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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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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 *Teacher Education through Flexible Learning in Africa (TETFLE)*, 6, pp.165-184 has been retracted due to ethical compromise.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).

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

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.

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.

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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Designing and Developing Self-Directed Learning Resources in Open Distance Learning (ODL) Contexts: A Ghanaian Case Study

Vol 7, 2025



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Designing and Developing Self-Directed Learning Resources in Open Distance Learning (ODL) Contexts: A Ghanaian Case Study

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Abstract

The expansion of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is critical for teacher education in Ghana. This study explores the on-the-ground reality of how educational resources are designed, developed, and used within a major Ghanaian university's ODL teacher education programme. Using qualitative case study design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants, comprising curriculum developers, module authors/lecturers, and course tutors. Findings reveal a systematic approach centred on collaborative co-authoring to create interactive, self-directed print textbooks locally referred to as modules, which serve as primary learning materials. The design approach emphasises interactive self-study enabling learners to engage with content independently. However, significant challenges emerge from a systemic fragmentation between content creation and delivery. Tutors, who are at the forefront of implementation, have limited formal channels for providing feedback, leading to a disconnect between the intended and enacted curriculum. The current study highlights the need for greater pedagogical coherence and institutionalised feedback loops to enhance the quality and effectiveness of ODL resources in this context.

Keywords: Curriculum development; Ghana; Open and Distance Learning (ODL); resource design; teacher education



Introduction

The expansion of Distance Learning (DL) in teacher education marks a significant and sustained shift across the African continent, with Ghana standing out as a key example (Addae-Kyeremeh et al, 2024; Senyametor et al., 2024). This growth responds to persistent challenges such as limited infrastructure in campus-based institutions and the increasing demand for qualified teachers (Addae-Kyeremeh & Boateng, 2024; Anamuah-Mensah & Cullen, 2013). This expansion is not only practical, but also policy driven. Continental frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016–2025) stress teacher development as central to achieving broader social and economic transformation (African Union Commission, 2015). DL programmes, typically delivered through a central university and a network of regional study centres, offer a flexible alternative to traditional face-to-face models, thereby widening access to professional development and initial teacher qualification for a more diverse population (Brenya, 2022). For instance, Zhang et al. (2021) highlight the University of Education, Winneba's network of 23 study centres across Ghana, noting that distance teacher education has enabled thousands of teachers to gain qualifications often with employment prospects making it a sustainable model for teacher training.

However, the flexibility of DL must not come at the expense of educational quality. As noted by the Commonwealth of Learning (Freeman, 2005), distance education often functions without a conventional classroom teacher, distributing instructional responsibilities between structured learning materials and tutors. These educational resources and materials must, therefore, be meticulously designed to perform multiple instructional roles: articulating learning objectives, delivering subject knowledge, illustrating key concepts, and maintaining learner engagement. They must be “well-written” and “self-contained” (Salifu et al., 2023, p. 2). This requires collaboration among academic authors, learning designers, editors, and media specialists to ensure pedagogical coherence, contextual relevance, and alignment with curriculum standards. Regardless of the delivery medium, print or online, design teams must carefully scope content structure, assessment types, and delivery methods to meet learning outcomes and ensure accessibility. Learner needs and behaviours are also considered, with materials incorporating opportunities for reflection, practice, and formative assessment that provide feedback without relying on constant tutor involvement (Sibomana, 2019).

While digital platforms are increasingly used to distribute materials, printed resources remain essential in contexts with limited technological infrastructure. In many African settings, including Ghana, print-based materials supplemented by occasional face-to-face contact continue to be the backbone of DL provision (Rennie et al., 2017). Hence, poorly designed resources can have serious consequences, including high student attrition, learner isolation, and the graduation of underprepared teachers (Angelino et al., 2007; Ewulley et al., 2023). Given the high cost of tutoring and the home-based nature of most learners, tutor interaction is often limited and episodic. Tutors are thus, more accurately described as “facilitators” (Andoh et al., 2020, p. 120), placing a significant pedagogical burden on the learning materials. The quality and relevance of these resources are particularly critical in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) teacher education, where the learning experience must model effective teaching practices and address the needs of a diverse student body (Khunou, 2021).

The current study explores the realities behind the development of such materials, focusing on the process, author practices, philosophies, and challenges involved in designing and delivering educational resources by addressing two key research questions:

1. How are educational resources for teacher education designed and developed within the ODL framework at a university in Ghana, and what factors influence this process?
2. What are the challenges in the design and development of educational resources in such low resource contexts?

Relevant literature

Theoretical foundations of ODL resource design

The design of effective ODL environments is not an intuitive act but is deeply informed by several foundational theories that seek to explain and guide the learning process when teachers and students are physically separated. Moore’s (1993) seminal theory of transactional distance, for instance, provides a useful analytical lens. Moore (1993) posits that in any educational relationship, a psychological and communication gap, the ‘transactional distance’ exists between instructor and learner. The magnitude of this distance is determined by three key variables: dialogue (the extent of purposeful, constructive interaction); structure (the rigidity or flexibility of the course’s design and



objectives); and learner autonomy (Kandemir & Çakmak, 2021). Therefore, a primary goal of instructional design in ODL is to reduce this distance. This is achieved through resources that are intentionally designed and written to foster a sense of dialogue (e.g., through embedded reflective questions, self-assessment exercises, and a conversational tone) and a clear, supportive structure that guides the learner without being overly restrictive (Abreh, 2025; Anlimachie et al., 2025).

Building on this foundational concept, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework developed by Garrison et al. (1999) offers a more holistic, socio-cognitive blueprint for creating meaningful online and blended learning experiences. The CoI framework has become one of the most influential models in distance education research and practice, positing that deep and meaningful learning occurs through the dynamic interaction of three core, interdependent presences. Cognitive presence is the extent to which learners can construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse. Social presence refers to the ability of participants to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves as 'real people' and fostering a climate of trust and collaboration. Finally, teaching presence encompasses the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realising personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes. Each of these presences is heavily influenced by the architecture of the learning environment, particularly the design of its core educational resources and activities. Instructional techniques that foster an environment conducive to active learning, such as the use of collaborative tools, case-based learning, and structured discussions, are paramount (Dron & Anderson, 2014).

Furthermore, the principles of Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism are profoundly relevant to the ODL model described in this study. Vygotsky argued that learning is a fundamentally social process, where individuals construct knowledge through interaction with others. His concept of the Zone of proximal development, the gap between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can achieve with guidance, is particularly salient. In this ODL context, the educational resource (the module) can be seen as a primary 'More Knowledgeable Other' (MKO), providing the structured knowledge and scaffolding needed for independent study. The course tutor then functions as a second, more dynamic MKO during face-to-face sessions, providing targeted support to help learners traverse the ZPD. This theoretical lens highlights the critical symbiotic relationship between the self-study materials

and the human facilitator. Similarly, Laurillard's (2012) conversational framework emphasises that learning is a process of iterative dialogue. This framework outlines a series of 'conversations' that must occur between the teacher and the learner, as well as between the learner and the concepts. For distance education, this implies that resources must be designed as a 'dialogue on paper', anticipating learner questions, providing feedback, and encouraging students to articulate and re-articulate their understanding.

Collectively, these theories highlight a unified vision for effective distance learning design, one in which meticulously structured resources and intentional facilitation converge to create a rich, interactive, and socially mediated learning environment. This study, therefore, draws on these interwoven perspectives to frame the educational resources not merely as content repositories, but as catalysts for dialogue, community, and guided intellectual growth, ultimately bridging the physical and pedagogical distance inherent in the ODL context.

Designing contextually relevant learning resources to support DL

In many Ghanaian and African contexts where Internet access is either expensive, unreliable, or unavailable, printed course materials remain the most equitable and robust cornerstone of ODL delivery (Rennie et al., 2017). This is not merely a concession to a lack of technology, but is also supported by cognitive science. Research suggests that reading long, linear texts on paper may lead to better comprehension and retention compared to screen-based reading, partly due to a reduced cognitive load and the tactile, spatial cues that paper provides (Mangen et al., 2013). Therefore, print modules are intentionally designed for deep, independent study, often using a modular format, clear learning outcomes, and a conversational tone to simulate a tutorial dialogue and reduce learner isolation (Lockwood, 2018). Their structure must be logical and carefully scaffolded, progressively building understanding and embedding activities that prompt reflection and application. The challenge, therefore, is not simply to produce a textbook, but to design a comprehensive, self-contained learning experience that simulates the presence of a tutor.

However, this reliance on pre-designed materials creates a well-documented tension between the intended curriculum (as designed by the module authors) and the enacted curriculum (as experienced by learners and facilitated by tutors). This gap is a central problem in the study of educational implementation (Fullan, 2016). Tutors,



who are at the front line of delivery, develop invaluable insights into which parts of the resources are effective and which parts are confusing or problematic for students. They are uniquely positioned to provide formative feedback for curriculum improvement. Yet, as literature suggests and the current study explores, they often have limited or no formal channels to influence the design and revision process (De Souza & Da Costa Polonia, 2015; Kılıç & Saygılı, 2022). Without robust, institutionalised mechanisms for dialogue between the central resource developers and the distributed network of facilitators, the curriculum risks becoming static, unresponsive, and progressively misaligned with the emergent needs of learners.

While print remains central, the global push towards integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) presents both profound opportunities and significant challenges. The proliferation of digital tools, Open Educational Resources (OER), and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have democratised access to a vast repository of high-quality materials (Shukla et al., 2022). OER are promoted based on the '5R' permissions articulated by Wiley (2014): the rights to retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute. The ability to 'revise' and 'remix' is theoretically ideal for contextualising content for local needs. However, the practical application of this principle is often hindered by a lack of technical skills, institutional support, and time.

More fundamentally, many of these readily available digital resources are developed in, and for Western contexts. Their importation into African educational settings raises critical questions about their cultural relevance, linguistic suitability, and alignment with local curricula and pedagogical traditions (Arinto et al., 2017). As Ngimwa and Wilson (2012) argue, digital resources designed without adequate consideration of the African learner's context often fail to meet their pedagogical and motivational needs. The cultural assumptions embedded in case studies, the idiomatic expressions used, and the very structure of expected interactions can create a sense of alienation (Olaniran & Agnello, 2008). True contextualisation goes beyond a superficial substitution of names and places; it requires a deep re-engineering of the material to align with local epistemologies and lived realities.

This issue is compounded by the nature of the 'digital divide'. As van Dijk (2005) argues, this divide is not merely about access to hardware and Internet connectivity, it also encompasses motivational access (the desire to use technology), skills access (the competencies to use it effectively), and usage access (what people do with the technology). Principles like Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocate

for providing multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement (Meyer et al., 2014), offer a promising framework for creating more flexible and accessible resources. Yet, applying such principles effectively requires a granular understanding of the specific context, including learner characteristics, tutor capabilities, and institutional realities. This study addresses a critical gap by shifting the focus from the promise of imported technology to the reality of local practice, providing a detailed, empirical account of the resource design and development process in Ghana and offering insights into the factors that shape a curriculum striving to be both scalable and deeply contextualised.

Research design

To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative case study design was employed (Kekeya, 2021; Knapp, 2024). The current case study approach is well-suited for exploring a complex, contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context (Ali et al., 2024). The ‘case’ under investigation was the ODL teacher education programme at a major Ghanaian university. It is considered an ‘instrumental’ case because the in-depth study of this specific programme was undertaken to illuminate the broader issue of ODL resource development in a Sub-Saharan African higher education setting. This design enabled a holistic and intensive examination of the interactions, decisions, and challenges that shape the creation and use of learning resources. Credibility was enhanced through the triangulation of data sources, whereby the perspectives of different participant groups (e.g., central curriculum developers versus remote course tutors) were compared to construct a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the phenomenon (Wa-Mbaleka & Rosario, 2022).

This institution represents a critical case due to its significant role in training teachers across the country through its network of a central campus and numerous regional study centres. To ensure a comprehensive view, the study was conducted at multiple sites. The university’s main campus was the site for engaging with curriculum developers, module authors, and institutional leaders who oversee the resource design and policymaking processes. In addition, three regional study centres were purposefully selected as sites to gather data from course tutors, providing crucial perspectives from the point of curriculum delivery and enactment. This multi-site approach within a single-case design was essential for capturing the full lifecycle of ODL resources, from their conception to their practical implementation.



Population and sampling

The study population included all professional staff involved in the design, development, and delivery of the university's ODL teacher education programme. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select information-rich participants who could offer deep insights into the research questions (Akkas & Meydan, 2024). The sample comprised key stakeholders directly involved in the ODL process such as senior academics and institutional leaders at the main campus responsible for curriculum policy and module development, lecturers who serve as module authors, and experienced course tutors who facilitate learning at the selected regional study centres. These individuals were chosen based on their roles, experience, and direct knowledge of the resource development process and its associated challenges, ensuring the data collected was highly relevant and detailed.

In total, the final sample for this study comprised 16 participants, drawn from the distinct stakeholder groups identified. These are: *three senior academics* and institutional leaders responsible for policy; *four lecturers* who serve as module authors; and *nine course tutors* from across the three selected study centres. A combination of criterion-based and snowball sampling strategies was employed to recruit these individuals. Initially, academics and module authors were identified through purposive criterion sampling, based on their direct involvement in the ODL teacher education curriculum and a minimum of five years' experience with the programme.

Following their interviews, the participants were asked to recommend experienced and articulate course tutors, a form of snowball sampling that helped identify information-rich participants at the point of delivery. While this sample of 16 is a subset of the total available personnel of approximately 12 institutional officials, 15 core module authors, and several dozen tutors, it is considered appropriate for the study's qualitative, interpretive goals.

In qualitative inquiry, the aim is not statistical generalisation, but to achieve informational richness and depth (Staller, 2021). The power of the sample lies in its ability to provide detailed and nuanced data. The principle of data saturation guided the selection, the point at which collecting further data no longer yields new insights or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). By deliberately including participants with diverse roles and perspectives from high-level design to classroom implementation, the sample was strategically constructed to capture a comprehensive spectrum of experiences, ensuring that the collected data was sufficiently dense to achieve saturation and support a credible, in-depth thematic analysis.

Data collection, management, and analysis

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. An interview guide was used to provide a consistent framework for inquiry, focusing on topics such as the module writing process, pedagogical design, institutional policies, and implementation challenges. The semi-structured format provided flexibility to explore emergent themes and allowed participants to elaborate on their unique experiences and perspectives in their own words (Price & Smith, 2021). All interviews were audio-recorded with explicit consent from the participants.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim to generate a detailed textual dataset, which was subsequently analysed using an iterative thematic analysis approach, following the guidelines established by Braun and Clarke (2021b). This systematic process involved familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts; generating initial codes inductively from the data; organising codes into potential themes; reviewing, refining, and naming the themes; and producing the final analysis. The entire process was facilitated using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package, which assisted in organising the codes and themes efficiently.

Ethical considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical protocols to protect the rights and welfare of all participants. Formal ethical clearance was secured from the relevant institutional review boards at both the lead researcher's university and the participating Ghanaian university, prior to any research activities beginning. All individuals invited to participate were provided with an information sheet that clearly explained the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and their unconditional right to withdraw at any stage. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to their interview. To preserve participant anonymity, data tags (e.g., 'Tutor K') have been used when reporting the findings.

Findings

This section presents key findings related to the design, development, and challenges of creating educational resources for ODL in a Ghanaian teacher education programme. Interview data revealed themes such as collaborative module writing, interactive self-study design, and the tutor's role as facilitator, which are presented below:



Designing modules for DL

Self-directed learning as a cornerstone

The teacher education modules examined in this study are purposefully designed as self-directed learning texts, intended to guide students through content in a structured and accessible manner with minimal face-to-face instruction. Lecturers involved in developing these modules receive targeted training to ensure the materials are interactive and engaging for independent learners. As one academic leader explained:

...the people who wrote the modules were trained specifically to make them interactive. Each unit of a module typically opens with an introduction and learning objectives, and the content is written in a conversational tone as if the instructor is speaking directly to the student. The introduction of a unit is crafted such that “you will feel as if you have the lecturer in front of you talking. So, as you read, it’s like you are conversing with somebody. It’s highly interactive”. This stylistic approach is intended to simulate a guided dialogue, anticipating student questions and encouraging them to think actively as they read.

Because these modules must stand in for face-to-face teaching, they are written in very clear and accessible language. One of the academic authors/lecturers explained as follows:

The modules are written in such a way that... [it’s] as if speaking to the student so that they should be able to read by themselves and understand most of what is in the module”. The language used is simple and straightforward English, avoiding overly technical jargon, so that students of varying backgrounds can grasp the material through self-study. The expectation is that by reading the module independently, learners can acquire the core content on their own; any difficult points that remain can later be clarified during tutor-led sessions.

