languages on the official school timetable, all learners are expected to converse among themselves as well as with their teachers only in the language of instruction (Charamba & Zano, 2019).

The former colonisers' language then becomes the language of instruction right up to tertiary level. Most schools go to the extent of punishing learners who speak a language other than the language of instruction during schooling hours. While colonialism lasted, no African languages were ever taught in school, let alone being used as languages of instruction in respective countries (Ndamba, 2010). This monoglossic practice is still perpetuated in independent sub-Saharan Africa, resulting in placing exotic languages on a pinnacle at the expense of indigenous languages. Indigenous languages, or vernacular as they came to be known during the colonial era, were and continue to be considered unfit for use as languages of instruction further than the third or fourth grade, resulting in the region having the lowest literacy rates in the world (OAU, 1986).

Colonial ideologies and practices, undoubtedly led to a systematic exclusion of African languages in places of high esteem such as schools, trade, work, and religious gatherings under the pretext of '*one nation – one language*', '*one classroom – one language*'—a practice that still dominates national and regional dialogues and classroom practices today. In cases where the colonial language is not the exclusive official language, it was accorded a co-official language status. Notable examples are with Swati and Sesotho in Swaziland and Lesotho, respectively, much as it is in South Africa (Marupi & Charamba, 2022).

The million-dollar questions could be:

- Why do learners whose mother tongue differs from the language of instruction not fare so well academically?
- What then can be the way forward for 21st-century curricula in trying to redress the linguistic and cultural imbalances caused by colonialism?

Multilingualism in the 21st-century sub-Saharan multilingual classroom

Much research on language struggles in African countries show that European notions of monolingual practices were used in balkanising African countries into colonised states from 1884 (Charamba, 2021; Ricento, 2000; Zano, 2024). The Berlin convention of 1884 which resulted in the partitioning of Africa (Khosa, 2013), ensured that newly founded colonies were divided based on the linguistic boundaries, reflecting European divisions of states—hence, the invention of miscellaneous concepts such as Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone Africa, which are not accurate descriptions of Africa's sociolinguistic compositions.

From these nomenclatures, Africa's multilingual realities were 'fixed' into elephantine norms reflecting no more than 5% of the population (Madiba, 2014). This explains why after a period of over 200 years; many sub-Saharan African states have not fully expressed their multilingual competence in the educational space. Despite evidence from an international body of research on language and education (see for example Ndhlovana, 2025a; Zano, 2024), many African countries still use their ex-colonial languages as languages of instruction despite that these languages are not understood fully by the majority of both teachers and the learners (Childs, 2016).

The monoglossic language doctrine with roots embedded in the colonial philosophies, does not appreciate cultural and linguistic diversity in education. It regards languages as perceptible units spoken and taught at different times to circumvent the contagion of one language by the other (Zano, 2022). Today's global village has become increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, resulting in most learners entering the classroom with a home language that is different from the language of instruction (Van Laere et al., 2014). Poor propensity in the language of instruction, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, has been identified as one of the major causes of menial academic performance amongst learners whose home language and language of instruction differ, thus, culminating in the growing calls to recognise linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom as learners constantly switch languages (Hornberger & Link, 2012).

There is, therefore, the need to produce alternative pedagogical approaches for multilingual classes in sub-Saharan Africa which cater for the simultaneous use of more than one language for teaching and learning purposes (Baker 2011; Clark et al., 2012). This epistemological shift from the acquiescence of monolingual paradigms is generally referred to as the "multilingual turn" (May, 2013:5) to signal the focus on multilingualism as the beginning point in understanding language practices (Baker, 2011; Garcia & Wei, 2014). These academics have revealed that a heteroglossic orientation towards language systems has gained momentum in global, fluid, and mobile communicative spaces (Madiba, 2014), as it promotes learners' achievement in various content areas.

African multilingualism has always been inferred from a monoglossic ideology where people make use of one language at a time despite the pretensions of plural language policies in sub-Saharan Africa (Khosa, 2013). The use of more than one language has always been conceived from extrinsic discernments of plurality, which contradict the meaning-making practices of people with African language backgrounds (Madiba, 2014). Monolingual bias as highlighted earlier on became a derivative from the British Enlightenment period where the philosophy of'one nation – one language' and the presupposition that using multiple languages creates mental confusion (Baker, 2011) exuded the socio-political and educational thinking of this era. While Garcia (2011) construes the complexity of multilingual education through a recurring analogy of the banyan tree, Charamba views African multilingualism through the "*Sankofa* lens", a notion used by the Ghanaians which means 'going back to fetch' (Marupi & Charamba, 2022). The notion views the past and the present as being interlocked through the search for consistency of practices and applications in the present context (Khosa, 2013).