In essence, the design philosophy is to empower students to learn at their own pace with the module as a “self-tutor”, minimising the need for extensive lecturing by a teacher. These aspirations for the DL module design philosophy are echoed by TutorK, one of the tutors:

... Modules developed for my programme, it’s quite good. Okay... the modules, have already been developed; [they made them] more interactive, self-explanatory; you’ll read on your own. You’ll need... some interaction with the TA, to explain but you can also learn on your own. So, looking at it, it’s quite explanatory, interactive, wide on examples; then [it’s] even developed around the, I’d say the outline... okay, yes... it has been made in such a

way that ... if I sit at home and you even sit on your own, you're left out by the tutors, you should be able to understand.

This suggests that the material is comprehensive and regularly updated, aligning closely with the course outline to cover necessary topics in a logical and student-friendly manner.

According to interviewees, each module is organised into sequential units that students can follow step by step. Importantly, the modules also encourage further exploration by including references and suggested readings at the end of each unit.

“At the end of every unit, we have reference materials – sources that you can consult”, noted one interviewee, TutorB. The interviewee goes further to explain as follows:

These extended readings are provided to enrich understanding and allow motivated students to go beyond the core module content. The inclusion of such resources reflects an instructional design choice aimed at promoting deeper learning and research skills. In practice, however, not all students take advantage of these references.

The interviewee also mentioned that while “students who are studious, those who are serious, they’ll go beyond the modules and look for the extra material”, many others “limit themselves to the... modules” only. This suggests that the effectiveness of the module design (in terms of encouraging independent inquiry) can be influenced by student motivation and study habits.

Co-authoring for continuity and workload sharing

The development of DL course textbooks and main teaching resource, known as modules, has shifted from single authorship to a collaborative writing approach. Initially, each module was written by one lecturer, however, over time, the university adopted a co-authorship model for several reasons. One major factor was to ensure continuity of the course material if staff turnover occurs. One lecturer/author explained as follows:

... the policy now is to have two people or more to do the module writing so that if one leaves, the other can support or be there. This co-authoring approach also distributes the workload. Each module typically consists of six units, and when two authors collaborate, they divide the units between them—for example, one author might draft Units 1–3 and the other Units 4–6, sometimes alternating to balance the effort. This way, both contribute substantively to the content.



Another lecturer/author described their experience as follows:

Yeah, the way we [did] this was... We've got a team of writers, who are lecturers here, in the university here, from various departments. So, in our case, the mathematics books are from both the Education – Faculty of Education – and then the Faculty of Science, that is, those from the Department of Mathematics and [Statistics]. So, we form teams and then we come together and look at the course outlines... And... if it is methods, we see the syllabuses that are being used at the level [for which] we are preparing [materials]. We have the Primary School one and then we have the JHS one; and I think, quite recently, I think they are working on the Senior Secondary School one – I am not involved in that. So, we take the syllabuses, you know, and base it [at] the levels they are going to... And... then we prepare the course outline and all of this... and based on that, you write the modules unit by unit, bearing in mind what the syllabus is ... at the level they will be teaching it. Right, so we do that—experts. Then we give portions to members of the team to write.

Right. So, they write. After we have written, we come together again and the team will look through all, from first unit up to the sixth unit. There are six units. All of us will look through and then we bring our suggestions, corrections and so on and so forth. Right. ... And it's after that that we send it to the administration and then they go about processing it; I mean, they have it typed very well and then it's done... then it's sent to them and then they go print them. And we are expecting that when they bring it, we look at them again later on, and make sure we have this.

The excerpts suggest a structured co-authoring process by faculty members, a process that begins with reviewing relevant syllabuses to create course outlines. Modules are then written unit by unit by assigned team members. After drafting, the entire team conducts a thorough peer review of all units, incorporating feedback, and corrections. The finalised content is submitted to the administration for formatting and printing, followed by a final quality check upon receiving the printed materials.

Use of existing expertise

The module authors are usually lecturers who have taught the subject in the regular campus-based programme, and they draw on their prior coursework materials. One lecturer/author noted:

I have been teaching these courses in the regular programme. So, it is my lecture notes that I transformed into the modules.

This indicates that the content development leverages existing expertise and materials, adapting them into the self-contained module format suitable for distance learners. Co-authors coordinate to integrate their contributions into a coherent resource. One of the leaders explained that:

...alongside writing the modules, one of the co-authors typically serves as the chief examiner for that course, overseeing assessments and academic quality. The chief examiner responsibility is assigned to just one person per module, and the co-authoring model helps ensure this role is not too onerous. If two lecturers co-write a module, often the one not serving as chief examiner will take on that duty in a different module, preventing any single individual from being “saddled with so much work”. This arrangement is designed to distribute responsibilities such as setting exam questions and marking schemes. It reflects an institutional decision to manage workload and maintain continuity: “they didn’t want one person to be saddled with so much work, at least, so far as chief examiner duties are concerned”.

These show a collaborative module development process with multiple authors and clear role allocation is a deliberate strategy influenced by staffing considerations (existing expertise and workload management) to sustain the DL programme.

Separation of content creation and delivery

In this DL framework, the lecturers who write the modules are not the ones directly teaching most of students. Instead, *course tutors* at various study centres facilitate learning using the module as the primary content. This was explained as follows by one of the senior leaders:

Tuition and facilitation of learning is carried out by course tutors, not the lecturers who write the modules. These tutors meet with student cohorts periodically (often on weekends) to guide discussions, clarify difficult concepts, and support learners [...] rather than to deliver lectures from scratch. The reason is that since the module contains the main “lecture notes” in written form, the role of the tutor is to facilitate an interactive learning experience around that content, rather than to teach it in a traditional way.

Facilitation in this context refers to a learner-centred approach where the tutor’s job is to stimulate and steer discussion, rather than present large amounts of new information. One lecturer/author described facilitation as “*purely a discussion session directed by the course tutor*” in which the tutor uses their expertise to pose questions and guide conversation.



Another lecturer/author described this shared understanding as follows:

A tutor is expected to come to class with a “foreknowledge of the contents” and an understanding of key concepts, and then “open discussions” among the students. The discussion is “structured” and guided to ensure it stays on topic and covers the important issues at hand.

In essence, the tutor acts as a moderator and mentor, helping students engage with the module material and each other, rather than lecturing at them. This mode of delivery aligns with adult education principles and the ODL philosophy of active, student-centred learning.

Most tutors interviewed emphasised the importance of their role as facilitators of learning. For instance, TutorY mentioned, “... *Rather than using the lecture method I believe in discussion*”. This approach they believe helps engage students actively, encourages critical thinking, and facilitates deeper understanding.

TutorK and TutorA, respectively, described the importance on drawing students’ prior knowledge and experience to facilitate discussion based on the module content or other sources:

... for me I always want to start from points where they know. Rather than using the lecture method I believe in discussion shows the emphasis on interactive and inclusive teaching approaches.

... Even if it is literature takes its source from the society; so, you bring what is in the society and bring it to bear on what is in the classroom what is in the textbook.

However, the effectiveness of the facilitation model is highly dependent on students arriving prepared. Ideally, learners are supposed to read the module material prior to a face-to-face session. In the words of one lecturer/author who is a course leader:

... that is the ideal situation; that is what is expected of them. If students have worked through the module in advance, the tutor can then use the class time to clarify doubts, deepen understanding, and engage in collaborative activities—truly facilitating discussion around a shared base of knowledge.

Tutors consistently noted that many students struggle to complete the required readings before attending tutorials. TutorT remarked “*the truth is that many of them are not able to do that*”. This lack of preparation often shifts the nature of the tutorial from a space for facilitated discussion to one of direct teaching, where tutors must summarise

or teach the content on the spot. A lecturer and course leader further explained that when students arrive unprepared, the tutor's workload increases significantly, transforming what should be a facilitative session into a more traditional teaching encounter. These perspectives are illustrated in the following excerpt:

... So, it is supposed that they would have studied the material, read the thing ahead; and then they have [the] face-to-face; and where they have problems and difficulties, then the tutors or facilitators help them through, by explaining. ... It's not actually meant [for teaching] ... you can get the details from the [module of] distance programme. It is not actually meant for them... for their lecturer to be there and then present the material like they would present it if they were in residence—I'm talking about these regular students. Yeah, they're [the distance students] supposed to study the material, where they have difficulty, then, they iron that out with [...] I mean, at the face-to-face with the tutor. That is actually the intention. During some of our monitoring, we noticed that many of the students don't actually read the thing very well; they don't read ahead; so they go and they expect the lecturer to go and still teach them like he'd be teaching ... In most cases, that is what we—I—noticed.

Tutors often find themselves blending lecturing with facilitation reviewing foundational content before attempting to initiate discussion. This hybrid approach emerges out of necessity, frequently due to students arriving unprepared. As a result, some tutors struggle to cover the full scope of content within the limited time of weekend sessions. The intended facilitative model is, therefore, sometimes compromised by time constraints and students' limited engagement with pre-reading materials, significantly shaping how resources are used during a contact session.

Another factor influencing facilitation is the background of learners and the disciplinary context. One lecturer/author highlighted a noticeable difference in engagement between education students and those in other programmes, such as business studies. They observed that teacher education students, often already familiar with pedagogical methods, tend to participate more actively in interactive learning.

When it comes to education courses, we find that the interaction is there because these are people who have trained as teachers, but when it comes to the business programmes, we have problems ... and that is a fact.

What this means is the students' professional orientation and familiarity with pedagogical methods may make them more active participants in discussions. This suggests that ODL facilitation is influenced by the cohort's profile indicating that



students in some disciplines might require different strategies or additional motivation to participate. Programme planners must be mindful of such differences as they design resources and tutor training, ensuring that facilitation approaches are adapted to the learners' needs.

Further, tutors face challenges in teaching content that traditionally relies on hands-on experience, however, there is an acknowledgement of the importance of demonstration, especially for disciplines that require practical understanding. To address this, tutors adapt by using demonstrations during live sessions or directing students to online resources, such as videos, to supplement their learning. Tutors bring "... handy items; galvanometers, ammeters, voltmeters to the class..." (TutorT) to demonstrate concepts, showing a commitment to bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

The institution has experimented with leveraging technology to enhance access to learning materials, which is another aspect of resource development. For example, in one cohort the university provided students with tablet devices pre-loaded with electronic resources and links to online materials. The intention was to modernise resource delivery and give students convenient access to a wider range of readings. However, this initiative was not fully sustained as explained by one of the leaders:

... we gave them these tablets and we gave them links ... [but] unfortunately, our agenda could not be pursued [The interviewee chuckles]. The lack of materials is not the issue—the programme can supply ample content—but rather the real challenge is students finding the time and capacity to use those materials effectively. As they noted, students often struggle with "having the time to digest what is in the module and then [go] beyond the module to look for other sources". This time constraint is an important contextual factor influencing how the self-directed resources are utilised. It underscores that even a well-designed module with additional e-resources depends on learner commitment and available study time to achieve its full impact.

Overall, the findings reveal that while the modules are designed for self-directed learning and interactive facilitation, student preparedness and disciplinary differences influence how these resources are used in practice. Tutors often adapt by combining teaching with facilitation, and learner engagement varies across programmes. A further insight is the separation between content creation and delivery where modules are typically written by faculty lecturers with subject expertise, however, those delivering the content may not have been involved in their development.

Challenges in the design and development of educational resources (modules)

The design and development of educational materials for ODL, in the context under review, presents unique complexities that extend beyond traditional face-to-face curriculum design. Tutors' reflections reveal a range of design-related issues that may influence the coherence, accessibility, and pedagogical appropriateness of ODL modules. Central to these concerns is the need to balance theoretical depth with practical applicability, while ensuring materials are appropriately scaffolded to support independent learners in diverse contexts. This section explores key dimensions of these design and development concerns to illuminate how module construction aligns, or fails to align, with learner needs and pedagogical intent.

Content load of modules

One of the main challenges raised by a tutor (TutorC) relates to the density of module content. They noted that some modules are overloaded with information, including sections that may not be essential for students' practical understanding or immediate application. Certain ideas were described as overly philosophical or abstract, leading the tutor to question their value in the context of how students engage with the material.

... Well, maybe. Sometimes, from the content area, it may be too loaded. At least, there're instance where, sometimes, I think certain portions may not necessary... you know, be important, in terms of how they're thinking of the materials. Yes. Some ideas are so philosophical, [...] so much that sometimes you might think they don't even need them; but they are there in the module.

The tutor's reflections as mentioned above, point to misalignment between content design, learner context, and pedagogical intent. This disconnect highlights challenges in the design and development process, where the balance between theoretical complexity and practical relevance is not adequately calibrated to the needs of distance learners. Consequently, the modules risk either overwhelming students with abstract material or restricting pedagogical flexibility by enforcing a narrow focus on exam-driven content.



Limited opportunities for tutors to provide feedback

Limited opportunities for tutors to provide feedback on course materials and assessment emerged as a recurring concern. While tutors play an important role in facilitating student learning during face-to-face sessions, many felt sidelined from module development and assessment processes. The lack of formal channels to communicate their observations and suggestions, despite being directly involved in teaching the modules, was seen as a missed opportunity to improve course content. As the following excerpts illustrate, TutorD, TutorE, and TutorF, respectively, expressed a strong desire for structured avenues to provide feedback and contribute meaningfully to the continuous improvement of the programme:

But I know, sometimes, they come around. But they concentrate more on the students but not the course tutors. But, I believe, if there were opportunities for them to ask me [about] some of those issues, I believe I would mention them. ... Maybe, the recommendation will be that as they assess ... the course tutors, there should be an opportunity for them to sit and talk to the course tutors. Because, our input will make a lot changes.

Once we have problems, we have nowhere to channel those problems. For example ... they use quizzes, for example; they set it; it goes back to university, okay; and they mark and there are problems with it, the marking. We are not involved; sometimes ... previously, they made the attempt ... When there were problems but, I think, you know, sometimes, the students complain of even the marking. Because, you have taught; you're expecting an outcome.

... if you have a problem, where we even channel it ... if at least we even have a common front where we can even channel some of the grievances, we all have as tutors ... and then if we can have a common front where, I mean ... Ideally, we just teach and then go away.

Tutor assumptions of learner prior knowledge

One notable design-related challenge that emerged from the interview with lecturers/authors, is the assumed linear progression of knowledge across modules. Interview data reveal that they often embed assumptions about learners' prior engagement with and retention of earlier course content, structuring new modules as cumulative and sequentially dependent. As one tutor explained:

The way the modules are written, the assumption is that previous Maths courses that you do are used as [a basis]—as prerequisite—for the successive ones.

This sequencing strategy reflects a curriculum design model premised on progressive knowledge-building. However, the challenge arises when this design logic is not supported by mechanisms within the materials themselves to reinforce or revisit prerequisite knowledge. Without clear prompts, scaffolding, or cross-referencing within the modules, the coherence of the learning trajectory becomes fragile.

The same interviewee went on to note that:

They think that after learning a particular course, in a particular semester, that is the end of it. So, there is no way that they ever go back to look at what is there.

This reveals a breakdown in how the curriculum logic is encoded within the material design. While this does not necessarily mean that students are unwilling to engage in cumulative learning, it may indicate that the materials lack sufficient internal cues and do not incorporate design features that make continuity explicit or support conceptual links across modular content. For example, TutorE highlighted a critical issue in the way mathematics modules are approached: although the modules are designed to progressively build, with each course serving as a foundation for the next, many students treat them as isolated courses. This misunderstanding leads to significant learning gaps, particularly when advanced topics require knowledge from earlier courses. The tutor explained that students often do not revisit previous material, assuming that once a course is completed, it is no longer relevant.

... I would say that the way the modules are written, the assumption is that previous Maths courses that you do are used as [a basis]—as prerequisite—for the successive ones. But it appears most of these students are not aware of that. They think that after learning a particular course, in a particular semester, that is the end of it. So, there is no way that they ever go back to look at what is there. So, when you are going higher, then you get to certain topics and you want to use those ones they have done as previous knowledge, then you see that there is a vacuum. That means that we'll have to do, quickly, a remedial teaching for them, to bring them to that level. Then you'll continue with your normal teaching. That is another serious challenge.

The responses highlight the need for ODL resource designers to integrate strategies such as spiral content structures, review prompts, and guided recall activities that make the interdependencies between modules more transparent. Without these, the intended curriculum coherence may not translate effectively into learner experience.



Fragmented pedagogical responsibilities

Although lecturers and senior leaders spoke of collaborative module writing, the findings revealed a fragmentation of responsibilities between those who design the content and those who deliver it. Responsibilities for content creation, instruction, and assessment are often distributed among different staff, with limited collaboration or a shared pedagogical vision. Such fragmentation can compromise coherence in the learning experience, resulting in inconsistencies in how learning outcomes are interpreted and embedded across modules. One senior academic was critical and illustrated this disconnect, noting:

In the normal [programme], you know who is going to mark your script, but the distance is not like that ... Because ... I go for marking every six (6) months at the University and I mark all the scripts in all the regions. Meanwhile, [it's] a different facilitator who is teaching them and [a] different examiner who is setting the questions.

This narrative illustrates how fragmentation within distance learning programmes can compromise the pedagogical coherence essential during the design and development phase, thereby, limiting the potential for integrated and context-responsive resource creation.

Discussion

The findings reveal that the design and development of educational resources at this institution are underpinned by a deliberate pedagogical philosophy tailored to the demands of a large-scale, distributed teacher education programme. Central to this approach is the creation of comprehensive, interactive, and self-directed print modules, conceptualised as a 'tutor-in-print'. These modules are not merely content repositories, they are carefully structured to simulate a guided learning experience, aligning with Moore's (1993) theory of transactional distance. According to Moore (1993), transactional distance is shaped by the interplay of dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy. The institution's modules reduce this distance by embedding a conversational tone and interactive elements, thereby simulating dialogue and guiding learners through complex content. The structured, yet flexible design supports learner autonomy, enabling students to engage with material independently while maintaining pedagogical coherence.

This design philosophy is further enriched by the institution's collaborative co-authoring model, which aims to ensure consistency, leverage faculty expertise, and sustain resource production. The collaborative nature of content development also reflects the teaching presence described in the CoI framework by Garrison et al. (1999). Within this framework, the modules contribute to cognitive presence by fostering critical engagement with content, while the structured design and tutor facilitation embody teaching presence. Importantly, the programme does not rely solely on independent study. Students periodically participate in scheduled face-to-face sessions with tutors, which serve as critical touchpoints for reinforcing understanding and addressing conceptual difficulties. These sessions enhance social presence, another key element of the CoI model, by fostering interpersonal connections and collaborative learning. From a Vygotsky (1978) social constructivist perspective, these face-to-face interactions are essential for scaffolding learning within the ZPD. While the modules provide foundational knowledge and support independent exploration, tutors act as more knowledgeable others, guiding learners through challenges that may not be fully resolved through self-study alone. This dynamic interplay between self-directed learning and social interaction exemplifies Vygotsky's assertion that learning is fundamentally a social process.

Another key finding relates to how these resources are developed. Module co-authorship has become an institutional strategy for maintaining the quality, consistency, and sustainability of course materials. This collaborative approach reflects broader trends in ODL, where multiple authors help to reduce reliance on individual staff and draw on a range of pedagogical expertise (Diallo, et al., 2013; Lane, 2012; Okada & Ferreira, 2012). Co-authoring helps align content with curriculum expectations, fosters peer review and ensures the inclusion of multiple perspectives in instructional design. Nonetheless, tutors highlighted challenges in the way the curriculum is sequenced across modules. The modules are often written with an implicit assumption of linear progression. The expectation is for students to have mastered earlier content prior to progressing. This is a sound pedagogical principle (Biggs, 1996), however, it becomes problematic in a context where students do not achieve this. Without built-in scaffolding or prompts to review earlier content, learners may struggle to follow advanced material. This creates pressure on tutors during face-to-face sessions to bridge knowledge gaps that the modules do not address. As Laurillard (2013) and Lockwood (2018) suggest, effective distance education materials must anticipate learner needs, including the need to re-engage with foundational concepts.



As mentioned earlier, the curriculum and teaching methods are mediated through the educational resources. In relation to this, the findings reveal that tutors, despite being the primary point of contact with students, have limited avenues for feedback into module development. Tutors frequently expressed concern that they were not consulted during module revisions or provided space to report on the challenges they encountered in teaching. As key intermediaries between educational resources and learners, tutors are well-placed to inform curriculum improvement. Without institutionalised mechanisms for ongoing dialogue between tutors and course developers/the module writing team, there is a risk that the intended curriculum, as reflected in the modules, may diverge from the enacted curriculum delivered in classrooms (De Souza & Da Costa Polonia, 2015; Kılıç, and Saygılı, 2022).

In our findings, technology was not a central focus in the delivery of distance education. The initiative, to modernise learning delivery, by providing students with tablets preloaded with digital materials, was not sustained. There was no integration of technology with broader curriculum or teaching strategies. This highlights a wider issue in aligning resources, technology, and pedagogy. The use of technology, when not accompanied by curriculum planning or pedagogical adaptation, tends to have a limited impact.

Limitations of the study

This research was conducted as a qualitative case study focused on a single public university in Ghana. Therefore, while the findings offer deep, contextualised insights, they are not intended to be generalisable to all ODL institutions across Ghana or the wider Sub-Saharan African region. The sample size, though information-rich and appropriate for the study's interpretive goals, is small. Furthermore, the study primarily captures the perspectives of institutional staff and facilitators; a more comprehensive understanding could be achieved by incorporating students' direct voices and experiences with the resources.

Conclusions and recommendations

Despite the strengths evident within the sample examined from the university's DL resource production process, the study's central conclusion is that significant systemic fragmentation impedes the overall quality and pedagogical coherence of the programme. A critical disconnect exists between the central teams that design

the modules and set assessments, and the regional tutors who enact the curriculum through tuition at study centres. This separation creates a one-way flow of information, where tutors, who possess invaluable on-the-ground insights into student difficulties and resource effectiveness, have limited mechanisms to feed their experiences back into the design and revision cycle. This structural gap undermines the principle of constructive alignment, as teaching activities, learning resources, and assessments are managed by different, non-communicating groups, risking a disjointed experience for the learner.

Consequently, the intended curriculum, meticulously engineered within the modules, often diverges from the enacted curriculum experienced in the tutorial sessions. Tutors are frequently forced to abandon the intended role of ‘facilitator’ and revert to remedial teaching to bridge knowledge gaps left unaddressed by the rigid module design, particularly where modules assume linear knowledge progression without providing the necessary scaffolding. The failure to sustain technology initiatives like the student tablet programme further illustrates that resource provision, without deep pedagogical and systemic integration, yields limited impact. Ultimately, while the institution excels at creating scalable resources, it faces profound challenges in fostering a responsive, adaptive, and coherent pedagogical ecosystem.

To address the critical gap between lecturers/authors and tutors, the university could institutionalise robust, formal feedback mechanisms. This can be achieved by establishing a biannual review cycle where course tutors from various study centres are invited to structured workshops with module authors and curriculum leaders. An alternative or complementary approach would be to create a dedicated online portal for tutors to submit ongoing, structured feedback on specific module units, highlighting areas of student difficulty, content irrelevance, or pedagogical ineffectiveness. Making this feedback loop a formal, credited part of the tutors’ role would ensure the curriculum remains dynamic, responsive, and grounded in the reality of the learner experience.

Secondly, to overcome the challenge of fragmented pedagogical responsibilities, the institution could adopt a more integrated, team-based approach to manage the curriculum life cycle. This involves moving beyond siloed responsibilities for module writing, tutoring, and assessment. The formation of course teams for each subject area, comprising the lead module author(s), a representative group of experienced tutors, and the chief examiner, would enhance the programme. This team would



be jointly responsible for reviewing learning outcomes, aligning module activities with assessment tasks, and collaboratively refining the curriculum based on student performance and tutor feedback. Such a structure would embed the principles of constructive alignment and foster a shared pedagogical vision across all facets of the course.

Finally, to mitigate the challenges arising from assumed prior knowledge and improve student learning progression, module design must become more internally scaffolded. Module authors should be trained and required to integrate features that support cumulative learning explicitly. This includes starting new modules with concise review sections that activate prerequisite knowledge from earlier courses, embedding self-assessment questions that prompt students to revisit foundational concepts, and using clear cross-referencing throughout the text to link current topics with previously studied material. By making the connections between courses explicit within the resources themselves, the cognitive load on students is reduced, and the pressure on tutors to conduct remedial teaching during limited face-to-face sessions is alleviated.

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**Transforming Distance Learning: New Assessment
Methods Impact on Student Success in First-year
Public Administration at Free State**

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Transforming Distance Learning: New Assessment Methods Impact on Student Success in First-year Public Administration at Free State

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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigates the impact of revised assessment practices on student success in the first-year online module, Public Administration and Management Theories (EPAM1514), at the University of the Free State (UFS). Historically delivered in a traditional face-to-face format, the transition to online learning presented challenges, particularly in providing timely feedback on assessments. Guided by the theoretical frameworks of constructive alignment and Taylor's principles, this study explores how aligning learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment strategies can improve student success in an online environment. The research employed a qualitative desktop analysis, utilising document analysis and descriptive methods to analyse course documents, assessments, and student performance data. The findings indicate that aligning assessment practices with these principles positively impacts student success, primarily by enabling formative assessments and timely feedback. This approach empowers students to monitor their progress and take ownership of their learning. The study concludes that adapting assessment practices is crucial for enhancing student success in distance learning and emphasises the need for continuous evaluation to maintain alignment with learning outcomes. This research offers valuable insights for both educators and institutions aiming to optimise student learning and performance in online environments.

Keywords: Changing assessment practices; constructive alignment; public administration and management; student success; Taylor's.



Introduction

Founded in 1904, the University of the Free State (UFS) has established itself as a prominent higher education institution in South Africa. It demonstrates a steadfast commitment to providing accessible and flexible education through distance learning (Centre for Teaching & Learning, 2021; UFS, 2020). The institution's journey in distance education is marked by significant milestones, evolving progressively from traditional correspondence methods to technologically advanced, blended, and fully online models. Key achievements include the strategic integration of robust Learning Management Systems (LMS) for 24/7 content access and collaborative tools, the successful adoption of blended learning approaches, and the pioneering of specialised online programmes such as the Advanced Certificate in Teaching (ACT). These advancements are underpinned by notable innovations like the pervasive integration of multimedia content, including interactive simulations and video lectures, and the development of comprehensive online support systems, such as virtual tutoring and digital libraries, facilitated by the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL). This institutional evolution aligns with the broader global phenomenon of online learning, defined by Joshua Stern (2018) as education delivered over the Internet, or 'eLearning', which enables teaching and learning from anywhere, anytime. However, the unprecedented and rapid rate at which this shift to online education has occurred (Hodges et al., 2020), has presented considerable challenges, often proving stressful for many instructors, despite the emergence of highly creative solutions.

Despite these strides, contemporary distance learning environments present myriad challenges for students, particularly impacting teaching and learning dynamics. The unprecedented shift to online education (Hodges et al., 2020; Dysthe, 2014) has amplified issues such as technological barriers, the demand for self-regulation and motivation, feelings of isolation, information overload leading to digital fatigue, and the complexities of work-life balance. These broader challenges are often exacerbated by prevailing assessment practices, where a continued reliance on traditional methods like written examinations and essays (Dikli, 2003) poses logistical hurdles for academic integrity and timely feedback, and often proves inadequate for authentically assessing practical skills and real-world application of knowledge (Kulieke et al., 1990). Furthermore, a critical contributing factor is the observed lack of instructor proficiency in leveraging the full spectrum of online assessment tools. At the same time, basic functions like grading may be digitised (Llamas-Nistal et al., 2013). Still,

many educators remain underequipped to design and implement diverse, secure, and effective online assessments that foster higher-order thinking and personalised knowledge application (Boud, 2007).

To address these assessment-related issues and enhance student learning outcomes, it is imperative to clarify fundamental assessment concepts and adopt innovative practices. Formative assessment serves as an ongoing process to monitor student learning and provide continuous feedback, guiding improvement. In contrast, summative assessment evaluates overall learning at the conclusion of a unit or course. In online learning, these concepts necessitate adapted approaches. Suggested improvements include authentic assessments (case studies, simulations, project-based learning), which mirror real-world applications and enhance engagement; formative feedback loops and low-stakes quizzes for continuous guidance; peer and self-assessment to foster critical thinking; e-portfolios for holistic skill demonstration; and collaborative assessments to build community and teamwork skills. It is pertinent for distance learning institutions to adopt these practices to resolve assessment problems effectively. Such adoption is crucial for genuinely enhancing educational quality and addressing the unique challenges faced by remote learners. The benefits include significantly improved student learning outcomes, as authentic assessments enhance the relevance and applicability of learning, ensuring graduates possess market-driven skills (UFS, 2020). The emphasis on continuous, formative feedback, as advocated by Black and Wiliam (1998), empowers students to take greater ownership of their learning, leading to deeper understanding and higher retention rates (Centre for Teaching and Learning, 2022).

Lack of knowledge on the use of online assessment tools has become a call for attention when it comes to the successful teaching and learning in the assessment of students. Students attend assessment sessions and are tested the traditional way, however, grading, reporting of results, and statistical analysis are performed digitally (Llamas-Nistal et al., 2013). The study focused on the following objectives:

- To examine the impact of changing assessment practices on student success in the first-year Public Administration and Management (EPAM1514) module in an online learning environment at UFS.
- To assess the effectiveness of online formative assessments in enhancing student engagement, motivation, and performance in distance learning.



- To evaluate the alignment of assessments with learning outcomes and their impact on student understanding and retention of course material.
- To provide insights and recommendations for lecturers and institutions seeking to enhance student success in distance learning through the revolutionization of assessment practices.

The EPAM1514 module at UFS's Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences serves as a prime case study for this transformation. This first-year module, historically delivered through traditional face-to-face methods, has recently undergone significant innovation in its delivery and assessment, including a strategic overhaul to support a 'community of inquiry' model and the integration of simulation-based case studies and virtual work-integrated learning (WIL) modules (Botha & Mbeki, 2021; Centre for Teaching and Learning, 2022). While previous student achievement was foundational, it may have been constrained by traditional assessment paradigms. Therefore, it is imperative to empirically verify if these new assessment techniques, which align with the faculty's commitment to research-driven curriculum development and fair assessment mechanisms (Phejane, 2022; UFS, 2020), lead to demonstrable improvements in student learning outcomes, particularly in achieving module objectives such as distinguishing public administration from public management and understanding theoretical developments.

This verification is crucial for distance education provision to ensure pedagogical innovations genuinely enhance educational quality. Observing these changes and their implications is vital for all critical stakeholders in distance education, namely students, instructors, administrators, and policymakers. It informs continuous improvement, resource allocation, and the strategic evolution of flexible learning pathways that meet the demands of a dynamic public sector, ensuring the module's assessment practices are fair, reliable, authentic, and flexible. The study focused on the following research questions:

- How does changing assessment practices impact student success in the EPAM1514 module in an online learning environment at the UFS?
- How can aligning learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments promote successful student teaching and learning on online platforms?
- To what extent do formative assessments enhance student engagement, motivation, and performance in distance learning?

A qualitative research case study methodology was employed to answer the above research questions and objectives to explore the impact of changing assessment practices on student success in first-year EPAM1514 in an online learning environment at UFS.

Theoretical framework

The rapid rise of distance learning has necessitated a critical re-evaluation of assessment practices within higher education. For this study, constructive alignment, paralleled with Taylor's institute for teaching and learning principles of effective and meaningful online assessments, was incorporated into the theoretical framework to analyse the relationship between assessment practices, learning outcomes, and student success in the EPAM1514 module.

Rooted in learning theories developed by Bruner (1990), Dewey (1916), Piaget (1972), and Vygotsky (1978), constructivism-learning theory is defined as the active creation of new knowledge based on a learner's former experience. Woolfolk (1993) states that the key idea is that students actively construct their knowledge; the student's mind mediates input from the outside world to determine what the student will learn, and learning is active mental work, not passive reception of teaching. Therefore, constructive alignment becomes an outcomes-based approach to teaching where the learning outcomes students intend to achieve are defined before teaching occurs. Teaching and assessment methods are then designed to best practice, to achieve those outcomes, and to assess the standard at which they have been achieved (Biggs, 2014; Rundle, 2016).

Constructive alignment is a theoretical framework widely used to develop effective assessment practices in higher education. It involves aligning learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments to ensure that all components of the educational process work together to achieve the desired learning outcomes. According to Biggs and Tang (2011), constructive alignment is particularly important in distance learning as it provides a framework for ensuring that assessments are aligned with the learning objectives and that students are adequately prepared to meet the assessment requirements. Constructive alignment, proposed by Biggs (Goodyear, 2005), underlines the critical need for aligning learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments. This emphasis recognises that effective learning relies on a seamless interplay between what learners aim to achieve (outcomes), how they are guided towards those goals (activities), and how their progress and understanding are evaluated (assessments).



Constructive alignment aims to guarantee that students effectively acquire the desired knowledge, skills, and values by ensuring a coherent connection between these elements.