Sankofa attempts to reconstruct African multilingualism by reflecting on pre-colonial social entities in a bid to look for practical models and solutions applicable to the sub-Saharan African context (Khosa, 2013). The whole idea centres on looking back at pre-colonial ways of communication and revert to such practices. Through such monocles, African languages should not be viewed as static entities, but rather dynamic, fluid, and overlapping across a wider linguistic spectrum enabling the use of translingual communication that clouds ambits between languages (Hornberger & Link, 2012). This, therefore, renders all-controlling mechanisms over language use as inefficacious, ineffectual, and counterproductive to language and content mastery (Charamba & Zano, 2019).

Multilingual pedagogies as instructional approaches have been intensively studied in other regions in the world as a discourse where linguistic input and output are alternated in different languages (Creese & Blackledge 2010; García 2011; García & Wei 2014). In sub-Saharan Africa, Charamba (2019), Madiba (2014), Molosiwa (2009), Msimanga and Lelliott (2014), Ndamba (2010), Setati (2011), and UNESCO (2018) observe that African languages are used as a medium of instruction in the early years of primary education, the period during which English is taught as a subject before taking over the reigns as a medium of instruction for the remainder of one's academic journey.

The most valuable resource sub-Saharan Africa has is its children with diverse cultural and linguistic affiliations. These should, therefore, be given all the support they need to thrive in life through an enormous paradigm shift. Language is both a means and an end in educational systems. To learning, it manifests itself in countless, shifting modalities; while as an end or objective of learning, it is often perceived as an autonomous, formal entity (Ndhlovana, 2025a).

It is unfortunate to note that in most schools in sub-Saharan Africa learners are discouraged from using any other language than the language of instruction. The rigid restrictions are often based on the (false) presumption that students learn best (especially languages) when there is no interference from other languages (Rita, 2016). It is time for the region to make the marginalised visible.

Conclusion

When the language, culture, and history of an individual are not acknowledged in the school context, this experience can be dehumanising (Childs, 2016). In this regard, Bartolomé (1994) maintains that a humanising pedagogy can be enacted by considering the contexts, background, and world views of learners. Mother Tongue Comfort reminds of the delight of being able to use the home language: "I am truly me when wrapped in my words and my ideas" (Childs, 2016:4). Zinn and Rodgers (2012) add that both learners and teachers benefit from the acknowledgement of who they are and what they can do. As pointed out elsewhere in this article, most learners in sub-Saharan Africa use their mother tongue in the early years of schooling, which enables them to negotiate language and conceptual competences with relative ease.

ISSN 2788-6298

The switch in Grade 3 to learning and teaching in another language snatches the blanket of the familiar language away (Childs, 2016). Multilingual education could provide a means of extending the use of the mother tongue or main language purposefully and systematically into the higher academic phases. The mother tongue can, thus, be used as a bridge to the required school's language of instruction. The goal would thus be one of bi/multilingualism rather than foregrounding competence in the language of instruction.

Why is the theme essential?

The theme of *Inclusive Classrooms for Epistemic Access: Opportunities and Challenges for the present-day practitioner* was regarded as crucial, as it provides significant opportunities for educators to critique their pedagogical approaches, surpassing the conventional approaches to education. Given the ever-increasing student diversity, there is a need for educators to question and re-examine the efficacy of monolingual pedagogy, be it in face-to-face or distance education.

Debate on whether the use of multilingualism is disruptive of monolingual ideologies and practices that predominate education appear to be still in its emergence. Some research in this field focusses on what appears contradictory though cogent discourses on blurring boundaries between languages or codes, resulting in no 'named' languages. By not recognising 'named' languages, students can make use of their entire linguistic repertoire for meaning making.

It can be argued that multilingual education does not only involve the educators' and students' proficiency in several languages, but it also includes their knowledge and comprehension of language acquisition processes, conceptual, theoretical, and pedagogical models, approaches focusing on the advancement of multilingual adeptness, and language policies and ideologies interrelated with education and language use.

The linguistic proficiencies of students in the sub-Saharan region have been examined and evaluated based on the language policies or expectations of the Global North.

In most classrooms today, not all pedagogical approaches acknowledge and recognise minority language students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Some institutions and/or educators view these students' multilingualism as an obstacle to effective teaching and learning.

Why were we (the editors) interested in a special edition on this theme?