This alignment ensures that assessments accurately measure the desired learning outcomes and that teaching activities effectively support students in achieving them. According to Biggs and Tang (2011), implementing constructive alignment in distance learning environments positively impacts student engagement, motivation, and success. This framework provides a foundation for evaluating the impact of changing assessment practices in the EPAM1514 module. Constructive alignment is a crucial framework for aligning learning, activities, and assessments for effective learning. It emphasises clear communication of outcomes, activities relevant to those outcomes, and assessments that measure their achievement. The alignment is particularly beneficial in distance learning, ensuring assessments are relevant and students are prepared.

Taylor's principles, derived from study on successful distance education, emphasise the importance of creating interactive and engaging learning experiences, providing timely feedback, offering robust learner support, and maintaining clear organisational structures (University of Calgary, 2021). For interactive engagement through clear communication, the success of distance learning hinges on fostering interactive and engaging environments, as highlighted by Taylor's (University of Calgary (2021) principles, which align with the emphasis on clear communication within effective assessment practices (University of Calgary, 2021). Both frameworks promote active student engagement by ensuring transparency in assessment criteria, learning objectives, and expectations. Students equipped with a well-defined roadmap are empowered to navigate the course content actively and participate meaningfully in online discussions and collaborations.

To achieve meaningful feedback as a cornerstone for improvement, both Taylor's principles and effective assessment practices underscore the importance of timely and constructive feedback. Such feedback, as envisioned by University of Calgary (2021), serves as a cornerstone for student improvement. Well-designed assessments, adhering to principles of reliability and clarity (University of Calgary, 2021), offer opportunities for precisely this type of feedback. By enabling instructors to provide specific and actionable feedback based on student performance, these assessments support individual learning journeys and enhance student satisfaction. Integrating Taylor's principles with effective assessment practices, fosters a synergistic approach to distance learning

success. By combining an engaging learning environment with clear communication and meaningful feedback through well-designed assessments, educators can empower students to take ownership of their learning and achieve successful outcomes. According to Taylor's principles, enhancing student success in online learning is the institute's core. Taylor's principles further guide enhancing student success in online learning environments. These principles focus on clear communication, active student engagement, and meaningful feedback. Clear communication ensures that students comprehensively understand course expectations, assessment criteria, and learning objectives. Below (Table 1) is a combined illustration of Biggs' (2014) and Taylor's (University of Calgary, 2021) principles:

Table 1: Comparison of Biggs and Taylor's principles of assessment

Principle (Biggs, 2014)	Description	Taylor's Principle (University of Calgary, 2021)	Description
Alignment with Learning Outcomes	Communicate learning outcomes to students. Ensure they understand what knowledge, skills, and abilities they are expected to demonstrate.	Focus on Learning	Assessment tasks should directly measure student learning and promote the development of desired competencies.
Alignment with Learning Activities	Assessments should directly relate to the learning activities undertaken by students, which reinforces acquired knowledge and skills.	Balance Structure with Flexibility	Assessments should provide a clear framework while allowing for diverse learning styles and approaches.
Opportunities to Demonstrate Achievement	Provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes through relevant tasks and assessments.	Clear Instructions and Quality Feedback	Assessments should have clear instructions and provide timely, specific, and constructive feedback to guide student learning.

Principle (Biggs, 2014)	Description	Taylor's Principle (University of Calgary, 2021)	Description
		Alternative Forms of Assessment	Consider incorporating various assessment methods (e.g., essays, quizzes, simulations, presentations) to cater to different learning styles and assess diverse skills.
		Promote Academic Integrity	Assessments should be designed to minimise the potential for cheating and plagiarism while encouraging honest and independent work.

The theoretical framework for the current study synthesises Biggs' (Goodyear, 2005) principles of constructive alignment with Taylor's guidelines for effective online assessment, offering a comprehensive lens for examining the link between assessment practices and student success in distance learning. Constructive alignment posits that learning is most effective when intended learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments are coherently aligned. This provides a foundation to evaluate whether assessments in the EPAM1514 module correspond with its objectives. Taylor's principles complement this by emphasising clarity, flexibility, and the creation of meaningful learning experiences tailored to online learners.

As illustrated in Table 1, the integration of these frameworks forms a holistic approach, ensuring that assessments accurately reflect learning outcomes, teaching activities effectively prepare students, and guidance and feedback support learner success. The model also incorporates practical considerations, including alternative assessment methods and the promotion of academic integrity, bridging theoretical

principles with the operational realities of online education. By combining these perspectives, the framework establishes a robust, multi-dimensional model for evaluating and enhancing assessment practices, ensuring both pedagogical alignment and practical applicability within distance learning contexts.

Literature review

The challenges and opportunities of assessment in the evolving landscape of South African online learning

As highlighted in the presented research, the rise of online learning (e-learning) at South African institutions necessitates a critical examination of assessment practices in this evolving educational landscape. Students' Access to and Use of Learning Materials (SAULM) 2020 survey report, the abrupt move from traditional modes of teaching and learning to online platforms such as Blackboard and QuestionMark assessment platforms, showed difficulties that have been encountered (UFS, 2020). For example, it has become increasingly difficult for students to catch up on their tasks and succeed in their studies. Therefore, the lack of knowledge on using online assessment tools has become a call for attention when it comes to successful teaching and learning in the assessment of students.

Distance learning has emerged as a transformative mode of education, offering the potential to transform teaching and learning practices. As South African institutions increasingly adopt online learning platforms, there is a need to examine the impact of changing assessment practices on student success within these environments. Distance learning, also known as e-learning, has gained momentum globally due to its potential to increase the accessibility and affordability of education (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

In South Africa, the shift towards online learning has been accelerated by the need to expand educational opportunities to a larger number of students (Bennett, 2018; Ramsden, 2003). The transition from face-to-face instruction to online delivery has posed challenges for lecturers and students, particularly in assessment practices (Zawacki Richter et al., 2019). Asynchronous communication and limited opportunities for immediate feedback have been identified as major obstacles (Dennen & Burner, 2008). To address these challenges, aligning learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments become crucial.

Smith and Johnson (2021) showed how alternative assessments like performance-



based tasks, simulations, and collaborative projects benefit students in distance learning programmes. The research highlighted that these methods increased student engagement, fostered critical thinking skills, and ultimately led to improved academic achievement (Andrade, 2017). Their findings suggest that moving beyond traditional assessments in online learning environments can positively impact various aspects of student success (Bennett, 2018; Smith & Johnson, 2021).

Furthermore, a comprehensive review by Brown and Thompson (2022) explored the role of technology in redefining assessment practices in higher education. Their analysis revealed that the integration of digital tools and platforms, such as online quizzes, interactive assignments, and virtual simulations, enhances the authenticity and relevance of assessments, leading to improved learning outcomes and increased student satisfaction (Andrade, 2017; Brown & Thompson, 2022; Salmon, 2013; Wilson et al., 2016).

According to Goodyear (2005), Biggs posited that assessment practices that relate to learning targets and teaching activities provide a cohesive learning experience, boost student engagement, and ultimately lead to greater student achievement. In online learning, constructive alignment can guide in designing effective assessment practices that support student success (Phillips & Schaffhauser, 2016). For instance, a study by García-Peñalvo et al. (2020) on online assessment practices found that aligning assessments with learning outcomes positively influenced student performance and satisfaction.

Similarly, Lim and Morris (2009) demonstrated that incorporating interactive and authentic assessments improved student engagement and learning outcomes in online courses. Furthermore, Brown and Thompson (2022) conducted a detailed analysis of the influence of technology in redefining assessment practices in higher education. The research (Brown & Thompson, 2022) found that incorporating digital tools and platforms such as online quizzes, interactive assignments, and virtual simulations improves the authenticity and relevance of assessments, resulting in better learning outcomes and higher student satisfaction.

Distance learning and the advantages thereof

Distance learning, often facilitated through online platforms, offers numerous advantages for students and institutions (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). These advantages can be broadly categorised into increased flexibility, improved accessibility, and

potential cost reduction. Increased flexibility means that distance learning platforms allow students to access course materials and complete coursework at their own pace and convenience (Simonson et al., 2019). This flexibility is particularly beneficial for students with work or family commitments, allowing them to pursue their education without disrupting their existing schedules (Moore et al., 2011).

Improved accessibility indicates that online learning eliminates geographical barriers, making education more accessible to students residing in remote locations or those unable to attend traditional on-campus classes (Bates, 2019). This expanded access can contribute to a more diverse student body and increased educational equity (Rumble, 2012). Lastly, potential cost reduction denotes that e-learning has the potential to reduce costs associated with education for both students and institutions. Students may save on expenses like transportation and accommodation, while institutions can benefit from reduced costs related to physical infrastructure maintenance and classroom resources (Rovai, 2003; Allen & Seaman, 2017). These advantages, along with the increasing availability of technology and online learning platforms, have prompted South African universities, including UFS, to adopt online learning to enhance educational opportunities and cater to the evolving needs of a diverse student population.

Challenges in assessment practices in distance learning

While distance learning offers various advantages, it also presents unique challenges regarding assessment practices (Jonassen, 2012; Picciano et al., 2017). Effective assessment is critical to evaluating student learning and progress, however, online contexts necessitate adaptations to traditional assessment methods. Limited feedback opportunities mean the absence of face-to-face interaction in distance learning environments can hinder the ability to provide immediate feedback to students (Gronlund & Brookhart, 2008). This lack of real-time feedback can impede student development and engagement, as timely feedback allows students to identify and address any misunderstandings or areas requiring improvement (Sadler, 1989).

Academic integrity concerns indicate that increased flexibility and autonomy inherent in online learning can raise concerns regarding academic integrity, such as plagiarism and cheating (Simonson et al., 2019). The ease of access to online information and the potential for collaboration outside of the instructor's direct supervision dictate the implementation of robust measures to ensure the authenticity



of student work (Chen & Li, 2015). These challenges highlight the need for lecturers to carefully design and implement assessment strategies tailored to the online learning environment. By incorporating various assessment methods, fostering interaction and communication, and utilising appropriate safeguards against academic dishonesty, educators can promote effective assessment practices that contribute to meaningful learning outcomes in online courses.

Method

This qualitative research case study employs document analysis and descriptive methods to investigate the impact of changing assessment practices on student success in first-year EPAM1514 in an online learning environment at UFS. According to Fleming and Zegwaard (2018), a qualitative approach is a way to conduct qualitative research in general. This study described the purpose of a qualitative study through explicitly or implicitly analysing data, and the researcher being an integral part of the process.

The research design for this study is a qualitative desktop research case study. It was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the impact of changing assessment practices on student success in an online learning environment. The case study approach is useful in exploring complex phenomena and allows for collecting data from multiple sources, which can provide a rich and detailed description. The case study method can be used as both a teaching and research strategy. A single intrinsic case study design (Stake, 1995; Lieberman & Lin, 2017) involving qualitative data collection in line with the interpretive research paradigm is followed (Tight, 2012).

Data collection

This qualitative case study employed document analysis and descriptive methods. Data for the study were systematically collected from a variety of sources to ensure a comprehensive overview of assessment practices and their impact on student success. These materials included official course documents such as assignments and rubrics, as well as semester tests and aggregated student marks. These materials were obtained from UFS's Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences website, the Learning Management System (Blackboard), and directly from the course coordinator. Permission to use the module and access to anonymised student data was

formally obtained from the EPAM1514 course leader. This process was conducted in accordance with the ethical clearance granted by the General Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC) at UFS (Record number UFS-HSD2024/0442), ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of all participant information.

Data analysis

The data analysis for the current qualitative case study was conducted through a rigorous descriptive thematic analysis, following the systematic approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) and Nowell et al. (2017). The process was a structured and systematic method for deriving the study's core findings. It began with familiarisation, involving an intensive immersion in the collected data to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content (Elo et al., 2015). This was followed by initial coding, where preliminary labels were systematically assigned to segments of text and data that represented salient features or concepts relevant to the research questions. These initial codes were then grouped into broader, potential themes during the search process for themes stage, where recurring patterns and interrelationships were identified. The identified themes subsequently underwent a review process to ensure they accurately and comprehensively represented the entire dataset. Finally, each theme was precisely defined and named, articulating its essence and significance in addressing the research questions. This systematic process allowed for a transparent and structured identification of core ideas and recurring patterns within the data, thereby providing a robust foundation for the study's findings and conclusions.

Furthermore, the research sought to evaluate the assessment reliability, assessing the consistency and dependability of the new online approaches in yielding comparable results under similar conditions. A key analytical dimension involved examining assessment authenticity, determining the extent to which the redesigned online assessments genuinely mirrored real-world tasks and applications pertinent to the public administration discipline. The assessment flexibility was also a central concern, exploring the adaptability and accessibility of these new methods for a diverse cohort of distance learning students, considering their varied contexts and technological access. Beyond these specific assessment attributes, the study aimed to identify recurring challenges and benefits encountered by both students and instructors during the implementation and ongoing utilisation of the online assessment framework. Ultimately, the investigation sought to derive broader implications for distance education provision, offering insights into how the evolving assessment practices



within the EPAM1514 module could inform future strategies and policies at UFS and other higher education institutions engaged in distance learning.

Results

The EPAM1514 module

The EPAM1514 module is available as a first-year module at UFS's Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. This module was previously delivered in a traditional face-to-face teaching-learning-and-assessment. In the module, the outcomes are determining the origins of the public administration field, identifying the major contributors to the study discipline, distinguishing between public administration and public management, and establishing the development of theories and approaches related to administration and management. The main reason why the EPAM1514 module is used in the current case study, is because of the phenomenon of moving from traditional methods of assessment to online assessment, and to determine whether the module's assessment practices are fair, reliable, authentic, and flexible according to the principles of online assessments. The study collected data from various sources, including course documents, semester tests, and student marks. The findings are presented under the following themes:

The impact of changing assessment practices on student success

This study investigated the impact of changing assessment practices on student success in the first-year EPAM1514 module offered through online learning. The findings revealed a positive correlation between the implementation of new assessment methods and improved student learning outcomes. A key factor contributing to this success was the incorporation of formative assessments, such as online quizzes and discussions. These frequent, low-stakes assessments served several purposes aligned with the principles of effective online assessment (Biggs, 2014; University of Calgary, 2021). Formative assessments allowed students to monitor their progress throughout the course, providing them with a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in the learning objectives (Sadler, 1989). These assessments functioned as learning activities, helping students solidify their understanding of course material through practice and application (Biggs, 2014).

Furthermore, the timely feedback provided by lecturers on these formative assessments was crucial for student success. Research emphasises the importance of

constructive feedback in online learning environments, as it allows students to address any misunderstandings or areas requiring improvement before summative assessments (Gronlund & Brookhart, 2008). By receiving prompt feedback on their formative work, students were empowered to adjust their learning strategies and ultimately achieve better results in summative assessments. The study found that changing assessment practices positively impacted student success in the EPAM1514 module by about 5%. Using formative assessments, such as quizzes and online discussions, helped students monitor their progress and identify areas that needed improvement. Students also appreciated the timely feedback provided by lecturers, which helped them address their weaknesses before summative assessments. The positive feedback on the new assessment practices aligns with the concept of assessment for learning (Wiliam & Black, 1998). This approach emphasises the use of assessment to guide and improve student learning rather than solely for grading purposes. By actively engaging with formative assessments and receiving timely feedback, students in the EPAM1514 module were equipped to take ownership of their learning and demonstrate their understanding of the course material more effectively.

Challenges of implementing changed assessment practices

While the study revealed a positive impact of changing assessment practices on student success, it also highlighted some challenges faced by lecturers during implementation. These challenges offer valuable insights for lecturers considering the transition to online assessments. One key challenge identified was the lecturers' lack of familiarity with online assessment tools. Designing and delivering effective assessments require a strong understanding of the functionalities and limitations of these tools (Picciano et al., 2017). Lecturers who are unfamiliar with online assessment tools may struggle to create assessments that accurately measure student learning outcomes or utilise the full potential of these tools for engaging students (Simonson et al., 2019). This highlights the importance of providing faculty development opportunities to equip lecturers with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate online assessment tools effectively. Workshops or training sessions focused on designing and implementing online assessments which can empower lecturers to overcome these challenges and leverage the benefits of technology to enhance student learning (Chen & Li, 2015).

The current study also revealed technical difficulties experienced by some students during online assessments. These technical issues, such as Internet connectivity problems, can negatively impact student performance and create feelings of frustration



(Simonson et al., 2019). To mitigate these challenges, lecturers can implement strategies such as providing clear instructions on system requirements and troubleshooting tips beforehand (University of Calgary, 2021). Additionally, offering alternative assessment options or allowing students to retake assessments in case of technical difficulties can help ensure a fair and equitable learning environment (Picciano et al., 2017). The current study also identified some challenges lecturers faced when implementing changed assessment practices. The lecturer was unfamiliar with online assessment tools, making it difficult to design and deliver assessments effectively. Some students also experienced technical difficulties with the online assessments, which affected their performance.

Results for online semester tests, assignments, and quizzes

While there is insufficient historical data for the EPAM1514 module, important insights were first gathered through correspondence with a former instructor in the Department of Public Administration and Management. However, the instructor is no longer affiliated to UFS, and no formal departmental paperwork proving module-level performance during that period is publicly available. According to the 2018 Annual Learning and Teaching Report, the Department of Public Administration and Management passed around 80% of its undergraduate modules. Although this figure does not break down data by module and so, does not directly reflect performance in EPAM1514, it is a good approximation for general first-year module success rates throughout that academic year. It is crucial to note that this data does not break out pass rates by specific modules or cohorts; thus, it cannot directly confirm the performance numbers for EPAM1514 in 2018 or 2019. As a result, in the absence of more detailed data, the departmental average serves as a contextual comparison. Figure 1 is a representation of the data made available at the time of the study:

Students participated	362
Pass	241
Pass with Distinction	40
Fail	121
Not Participated	15

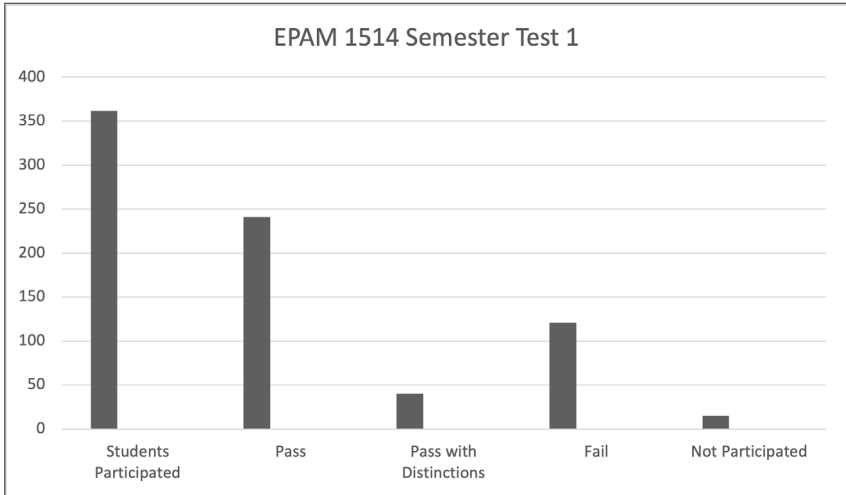


Figure 1: Illustration of the online semester I students' pass rate

Figure 1 provides a quantitative overview of student performance on the first semester test. The accompanying table details that out of 362 participants, a total of 241 students passed, with 40 achieving a distinction. In contrast, 121 students did not pass. The histogram provides a visual representation of the score distribution, with the highest concentration of students in the 50–59% range. This data indicates that the first semester test was a successful assessment for a large portion of the student body.

Students participated	327
Pass	326
Pass with Distinction	251
Fail	1
Not Participated	50

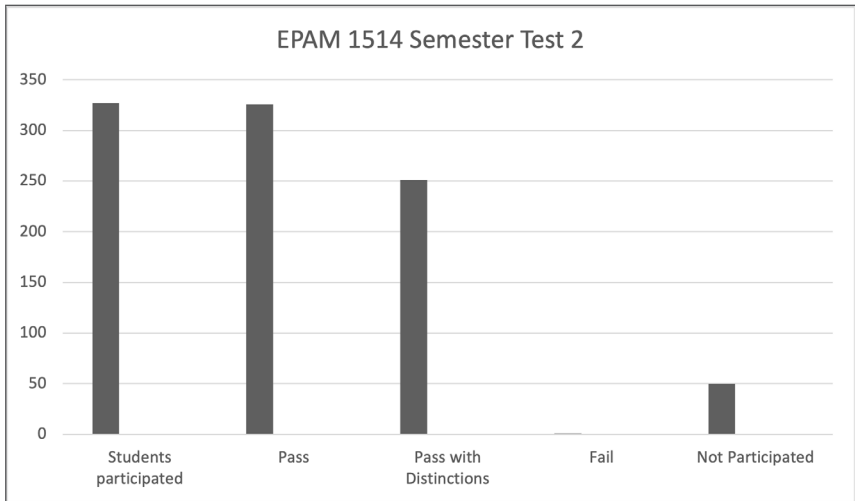


Figure 2: Illustration of the online semester test 2 students' pass rate

Figure 2 provides a quantitative summary of student performance on the second semester test. The table breaks down the results, showing that out of 327 participating students, a total of 326 passed and 1 did not pass. The accompanying histogram provides a visual representation of the score distribution. It indicates that the scores were primarily concentrated in the 70-79% and 80-89% ranges, highlighting that most of the students successfully navigated this specific assessment.

Students participated	352
Pass	312
Pass with Distinction	20
Fail	40
Not Participated	25

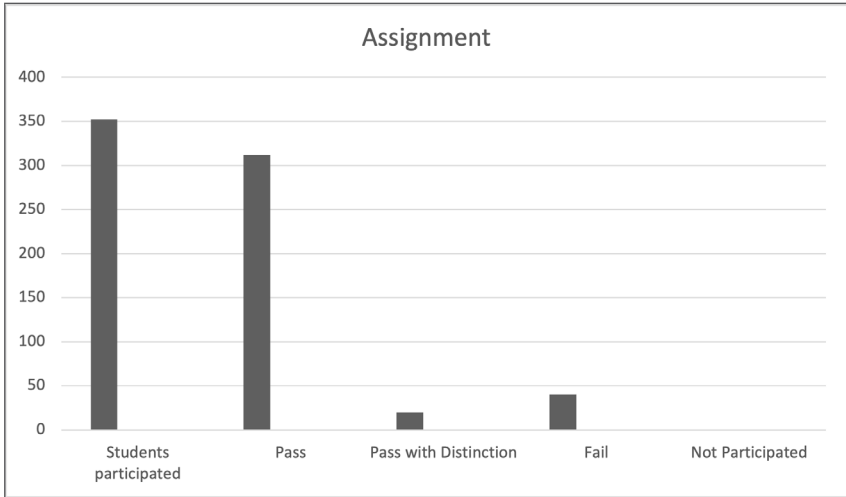


Figure 3: Illustration of the online assignment students' pass rate

Figure 3 provides a quantitative overview of student performance on the online assignment component of the module. As per Figure 3, out of 352 participants, a significant majority of 312 students passed, with 20 achieving a distinction. In contrast, 40 students did not pass. The histogram illustrates this success, showing a distribution of scores with the highest concentration of students in the 50-59% range. This data indicates that the online assignment was a highly successful assessment for a large portion of the student body, with many achieving top marks.

Students participated	329
Pass	204
Pass with Distinction	102
Fail	125
Not Participated	48

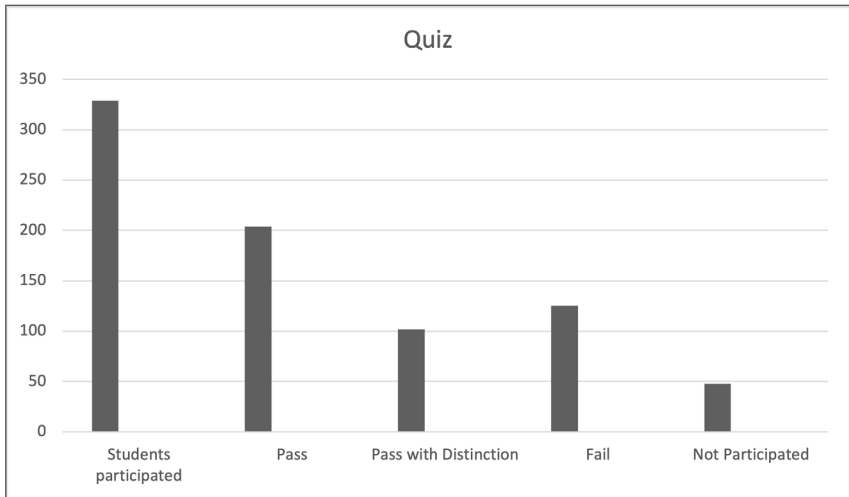


Figure 4: Illustration of the online quiz students' pass rate

Figure 4 provides a specific quantitative breakdown of student performance on the online quiz component of the module. The accompanying table reveals that out of 329 participating students, a total of 204 passed, while 125 did not pass. Notably, the data shows that 102 students passed with distinction, highlighting a significant number of high-performing students. The table further indicates that 48 students did not participate in the quiz. The histogram visually reinforces these statistics, showing a bimodal distribution of scores with prominent peaks in the 70–79% and 80–89% ranges. This graphical representation underscores the high achievement of a large portion of the students on the quiz. This result stands in contrast to the overall final exam results shown in the other image.

Importance of alignment with learning outcomes

When assessments are meticulously crafted to mirror the course's learning objectives, students gain a clear understanding of what is expected of them and how they can achieve success (Biggs, 2014). The alignment serves to empower students by clearly communicating learning outcomes and aligning assessments accordingly. Students are empowered to take ownership of their learning journey. They can actively engage with course materials and assessments, accurately knowing what knowledge, skills, and abilities they are expected to acquire (Biggs, 2014). Another key purpose is focused

learning, wherein alignment ensures that assessments are not isolated events, but rather serve as learning activities themselves. Students can focus their efforts on mastering the skills and knowledge that will be directly assessed, leading to a more targeted and efficient learning experience (Biggs, 2014). Demonstrating achievement also shows that aligned assessments provide students with a platform to effectively demonstrate their understanding of the learning outcomes. Students can showcase their knowledge and skills through tasks and assessments directly related to the course objectives (Biggs, 2014).

Alignment between assessments and learning outcomes is particularly crucial in online learning environments, because the absence of face-to-face interaction can make it more challenging for students to gauge their progress and identify areas needing improvement (Gronlund & Brookhart, 2008). By aligning assessments, lecturers provide a clear roadmap for students, allowing them to navigate the online learning experience with greater clarity and purpose. The positive impact of aligned assessments aligns with the concept of assessment for learning (William & Black, 1998). This approach emphasises using assessments to guide and improve student learning, rather than solely for grading purposes. When assessments are aligned with learning outcomes, they become valuable tools for both students and lecturers. Students gain a deeper understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, while instructors can monitor student progress and adjust their teaching strategies as needed (Sadler, 1989). When assessments were aligned with learning outcomes in EPAM1514, students were able to understand what was expected of them and how to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

The need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation

The current study emphasises the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation in online assessment practices to ensure continued alignment with learning outcomes and successful student learning support. The process of ongoing evaluation and adaptation is essential for maintaining alignment in an educational landscape that is constantly evolving, and learning outcomes may need to be adjusted accordingly. Regularly evaluating assessments helps to identify potential misalignments and ensures that assessments continue to accurately reflect the current learning objectives (Biggs, 2014). Another reason ongoing evaluation and adaptation are essential, is for evolving student needs and preferences that change over time. By continuously evaluating assessments, educators can identify areas for improvement and adapt assessment



methods to better cater to diverse learning styles and technological advancements (Picciano et al., 2017). Lastly, ongoing evaluation and adaptation are essential for maximising effectiveness, wherein the online learning environment itself is subject to change. New technologies and assessment tools emerge frequently, and ongoing evaluation allows lecturers to remain current in their practices and adapt assessments to leverage the most effective and engaging online tools available (Simonson et al., 2019). The emphasis on ongoing evaluation aligns with the principles of assessment for learning (William & Black, 1998). Just as student learning is a continuous process, so too should be the evaluation and adaptation of assessment practices. By engaging in this ongoing cycle, educators can utilise assessment, not only to measure student achievement, but also to identify areas for improvement and refine their teaching strategies to promote deeper learning (Sadler, 1989).

Overall EPAM1514 results

EPAM1514 Final Exam Results	Numbers
Students Participated	372
Pass	293
Pass with Distinctions	9
Fail	78
Reassessment	1
Exam not granted	0
Students not participated	5

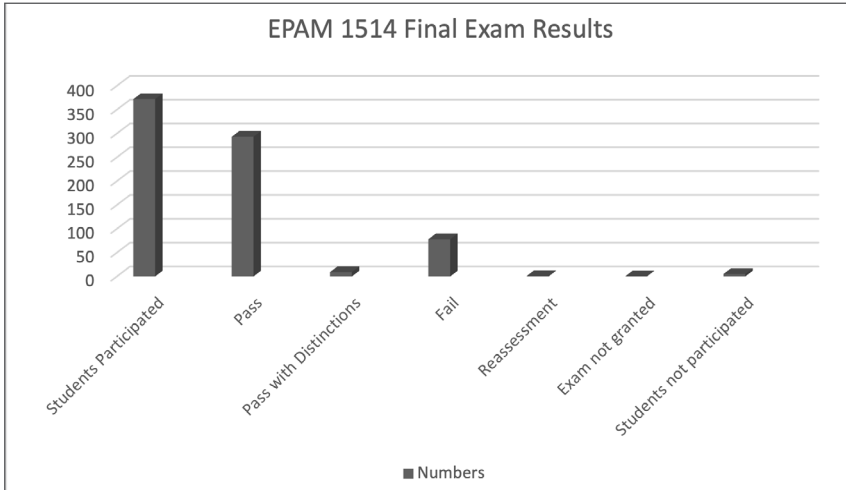


Figure 5: Overall EPAM1514 results

Figure 5 provides a quantitative summary of student performance in the EPAM1514 module. The table offers a clear breakdown of key outcomes, revealing that out of 372 participants, 293 students passed the module, whilst 9 students passed with distinction and 78 students did not pass. The data also reflects that one student required a reassessment, and five students did not participate in the final exam. The histogram visually reinforces these numbers, illustrating the distribution of student scores. It highlights that the largest concentration of students achieved scores in the 50–59% and 60–69% ranges, providing a more detailed look at the final grade spread within the module.

Discussion

The findings of the current study suggest that changing assessment practices can contribute to student success in an online learning environment and provide valuable insights for lecturers seeking to optimise online learning environments and promote student success. Using formative assessments and timely feedback can help students monitor their progress and improve learning outcomes. The findings revealed a positive correlation between the implementation of new assessment methods and improved student learning outcomes. A key factor contributing to this success was the incorporation of formative assessments such as online quizzes and discussions. These frequent, low-stakes assessments served multiple purposes aligned with the principles of effective online assessment (Biggs, 2014; University of Calgary, 2021).



Firstly, formative assessments allowed students to monitor their progress throughout the course, and this ongoing feedback provided a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses with the learning objectives (Sadler, 1989). Secondly, these assessments functioned as learning activities themselves, helping students solidify their understanding of course material through practice and application (Biggs, 2014). Furthermore, timely feedback provided by lecturers on these formative assessments was crucial for student success. Research emphasises the importance of constructive feedback in online learning environments, as it allows students to address any misunderstandings or areas requiring improvement before summative assessments (Gronlund & Brookhart, 2008). By receiving prompt feedback on their formative work, students were empowered to adjust their learning strategies and ultimately achieve better results in summative assessments.

The positive student response to the new assessment practices aligns with the concept of assessment for learning (William & Black, 1998). This approach emphasises the use of assessment to guide and improve student learning rather than solely for grading purposes. By actively engaging with formative assessments and receiving timely feedback, students in the EPAM1514 module were equipped to take ownership of their learning and demonstrate their understanding of the course material more effectively.

The findings of the current study add to the growing body of research that highlights the benefits of using diverse assessment methods in online learning environments (Picciano et al., 2017). Moving beyond traditional exams and essays towards formative assessments like quizzes and discussions fosters a more interactive and engaging learning experience for students (Simonson et al., 2019). This engagement, coupled with timely and constructive feedback, can significantly contribute to improved student success in online courses. The study also highlights the importance of alignment with learning outcomes and the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of assessment practices.

Transformation: The LMS and Online assessment tools

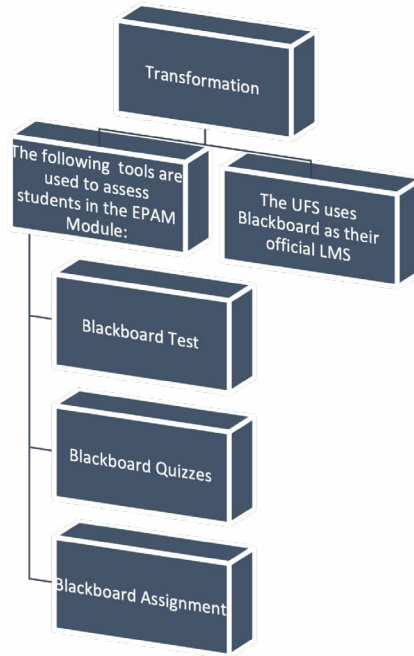


Figure 6: A transformed EPAM1514 teaching, learning and assessment structure

The information reflected in Figure 6 visually grounds the study within its specific technological context. The figure illustrates that UFS uses Blackboard as its official LMS, which serves as the central platform for online learning and assessment. Within this environment, the diagram highlights the three primary modalities used for assessment in the EPAM1514 module: Blackboard tests, Blackboard quizzes, and Blackboard assignments. This visual representation provides a clear and concise overview of the institutional tools under investigation, connecting the theoretical discussion of assessment practices directly to the operational environment of the study.