We (the editors) believe that students should not be treated as blank slates and one of the most important resources they bring into the learning space is their language. We, therefore, suggest that educators should view students' languages as a resource rather than an obstacle. Effective education can only materialise when students have proficiency in the instructional language. The crux of education should be knowledge acquisition and students should be assessed in such. Monolingual pedagogies, however, subject students to being assessed in their proficiency in the language of learning/teaching. Multilingual pedagogy also enhances students' proficiency in the target language while at the same time, preserving minority languages and cultures. Considering the current discourse on multilingualism, we saw it fit to produce a special edition that solely focuses on the challenges and opportunities presented by multilingual education throughout the world.

Why is this the right time to investigate the theme?

Due to the current increase in inter- and intra-national movements and globalisation, institutions are witnessing an ever-evolving student diversity. This also includes diversity in terms of the language and culture students bring to class. With the changing linguistic landscape, we think it is long overdue that educators question and cross-question the efficacy of monolingual pedagogy and consider a change in instructional approaches by acknowledging and embracing students' linguistic diversity. Economic and political challenges faced by some communities and countries are also adding to the enrolment of students from various backgrounds. With some studies highlighting the efficacy of multilingual education, we suggest this is the right time to investigate the efficacy of multilingual education and add a voice to the current debates around the theme.

The first article by Eric Addae-Kyeremeh et al. (2025) explores how educational resources are designed, developed, and used within a major Ghanaian university's Open and Distance Learning (ODL) teacher education programme. The interactive self-study approach encourages independent engagement with content, offering insights to improve the quality and effectiveness of ODL resources.

ISSN 2788-6298

In the second article, Phejane (2025) investigated how distance learning can be transformed through new assessment methods and the impact of revised assessment practices on student success. The study concludes that adapting assessment practices is imperative for student success in distance learning and highlights the importance of ongoing evaluation to align with learning outcomes.

Using the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition model, Makonye (2025) in the third article conducted a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature from 2010 to 2024. The systematic study maps current pedagogical practices and interrogates the affordances and constraints of digital tools in teaching, learning, and assessment. The findings reveal that a deeper pedagogical transformation is necessary to fully harness information and communication technology for innovative, trans-disciplinary science, technology, engineering, and mathematics learning environments.

In the fourth article, Scheepers (2025) examined whether adult distance learning students value affective support or prioritise managing their own learning. While students appreciated the Programme Success Tutor (PST), they placed greater importance on their autonomy and self-management in their learning journey. This finding reveals important insights for practitioners.

Charamba and Ndhlovana (2025), in their response to this call, systematically reviewed peer-reviewed studies from 2020 to 2025 and analysed how higher education can improve teacher preparation for culturally responsive teaching. The review offers practical strategies for creating inclusive classrooms and suggests reforms in teacher education to enhance skills in multilingual and culturally responsive teaching.

The sixth article by Kapolo et al. (2025) examines teachers' resilience in managing diverse classrooms in Namibia. The findings show that teachers consider resilience essential for navigating these environments, yet they encounter challenges like absenteeism, discipline issues, low self-esteem, language barriers, and tribal tensions. The study also provides valuable recommendations to address these obstacles.

In India, Mukhopadhyay investigates teacher education for English instruction in multilingual classrooms and highlights the absence of multilingual continual professional development (CPD) activities in language education and training policy. The article uses a narrative overview to present two short-term research project examples, demonstrating the advantages of a multilingual approach in the CPD of in-service Indian teachers.

Dihangoane and Omidire (2025), in the eighth article, report on the findings of using translanguaging as leverage for developing inclusive communication. Although some teachers were sceptical about implementation, most learners enjoyed and

benefited from translanguaging. The authors highlighted how distance education can address challenges in raising teacher awareness of translanguaging's benefits.

In the ninth article, Sefotho (2025) investigates how teachers could use translanguaging to develop reading comprehension in bi/multilingual classroom contexts. The results show how translanguaging for the present-day practitioner is an opportunity to enhance reading comprehension in bi/multilingual classroom contexts.

Diving into the challenges and opportunities of teaching in multilingual and multicultural education contexts in Namibia in the tenth article, Hako et al. (2025) emphasise the significance of a comprehensive training plan in multicultural learning programmes for developing cultural competency and preparing teachers for multilingual and multicultural settings.

To further navigate the challenges and opportunities for the present-day practitioner in contemporary classrooms, Ajani's systematic literature review highlights the importance of in-service teacher training (INSET) in empowering educators to tackle the complexities of modern classrooms. Notably, the article examines factors such as technological advancements and diverse learner populations.

In the twelfth article, Muhati-Nyakundi (2025) examines how teachers in Kenya and South Africa perceive their readiness to handle overcrowded classrooms, using Afrocentric and resilience approaches. The paper offers recommendations for a comprehensive strategy to address the challenges faced by teachers in such environments.

We, the editors, believe this special edition shares cutting and up-to-date knowledge on instructional issues that affect education.

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