The study also underscored the critical role of alignment between assessments and learning outcomes. When assessments are meticulously crafted to mirror the course's learning objectives, students gain a clear understanding of what is expected of them and how they can achieve success (Biggs, 2014). This alignment empowers students, promotes focused learning, and allows for a more effective demonstration

of achievement. In online environments, where face-to-face interaction is limited, ensuring a strong alignment between assessments and learning outcomes is particularly crucial for student success (Gronlund & Brookhart, 2008).

Finally, the research emphasises the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of assessment practices (Picciano et.al, 2017). The educational landscape, student needs, and technological advancements are constantly evolving. Regularly evaluating assessments helps to ensure they remain aligned with learning outcomes and cater to diverse learning styles and the latest online tools available (Simonson et al., 2019). This continuous process aligns with the principles of assessment for learning, allowing educators to refine their assessment practices and create a dynamic online learning environment that fosters deeper student learning and success.

Conclusion

This study explored the impact of implementing new assessment practices in the first-year EPAM1514 module offered through online learning at UFS. The findings contribute significantly to the ongoing transformation of distance learning by demonstrating the positive impact of these new methods on student success. A key advantage of the revised assessment practices was the incorporation of formative assessments, such as online quizzes and assignments, wherein these frequent assessments provided students with timely feedback, a feature often lacking in traditional face-to-face learning environments. This prompt feedback allowed students to identify areas needing improvement and adjust their learning strategies accordingly, ultimately leading to stronger performance (Gronlund & Brookhart, 2008).

The study also highlighted the importance of alignment between assessments and learning outcomes by ensuring a strong correlation between these elements; students gained a clear understanding of what was expected of them and how they could achieve success (Biggs, 2014). This alignment empowered students, fostered focused learning, and allowed for a more effective demonstration of their knowledge (Biggs, 2014). In online environments, where face-to-face interaction is limited, a strong alignment between assessments and learning outcomes is particularly crucial for student success (Gronlund & Brookhart, 2008). Furthermore, the research emphasised the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of assessment practices (Picciano et al., 2017). The educational landscape, student needs, and technological advancements are constantly evolving; therefore, regularly evaluating assessments helps to ensure they

remain aligned with learning outcomes and cater to diverse learning styles and the latest online tools available (Simonson et al., 2019). This continuous process aligns with the principles of assessment for learning, allowing educators to refine their practices and create a dynamic online learning environment that fosters deeper student learning and success.

The positive outcomes of the current study hold significant implications for lecturers and institutions seeking to enhance student success in distance learning environments. To effectively implement these changes, universities should provide training and support for both lecturers and students. Equipping lecturers with the necessary skills to use online assessment tools and align assessments with learning outcomes is crucial for creating an environment conducive to student success (Picciano et al., 2017). Additionally, supporting students in navigating online assessments and using feedback effectively can further enhance their learning experience. In conclusion, the current study demonstrates the transformative potential of new assessment methods in online learning environments. It contributes to the ongoing transformation of distance learning by demonstrating the positive impact of new assessment methods on student success in the public administration module at UFS. By incorporating formative assessments, providing timely feedback, ensuring alignment with learning outcomes, and embracing ongoing evaluation and adaptation, educators can create a more engaging and effective online learning experience, ultimately leading to a brighter future for both students and distance learning programmes.

Limitations

A significant limitation of the current study is its reliance on a single case study design, which inherently restricts the generalisability of the findings to other modules, faculties, or institutions. The insights are derived from a single module, EPAM1514, within the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at UFS, thereby limiting the scope of its applicability.

Furthermore, the study is constrained by a notable absence of direct, verifiable, and module-specific historical data. The study's analysis of a previous pass rate is based on a contextual approximation, drawing on correspondence with a former instructor and a general departmental average from the 2018 Annual Learning and Teaching Report. The reliance on an unconfirmed historical baseline prevents a conclusive, quantitative comparison of performance before and after the intervention. Consequently, any



assessment of improvement is predicated on an inferential framework, rather than a direct empirical one. This limitation, rooted in the availability and comprehensiveness of historical data, necessitates caution when interpreting the magnitude of the observed positive impact on student success.

Recommendations

The current study highlights the need for institutions to regularly review and adapt their assessment practices. Distance learning is a dynamic and evolving field, and as such, assessment practices should be continually evaluated to ensure they align with changing needs and technological advancements. Ongoing evaluation and adaptation will enable institutions to provide effective learning support and promote successful student outcomes in public administration and management. Institutions can enhance student success in online learning environments by changing assessment practices and aligning them with learning outcomes. By implementing these recommendations, lecturers and institutions can play a crucial role in facilitating student success and promoting a more accessible and affordable education system.

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Transitions in ICT-Integrated Teaching and Learning in Trans-disciplinary STEM Education: A Systematic Review Through a Scopus Bibliometric Analysis

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Transitions in ICT-Integrated Teaching and Learning in Trans-disciplinary STEM Education: A Systematic Review Through a Scopus Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract

The integration of digital technologies into teaching and learning practices accelerated significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, driving enduring pedagogical shifts that persisted beyond the pandemic. At the onset, educational institutions faced a choice: suspend curricular delivery or embrace alternative modalities to maintain instruction. Most opted for the latter, catalysing the widespread adoption of virtual technologies. Although virtual tools predated the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic dramatically increased their centrality in educational practice. This research is based on a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature from 2010 to 2024. Using the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) model, this systematic study maps current pedagogical practices and interrogates the affordances and constraints of digital tools in teaching, learning, and assessment. The findings reveal incremental movement toward transformative use, but emphasise that substitution and augmentation remain dominant. The study contends that a deeper pedagogical transformation is necessary to fully harness information and communication technology (ICT) for innovative, trans-disciplinary science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning environments.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis, digital learning; STEM education; pedagogical transformation.



Introduction

Back in the mid-1980s, when I was a student teacher in Zimbabwe, my mathematics lecturer, Mr Batman, would often quip, ‘A computer does not think’. Ten years on, I suggested that our teachers’ college adopt computers to enrich teaching and learning. To my surprise, a colleague dismissed the idea with laughter—a reaction that now seems emblematic of how innovation is often met with scepticism before its value becomes undeniable. Decades later, with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), Mr Chisindi’s once-humorous remark now stands as a poignant reminder of how far we have come—and how mistaken we were about the creative potential of the Internet.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated an abrupt, unprecedented disruption to traditional face-to-face teaching and learning. As physical teaching and learning became perilous, the pandemic became a powerful catalyst for the rapid adoption of online teaching and learning—ushering in pedagogical innovations previously unimplemented and untested at scale (Pérez Echeverría, 2025). The much-discussed Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (Philbeck & Davis, 2018) was no longer a distant theoretical prospect; it had arrived as an unignorable imperative.

Educators, whether enthusiastic adopters or reluctant participants of ICT, were compelled to engage with digital platforms for teaching, learning, and assessment. This way of teaching and learning was no longer optional, but became imperative for sustaining educational continuity (Aina & Ogegbo, 2022; Ximba, 2022). Consequently, the affordances and limitations of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in advancing educational agendas—particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education—became a focal point of scholarly inquiry. This shift is reflected in emerging research both locally (e.g., Makhubele & Makonye, 2022) and internationally (e.g., Lukychova et al., 2022; Ah-Nam & Osman, 2017).

Across the educational spectrum—from early childhood to tertiary institutions—practitioners were faced with a stark choice: adapt to ICT-mediated instruction or risk institutional paralysis. The prohibition of face-to-face lectures, enforced through stringent government health regulations aimed at curbing viral transmission, made distance education the sole viable alternative. Unlike many years ago, when distance tuition occurred via hard-copy correspondence through post offices, as at the University of South Africa (UNISA), digital methods are now within easy reach. For many, ICT had previously been perceived as a peripheral or supplementary tool, often

deferred or dismissed. The pandemic, however, redefined their role as central to the survival and evolution of educational practice.

Interdisciplinary STEM education is a pedagogical approach that integrates science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to address complex, real-world problems by synthesising knowledge and skills across disciplinary boundaries (Makonye, 2022). Rather than teaching these subjects in isolation, interdisciplinary STEM education fosters holistic learning environments in which students recognise the interconnections and interdependencies among STEM domains (English, 2016). This approach cultivates collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving, as learners engage in projects that require them to draw upon diverse disciplinary methods and perspectives (Tytler et al., 2021). By embedding interdisciplinary strategies within STEM curricula, educators better prepare students for the demands of contemporary society, where multifaceted challenges necessitate integrated expertise and adaptive reasoning (NAE & NRC, 2014). Such pedagogical models promote a comprehensive understanding of how STEM fields interact, equipping learners with the cognitive flexibility and collaborative skills essential for innovation and lifelong learning.

The current study investigates the pedagogical transformations evident in a systematic review of research on ICT integration in transdisciplinary STEM education. It critically examines the emergent computer skill sets and competencies required to navigate shifts in trans-disciplinary STEM education pedagogy and assessment. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: Based on reviewed literature in trans-disciplinary STEM education, what constraints and affordances associated with ICT use in mathematics and science teacher education can be identified to inform transformation in virtual learning spaces?

To address this question, the study explores teaching, learning, and assessment practices through the analytical lens of the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) model (Puentadura, 2012) as a framework for evaluating the depth and impact of ICT integration.

Theoretical framework

Granted that education is an acculturation and enculturation process sustaining humanity (Bishop, 1988; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), what theories may explain change in teaching and learning when ICT tools are used to replace or blend with the face-to-face traditional teaching approaches that are no longer sufficient in the 4IR age? I



propose that the use of technology in teaching and learning can be viewed through the lens of the sociocultural perspective, where learning is psychologically mediated by signs and tools (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), such as virtual artifacts of ICT.

Since the onset of ICT in education, researchers have sought theoretical settings to map that pedagogical process. To the author, the theoretical framework that can further assist in studying the harnessing of technology in pedagogy is the SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) model (Puentedura, 2012) (see Figure 1).

Level	Category	Description
Transformation	Redefinition	Tech allows for the creation of new tasks, previously inconceivable
	Modification	Tech allows for significant task redesign
Enhancement	Augmentation	Tech acts as a direct tool substitute, with functional improvement
	Substitution	Tech acts as a direct tool substitute, with no functional change

Figure 1: The SAMR Mode, adapted from Puentedura (2012)

The SAMR model explains the various stages and evolution of technology use in teaching and learning. The first stage is where technology is used to enable students to access learning materials; that is, simply substituting for traditional teaching roles, such as giving texts, workbooks, and exercises—hard copy transformed into soft copy, such as a textbook in PDF form. Another example is writing an essay using a word processor instead of a ballpoint pen and paper, or learners doing a long multiplication sum using a computer calculator app such as Symbolab in lieu of pencil and paper. The next stage is the augmentation level, when technology is used to enhance functionality, such as online direct learner feedback for STEM tasks, thereby improving participation. This is an improvement on the traditional situation where students would do the written work in exercise books, then submit it to the teacher, wait for the teacher to mark and assess it, and return it later. Another example of substitution is a teacher recording their mathematics lesson and sharing it on WhatsApp with students. The ICT augmentation stage is very personal and gives rapid feedback. The teacher's main efforts are setting up the work for learners to do, and monitoring the feedback. An example of augmentation in STEM education is when students use a simulation to observe basic circuits with adjustable voltage inputs.

As learners receive rapid feedback when they vary their inputs, they can observe patterns more easily. Immediate feedback on when they are right or wrong can motivate them to strengthen productive thinking and reconsider their misconceptions. This can be referred to as Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) (Panjay, 2023). CAI refers to teaching or remediation done via a computer app; it is often interactive and produces immediate feedback. CAI supports personalised learning and enhances student participation and expertise acquisition. The first two stages of the SAMR model, substitution and augmentation, can be viewed as an enhancement of traditional face-to-face teaching. At these stages, learners become more comfortable using digital tools, however, the old ways of teaching and learning only change in mode, not in function. The next two stages are functionally different.

In the modification stage, technology allows for significant task redesign. Here, common tasks are not only accomplished through technology; students also engage more with one another as they share knowledge and problem-solving approaches. Students can participate and interact across time and space, and multimedia can be used. In these situations, teachers and students from different schools can work together to solve STEM problems. The use of Zoom or Microsoft Teams Apps enhances that. Clearly, it was not possible for geographically dispersed students and teachers to collaborate on learning in real time. This is a change of game. The highest stage is the redefinition stage, where previously inconceivable tasks, as well as teaching and learning, are now made available by technology. The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) sits at the redefinition level. It will revolutionise and escalate pedagogical integration in unimagined ways. An example is learners sharing problems and solutions at a global stage. I do not doubt that AI will make knowledge accessible to everyone in the world. That way, untapped talent from many undeveloped parts of the world will be shared globally, leading to exponential growth of STEM knowledge. Thus, the SAMR model shows the escalation of technology use in teaching and learning. It explains the shift in the use of technology in education from rituals and routine learning to exploration (Sfard, 2016), which lies at the heart of educational transformation and learning. The last two stages represent transformative teaching and learning—a departure from the traditional teaching and learning methods that have been used for many years.



In examining the transitions in ICT integration within trans-disciplinary STEM education, this study researched the following questions:

1. With respect to the SAMR model, how has ICT integration evolved in trans-disciplinary STEM education between 2010 and 2024?
2. In what ways can the SAMR model be applied to evaluate or guide technology-enhanced teaching and learning in trans-disciplinary STEM education?
3. What trends, challenges, and innovations characterise the transition from enhancement to transformation stages of using ICTs in trans-disciplinary STEM education?

Contribution of the paper to the field

This article contributes to understanding the trends from 2010 to 2024 in the integration of ICT within trans-disciplinary STEM education. It informs researchers and STEM education policymakers on the way forward for implementing curriculum reforms in the era of ubiquitous virtual educational capabilities that must be harnessed to enhance teaching and learning. The importance of this research lies in its ability to highlight where ICT integration remains at a basic level, where transformation is beginning to occur, and how the SAMR model can guide future practice. By situating the findings within both theoretical frameworks and literature, the study provides evidence-based insights that can shape professional development, curriculum revision, and assessment innovation. In this way, the research shows the urgency of moving beyond basic ICT use to transformative use in STEM education.

Literature review on STEM education

Since around 2010, research using the SAMR model, STEM education, focusing on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics pedagogy, has gained significant impetus due to its central role in preparing learners for the demands of a rapidly evolving world. The continuous advancement of digital technologies, now embodied by the marvel of AI, calls for the effective integration of technology into educational processes.

Dzulkarnain et al., (2021) investigated student engagement in a university-level STEM course through a digital video project. Using the SAMR model as a lens, the study assessed how varying levels of ICT integration influenced teaching and learning practices. The research involved two groups: a treatment group engaged in

the digital video project and a control group taught via traditional lecture methods. Findings indicated that the treatment group demonstrated significantly higher levels of engagement and ICT integration, suggesting that technology-enhanced pedagogies can positively impact learner outcomes.

In a separate study, Dey (2017) examined the use of the SAMR model in flipped STEM classrooms, focusing on how technology integration influences student motivation, engagement, and learning in blended environments. The study contributed to a deeper understanding of how the SAMR framework can be applied to evaluate ICT-mediated learning experiences and pedagogical shifts. Romrell et al. (2014) explored the role of mobile devices in transforming classroom learning. As mobile technologies become increasingly embedded in students' lives, their potential to support personalised, situated, and connected learning—referred to as mobile learning (mLearning)—has grown. The authors applied the SAMR model to categorise mLearning activities and assess their pedagogical impact. The work by Romrell et al. (2014) highlighted both the opportunities and challenges of implementing mobile technologies in education, emphasising the need for structured frameworks to guide effective integration.

Aduyasas (2021) conducted a study involving 60 students to examine the effects of integrating ICT within a learning community and a lesson study approach in mathematics education. The research employed both the SAMR and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) models to guide and evaluate the integration of technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge. The SAMR framework was instrumental in mapping the levels of technological integration across instructional practices, offering insights into how digital tools can enhance learner outcomes when strategically applied.

All the studies discussed above, while having different foci and samples, demonstrate the effectiveness of the SAMR model in understanding how ICT-mediated educational processes can be better understood. Thus, the SAMR model shows potential for investigating interdisciplinary STEM education research from 2010 to 2024. Thus, among the frameworks developed to guide ICT integration, the SAMR model (Puentedura, 2012) stands out for its clarity and applicability in evaluating the depth of ICT use in teaching and learning, such as in Transdisciplinary STEM Education.



Methodology

This systematic review explores advancements in STEM education research in ICT and uses the SAMR model as a lens for the study. A qualitative research design (Yin, 2009) was conducted using the Scopus database to identify relevant research articles on ICT integration in STEM education. In this systematic review examining transitions in ICT-integrated teaching and learning within trans-disciplinary STEM education (2010–2024), the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) were employed to ensure methodological transparency, consistency, and replicability. PRISMA provides a structured approach for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses, including a 27-item checklist and a flow diagram that traces the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of studies. By applying PRISMA, this review systematically documents the search strategy, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and synthesis process, particularly in relation to the SAMR model's application across STEM contexts. This approach enhances the credibility of the findings and supports evidence-based insights into how digital technologies have transitioned from enhancement to transformation stages in educational practice.

Using the Scopus database, the search used the following strings:

(“ICT integration” OR “technology-enhanced learning” OR “digital pedagogy” OR “educational technology”);

(“STEM education” OR “trans-disciplinary learning” OR “interdisciplinary STEM” OR “cross-disciplinary education”);

(“SAMR model” OR “substitution augmentation modification redefinition” OR “technology integration framework”).

The combined search string was:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*ICT integration*” OR “*educational technology*”) AND

TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*STEM education*” OR “*transdisciplinary learning*”) AND

TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*SAMR model*”) AND

PUBYEAR > 2010 AND PUBYEAR < 2024

In systematic research, using the PRISMA approach promotes transparency and replicability of the research, which enhances its credibility.

In the current study on ICT-integrated STEM education, PRISMA offered a rigorous scaffold that documents search strategy, inclusion criteria, and synthesis when evaluating transitions across SAMR stages.

Data analysis

This study employed a structured literature analysis to examine ICT integration in trans-disciplinary STEM education, focusing on teaching, learning, and assessment practices. Data were extracted from the Scopus database, which offers comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed publications across global research domains. Selected articles were systematically reviewed and categorised according to pedagogical dimensions aligned with the SAMR framework.

Tables 1 to 5 present a synthesis of the reviewed literature, organised into three thematic categories: teacher actions; student actions; and assessment actions in trans-disciplinary STEM education research. This classification enables an embedded understanding of how ICT tools are operationalised across instructional roles and learning processes. The analysis followed a qualitative content-mapping approach, identifying patterns of technology use and pedagogical transformation within each SAMR level, as recommended in Bibliometric and thematic reviews of STEM education research (Chehlarova et al., 2023).

The following Table 1 provides frequencies of teacher actions in trans-disciplinary STEM education research

Table 1: Teacher actions in transdisciplinary STEM education

Teacher Actions	S	A	M	R	Total	Publications
Create activities	9	21	2	4	36	12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 23, 31, 34, 38, 46, 58, 62, 64, 70, 74, 125, 130, 132, 134, 135, 152, 159, 160, 161, 164, 172, 189, 196, 201, 216
Present content	26	4	2	0	32	6, 17, 66, 74, 76, 86, 87, 92, 104, 108, 111, 118, 121, 122, 126, 127, 136, 148, 158, 161, 164, 167, 169, 184, 189, 195, 201, 207, 209, 213, 215

Teacher Actions	S	A	M	R	Total	Publications
Share materials	12	9	0	0	21	4, 12, 20, 31, 39, 70, 83, 91, 101, 111, 134, 166, 172, 174, 177, 189, 194
Communicate	15	3	1	1	20	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 16, 17, 20, 31, 39, 53, 74, 82, 145, 152, 162, 194
Collaborate	0	0	0	5	5	36, 47, 53, 55, 111
Set activities	1	3	0	0	4	61, 86, 101, 210
Change in ownership (teacher → student)	0	1	0	0	1	130
Co-construction (teacher & student)	0	0	1	0	1	169
Flipped learning	0	0	1	0	1	24
Reflect on practice	0	0	1	0	1	137
Use for administrative purposes	1	0	0	0	1	152

Source: Scopus database

On selected teacher actions, Table 1 reflects the integration in transdisciplinary STEM education in enhancement and transformation.

Table 2: Selected teacher actions in ICT integration in transdisciplinary STEM education

	Enhancement	Transformation
Create Activities	30	6
Present Content	30	2
Share Materials and Communicate	39	2
Collaborate	0	5
Total	99	15

The totals of the above data are visually represented in Figure 2.

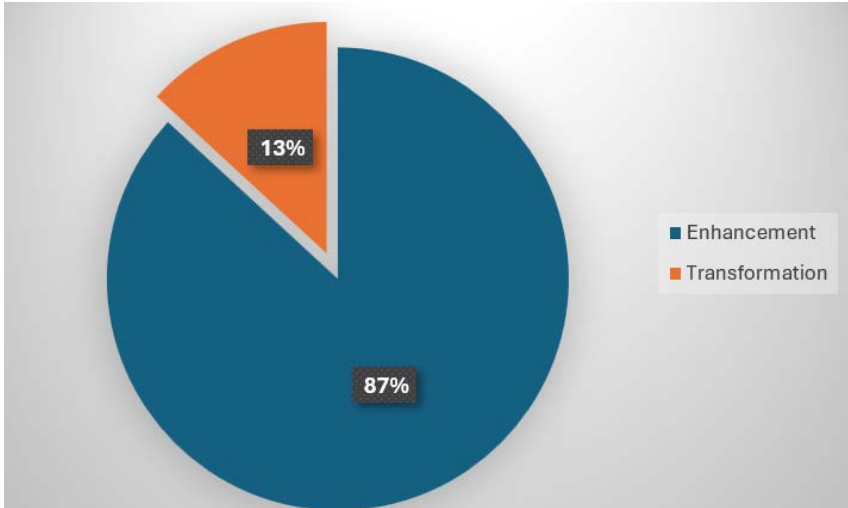


Figure 2: Comparison between enhancing (S, A) and transformative (M, R) ICT teacher activities in STEM classes

Source: Author's own

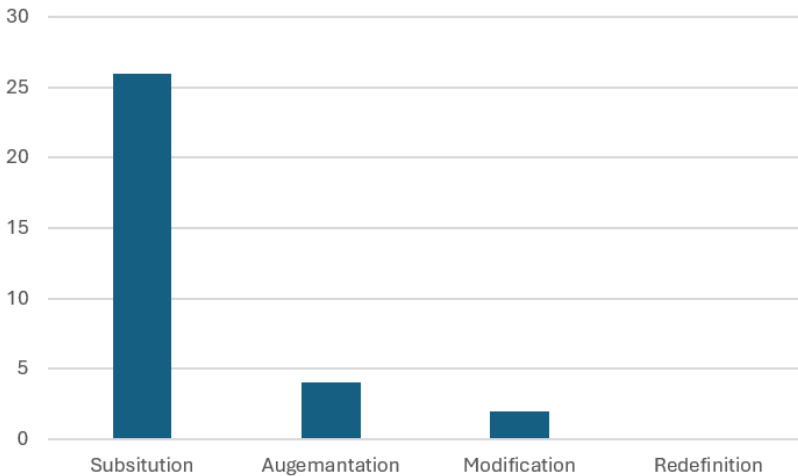


Figure 3: Teacher Action: Create Activities with ICT- SAMR levels

Source: Author's own



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The data show that teacher actions remain largely replicative, with a pronounced reliance on traditional instructional approaches. Most activities observed align predominantly with the substitution level of the SAMR model, indicating minimal pedagogical transformation. While instances of modification are present, they are relatively limited. Notably, there is a complete absence of practices corresponding to the redefinition stage, suggesting that the transformative use of ICT to create previously inconceivable learning experiences has yet to be realised in teacher-led initiatives.

The following Table 3 shows the frequencies of student actions in ICT use in transdisciplinary STEM education research.

Table 3: Student actions in ICT integration in transdisciplinary STEM education

Student Actions	S	A	M	R	Total	Publications
Access content	20	3	0	0	23	6, 17, 66, 74, 76, 86, 87, 92, 104, 108, 111, 118, 121, 122, 126, 127, 136, 148, 158, 161, 164, 167, 169
Submit work	11	3	0	0	14	4, 12, 20, 31, 39, 70, 83, 91, 101, 111, 134, 166, 172, 174
Communicate	10	3	1	1	15	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 16, 17, 20, 31, 39, 53, 74, 82, 145, 152
Create content	5	13	2	4	24	12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 23, 31, 34, 38, 46, 58, 62, 64, 70, 74, 125, 130, 132, 134, 135, 152, 159, 160, 161
Collaborate	0	0	0	5	5	36, 47, 53, 55, 111
Co-construction (student & teacher)	0	0	1	0	1	169
Flipped learning	0	0	1	0	1	24
Reflect on learning	0	0	1	0	1	137
Use for administrative purposes	1	0	0	0	1	152

Source: Scopus database

On selected student actions, Table 4 reflects the substitution and reformulation on selected student actions.

Table 4: Frequency of substitution (lowest level) and reformulation (highest level)

	Substitution	Reformulation
Complete Set of Activities	108	13
Access Content	37	1
Collaborate	0	5

The above data is shown in Figure 4 below as percentages.

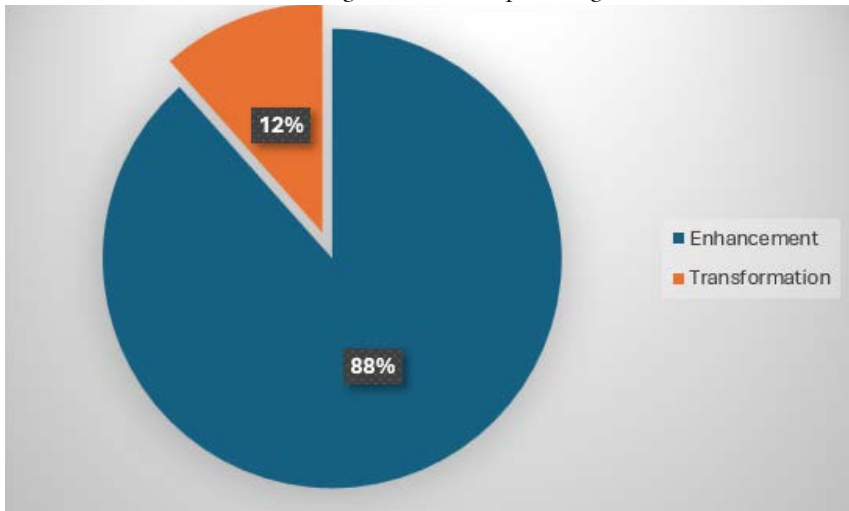


Figure 4: Comparison between enhancing (S, A) and transformative (M, R) ICT student activities in STEM classes

Source: Author's own

The following Table 5 shows the frequencies of assessment actions in ICT use in transdisciplinary STEM education research.

Table 5: Assessment actions in ICT use in transdisciplinary STEM education

Student Actions	S	A	M	R	Total	Publications
Access content	20	3	0	0	23	6, 17, 66, 74, 76, 86, 87, 92, 104, 108, 111, 118, 121, 122, 126, 127, 136, 148, 158, 161, 164, 167, 169
Submit work	11	3	0	0	14	4, 12, 20, 31, 39, 70, 83, 91, 101, 111, 134, 166, 172, 174
Communicate	10	3	1	1	15	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 16, 17, 20, 31, 39, 53, 74, 82, 145, 152
Create content	5	13	2	4	24	12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 23, 31, 34, 38, 46, 58, 62, 64, 70, 74, 125, 130, 132, 134, 135, 152, 159, 160, 161
Collaborate	0	0	0	5	5	36, 47, 53, 55, 111
Co-construction (student & teacher)	0	0	1	0	1	169
Flipped learning	0	0	1	0	1	24
Reflect on learning	0	0	1	0	1	137
Use for administrative purposes	1	0	0	0	1	152

Source: Scopus database

The Figure 5 shows a strong trend toward more digital forms of assessment in transdisciplinary STEM education.

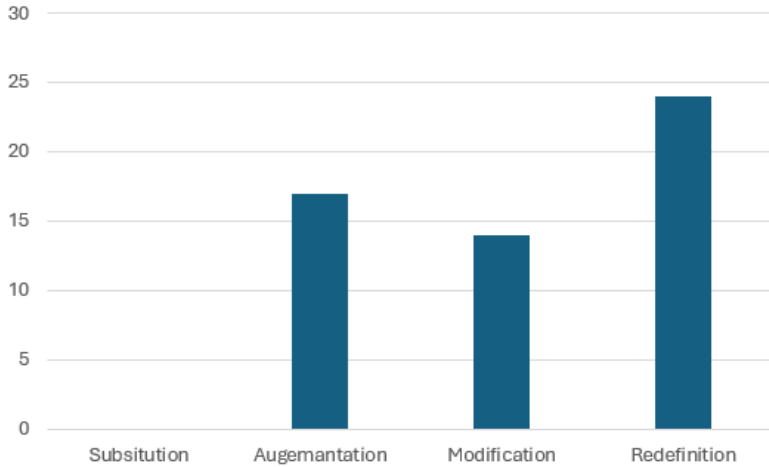


Figure 5: Assessment: Project-based, inquiry-based, and independent learning

Source: Author's own

Figure 6 shows that in assessments, students moved away from the lower levels of SAMR to self-regulated learning when project work assessments were more frequent.

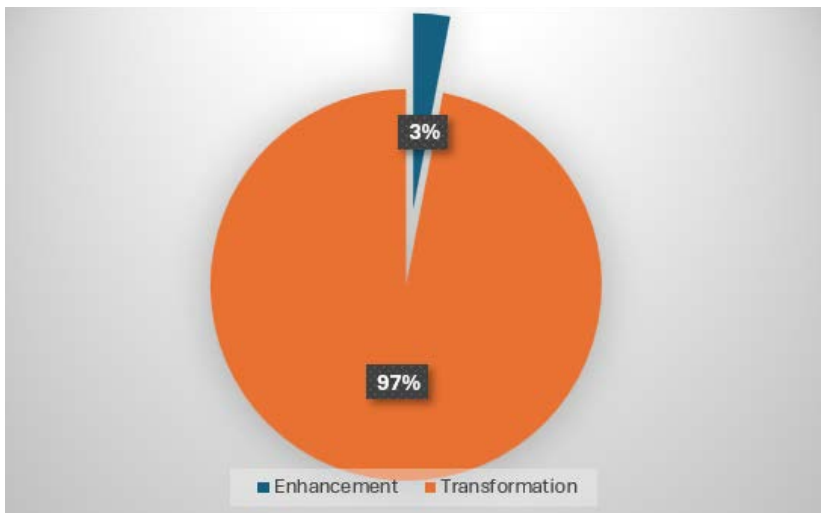


Figure 6: Comparison between enhancing (S, A) and transformative (M, R) ICT assessments

Source: Author's own



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From the above findings, the study proceeds to the discussion, in which the results are analysed considering the theoretical framework and the literature reviewed. The SAMR model (Puentedura, 2012) provides the central lens. In addition, Vygotsky and Cole's (1978) sociocultural theory offers explanatory power by showing how ICT tools act as mediating artefacts that either replicate or transform pedagogical practices.

Discussion

The onset of ICT integration in STEM education has been uneven, reflecting both opportunities and constraints. As Vygotsky and Cole (1978) posit, learning is mediated by signs and tools in both inter-psychological and intra-psychological contexts. In the era of the ubiquitous 4IR now upon us, teaching and learning increasingly occur through digital artifacts, represented by ubiquitous ICT tools integral to everyday life.

With respect to the first research question on ICT integration evolution in transdisciplinary STEM education between 2010 and 2024, the findings from the current study reveal varied patterns of ICT integration across teacher, student, and assessment actions. Teacher practices were found to mainly align with the substitution and augmentation levels, with 99 enhancement actions compared to only 15 transformative ones. This shows that nearly 87% of teacher activities remain replicative, digitising traditional pedagogies rather than redesigning them. This mirrors what Sfard (2016) describes as ritual learning, in which technology reproduces established routines without enabling exploration.

Also, student actions occur at all levels of the SAMR model, though they are more concentrated at the lower end, with 88% of student engagement remaining at the substitution and augmentation stages. Students' collaborative projects and inquiry-based learning—though less frequent—demonstrate the upper modifications and redefinitions stage. This was argued by Romrell et al., (2014), who found that mobile learning fosters personalised and connected experiences.

In the current study, assessment actions aligned more closely with the higher levels of the SAMR model. There were 32 transformative actions compared to only one for enhancement. Thus, assessment emerges as the domain most advanced in ICT integration. There were many project-based and inquiry-driven assessments that illustrated how ICT enables self-regulated learning and multimedia documentation, consistent with the findings of Dzulkarnain et al. (2021), that video-based projects enhanced engagement and learning.

The second research question concerned how the SAMR model was applied to evaluate or guide technology-enhanced teaching and learning in trans-disciplinary STEM education.

The SAMR model proved instrumental for theorising and categorising ICT integration, offering a clearly structured lens for assessing ICT pedagogical transformation. At the lower levels, ICT tools function as mediating artifacts (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), extending existing routines without fundamentally altering pedagogy. Examples include digitised worksheets, recorded lessons, or WhatsApp sharing of teaching and learning materials.

At the modification stage, ICT enables significant task redesign. Students can collaborate across time and space, using platforms like Zoom or Teams, which was not possible in traditional classrooms. At the redefinition stage, previously inconceivable tasks become possible, such as global collaboration and AI-mediated learning. This resonates with Adulyasas (2021), who emphasised that SAMR and TPACK frameworks are critical for guiding integration beyond augmentation. Student collaboration at reformulation demonstrated how ICT mediates peer-to-peer knowledge construction, consistent with the findings of Romrell et al. (2014). Assessment practices, particularly at the modification and redefinition levels, demonstrate how the SAMR framework can guide educators in designing tasks that leverage ICT for transformative learning.

Next, we discuss research question 3 on trends, challenges, and innovations that characterise the transition from the enhancement to the transformation stages of using ICTs in trans-disciplinary STEM education. The findings show that teachers are struggling to shed old teaching methodologies for STEM subjects. Teachers are still bound by yesterday's pedagogies—old habits die hard, proving that old success is a barrier to development. Teacher actions remained largely replicative, underlined by traditional instructional approaches, indicating negligible pedagogical transformation.

Student actions on the scale, though more varied, still concentrate at the lower end of the SAMR model. Collaborative projects and inquiry-based learning—though less frequent—demonstrate modifications and redefinitions emerging. This distribution suggests that learners are beginning to engage with ICTs in more transformative ways, albeit inconsistently.

By contrast, assessment practices show a stronger alignment with transformative practices. Project-based learning, peer feedback, and multimedia documentation reflect modification and redefinition, indicating that assessment is emerging as a



domain where ICT integration is more advanced and transformative. This resonates with Adulyasas (2021), who emphasised that frameworks such as SAMR and TPACK are critical for guiding integration beyond mere augmentation.

The transformative use of ICT in trans-disciplinary STEM education has been shown to increase student engagement, particularly when technologies are employed at the higher levels. These levels foster interaction not only with content, but also among learners, heightening collaboration, creativity, and intrinsic motivation (Dey, 2017). Furthermore, ICT integration is seen as supportive of the development of problem-solving skills, as it enables learners to access diverse resources, engage in self-directed inquiry (Makonye, 2015; Makonye & Sulisworo, 2025), and engage in continuous learning beyond the classroom.

Thus, ICT integration in transdisciplinary STEM education remains predominantly at the enhancement stage, with uneven progress toward transformation. Yet, the evidence of modification and redefinition in student collaboration and assessment demonstrates the emerging transformative potential of ICT. Interpreted through Vygotsky's sociocultural lens, ICT tools primarily function as mediating artifacts that extend existing routines rather than fundamentally altering them.

Conclusion

The SAMR model provides a framework for both evaluating ICT integration in transdisciplinary STEM educational practices and a roadmap for guiding future integration toward genuinely transformative STEM education. In this article, it proved instrumental in categorising ICT integration, offering a structured lens for assessing pedagogical transformation. The evidence suggests that ICT integration remains predominantly at the enhancement stage, with only incremental progress toward transformation, particularly in assessment practices. To move forward, STEM curricula should be revised to promote pedagogical practices that align with the higher levels of the SAMR model—modification and redefinition. Teachers require ongoing professional development and targeted training in the use of ICT for lesson design, enabling them to enhance their pedagogical practice in ways that move beyond simply digitising traditional tasks. Assessment innovation, which already demonstrates stronger movement toward transformation, should be leveraged as a catalyst for broader pedagogical change, expanding project-based and inquiry-driven formats that foster self-regulated learning and collaboration.

Given that ICT integration in transdisciplinary STEM education is progressing unevenly, if curricula are revised, teachers are supported, and assessment innovations are expanded, ICT can serve not merely as a coping mechanism, but also as a driver of enduring educational transformation in the AI age. Research on ICT integration in trans-disciplinary STEM education should focus on moving teaching and learning beyond enhancement stages into the transformative levels of the SAMR model. Future studies should explore strategies that enable consistent engagement in modification and redefinition, where ICT fosters collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving.

Limitations of the study

This study used bibliometric analysis of articles published exclusively in the Scopus database. This presents a limitation, as research outputs from other databases, conferences, or books were not included in the analysis. Nevertheless, the impact of this research remains significant, because Scopus is one of the most important academic databases, capturing studies from many of the field's most prominent scholars. Furthermore, the study can be regarded as a case study, which is valuable as a qualitative inquiry, offering insights into the trends and patterns of ICT integration in trans-disciplinary STEM education.

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**Autonomy versus Care: Adult Learners
Respond to the Provision of Affective Support
in an Online Setting**

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Autonomy versus Care: Adult Learners Respond to the Provision of Affective Support in an Online Setting

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine whether adult distance learning students place value on being provided with affective support during their studies, or whether their need to manage their own learning experience perhaps supersedes their reliance on such support mechanisms. The literature suggests that while there is a measure of appreciation for affective support in an online setting, adult learners tend to favour support of a more generic nature that allows them to navigate the day-to-day demands of an online learning environment. Drawing from the literature, a conceptual framework for supporting adult learners was devised and is elaborated on in this study. Using a qualitative case study approach and an interpretivist paradigm, 23 adult online learners enrolled with a private higher education institution in South Africa were invited to share their ideas and experiences of a role known as a Programme Success Tutor (PST), whose sole focus is the provision of affective support for its online students. Using the thematic analysis model of Braun and Clarke, the study revealed that while these adult learners acknowledged the PST presence in a positive light, they placed significantly more importance on their autonomy and the ability to self-manage their learning journey—only seeking support of a more generic nature as and when required. These findings led to a recommendation to replace the current PST designation with one more suited to the needs of the adult learner in an online setting.

Keywords: Adult learners; affective care; autonomy; higher education; online learning; self-management.

Introduction

“I’m a big girl now, I know what needs to be done, so I just get on and do it” (Megan). These are the sentiments conveyed by an adult online learner studying at a South African based private higher education institution (PHEI), conveying a sense of autonomy and self-management that is more often associated with a mature learner than it might be with a younger counterpart (Alghamdi et al., 2023; Botha, 2014; Greenstein, 2023; Malone, 2014). In 2016, the PHEI in question began offering several of its qualifications in a distance mode. Central to the model adopted by the institution was the provision of affective care to all online students. This focus on student emotional well-being was facilitated via a Programme Success Tutor (PST) role. Rather than having an academic focus, the PST role’s sole mandate was to foster a relationship of care and provide non-academic support to the institution’s distance students in mitigation of them experiencing any sense of disconnect and loneliness that is often associated with this mode of study (Grové & Laletas, 2019; Vallade et al., 2020). During an academic year, the PST would regularly engage with the students they had been allocated. Having a dedicated list of students per PST promoted the opportunity for connections to be made and for relationships of care to be established, while also fostering a sense of connection to the institution. In 2022, there was opportunity to revisit the PST role and question whether it continued to align with the needs and expectations of the institution’s online students. By engaging with the individuals for whom this role was intended, it became apparent that the way in which younger learners (17–20 years of age) experienced the PST role differed considerably to that of the adult learners (21 years and older).

The current study aims to interrogate those differences as a means of better understanding the support needs of the adult online learner at the PHEI, and whether the targeted provision of affective care via the PST role remains relevant within this particular higher education setting. Following from this aim, the objectives of the current study were to understand the importance online learners place on autonomy, to determine the role that context can play in the need for affective support, and to ascertain whether the PST role should be retained in its current form, or whether it would benefit from being repositioned as a generic support mechanism.



Background to this study

The South African PHEI at which this study is based was founded in 1991. In 2016, the institution began to offer several of its qualifications in a distance mode. As part of its student support strategy, the PST role was created to provide online students with non-academic, affective support as a means of promoting student emotional well-being and ensuring a greater sense of connectedness to the institution and those facilitating the qualifications online.

In 2022, a study was conducted to better understand how the institution's online students were experiencing the PST role and the affective support that was its primary focus. During that study it was found that while students appreciated having access to a human presence who was able to assist them during their academic journey, very few understood the role as being one focused primarily on affective support and student emotional well-being (Scheepers & Van den Berg, 2022b). In 2024, the data from this study was revisited to determine whether the age of the participants influenced how the PST role had been perceived and received. Returning to the original transcripts, the feedback and commentary from 23 students who were 21 years and older was selected for thematic analysis against the model of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012). Additional data from eight younger students (17–20 years of age) was also included to provide the opportunity for comparison. It is important to note that for the current study, contextual factors such as ethnicity, geographical location, and socio-cultural influences were not taken into consideration, instead the students' affiliation to the PHEI, and their access to the PST role for the duration of their studies was of interest.

What follows are the literature review and methodology that guided the current study. Themes, and findings are then addressed. The paper concludes with a recommendation, and acknowledges the limitations of this study.

Literature review

This literature review briefly addresses the growing interest in student emotional well-being and social presence in an online setting, before looking specifically at the adult learner within an online context, and their need for a greater sense of autonomy and self-management than their younger peers.

Emotional well-being and social presence

The last two decades has seen the importance of student emotional well-being in higher education (HE) gaining priority (Douwes et al., 2023; Eloff et al., 2022), with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown regulations further bolstering this attention (Doolan et al., 2021; Magson et al., 2021). Tait (2000, p. 2) breaks down student support into three “truly interrelated and interdependent” aspects: cognitive support; systemic support; and affective support. It is this notion of affective support, which is also referred to as “non-academic support” (Fynn & Janse van Vuuren, 2017; Karp, 2011; Waight & Giordano, 2018), that most closely aligns with nurturing a student’s sense of well-being in an online learning environment. Referring specifically to students entering an HE context for the first time, Douwes et al. (2023, p. 12) suggest that it is reasonable to assume that they will have a need to feel connected to their institution and to others, and that having this sense of connectedness “plays a central role in [their] well-being”. Prior to gaining a sense of autonomy, students will almost certainly go through a process of “learning and adjustment in which social and affective processes” have a crucial role to play (Douwes et al., 2023, p. 12, citing Crone & Dahl, 2012). When these processes are experienced as positive, it can have a direct impact on a student’s sense of achievement (Chen et al., 2021) and lead to feelings of stability and motivation (O’Regan, 2003; Williams, 2017). These findings closely align with those studies that emphasise the value of enhancing social presence in an online learning environment and the positive impact this can have on student satisfaction and retention (Lim et al., 2021; Phirangee & Malec, 2020; Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2019). Peacock and Cowan (2019) add to the discussion by positing that the tone adopted by an online facilitator (OF) can greatly influence the perception of trust, care, and encouragement that exists within an online learning community. Simpson (2004, as cited in Rotar, 2022) concurs and suggests that online students who had received an encouraging phone call from their OF, were more likely to remain committed to their studies than those who had not. Although each of the mentioned studies reaffirms the connection between a positive social presence and the emotional well-being of students studying in an online context, what is not readily apparent is whether this applies to adult learners in the same way, or to the same extent as it does to their younger peers.



Autonomy and self-management

According to Miller (2021) and Salikhova et al. (2021), adult learners who have intentionally opted to enrol for online studies are those who seek a degree of autonomy and self-management that this mode of study requires. Cocquyt et al. (2019, p. 231) agree, suggesting that due to their being more mature, adult learners tend to be more autonomous and self-managed than traditionally younger learners, preferring to “make decisions for their own learning”. In a study conducted with 37 adult learners at a Russian university, Salikhova, et al. (2021) found that the need for autonomy and self-management proved to be a dominant theme. Here participants emphasised the convenience of online learning and being able to decide for themselves, how much time to dedicate to their studies. Cocquyt, et al. (2019, as cited in Abedini et al., 2021, p. 8), refer to adult learners as being “life-centered”, possessing an “intrinsic motivation to learn personally relevant skills”, while Hashim et al. (2015) speak to the practical approach that adult learners tend to adopt towards their studies. Botha (2014, p. 244) further corroborates these findings and suggests that adult learners are “usually fairly sophisticated and independent”, thus, possessing the ability to manage their learning more intentionally than their younger peers.

Support for adult learners in an online setting

According to Whiteman (2002, p. 4), adult learners are not looking for a “traditional relationship” with their institution, instead they prioritise “service, convenience, and quality control”. The author goes on to suggest that, since many of these learners are re-entering HE seeking some form of “academic redemption” or personal enrichment, the support they need will differ to that which is sought by the more traditional, younger learner. Whiteman (2002) goes on to suggest that adult learners require support with navigating the technologies associated with online studies, academic writing, and understanding how to achieve the necessary work-life-study balance many younger learners do not have to contend with. Fensie (2023, p. 37) adds to the discussion by highlighting that instruction for adult online learners, must be “efficient and effective”, so that they can meet the requirements of their programme of study “without spending additional time that they generally do not have”. Although Fensie (2023, p. 48) does acknowledge the importance of emotional well-being for adult learners, the author also speaks to the need for a “social partnership” with the OF; one that encourages “increased effort and attention on the part of the learner”. This frames

the relationship as a form of academic support mechanism, rather than one focused on the learner's social identity and integration (Fensie, 2023).

Based on the literature review, Figure 1 provides a suggested framework for supporting online adult learners.

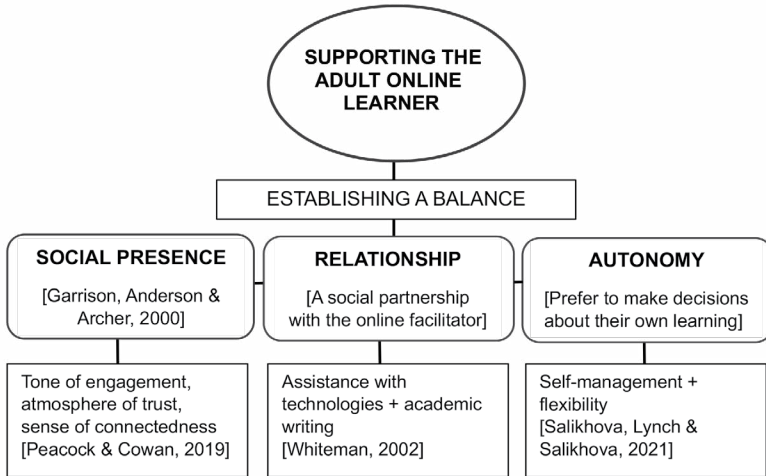


Figure 1: Supporting the adult online learner

Source: Author's own

Support for the adult online learner can be achieved by establishing a balance between social presence that is created through positive engagement with the online facilitator, fostering an atmosphere of trust and a sense of connectedness to the institution. This sense of connectedness is further enhanced through building a social partnership with the online facilitator who provides the learner with support in the use of technologies and academic writing (Whiteman, 2002). The adult learner's need for autonomy is clearly supported by the literature and can be delivered by providing a flexible learning environment that fosters self-management and allows the learner to remain in control of their learning journey.

Methodology

Design and methods

This qualitative study adopted an interpretivist paradigm allowing for the interrogation of the phenomena from the individual perspective of the participants. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 111) explain that, rather than reducing events to “simplistic interpretations”, an interpretivist paradigm allows for “new layers of understanding to be uncovered as phenomena are thickly described”. Within this qualitative approach a case study was used, since it facilitated an “intensive analysis of a particular event, situation, or social unit” (Schoch, 2020, p. 245).

Population and sample

As noted, the PST role was central to the online model of the identified PHEI. In 2022, a larger study was conducted to understand the value students placed in the provision of focused affective care within an online HE setting (Scheepers & Van den Berg, 2022b). To ensure purposive sampling, students who were registered with the PHEI for an online qualification were invited to participate in a series of semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions where they shared their experiences of this role. A theme that was not explored during that initial study was whether the age of the participant influenced in any way their interest in, or reliance on, this non-academic support mechanism (Scheepers & Van den Berg, 2022a). Finding that there was sufficient cause to explore this concept further has led to the current follow-up study that focuses specifically on the feedback that was provided by the adult participants (21 years and older). From the original group, 23 students met this criterion and provided the purposive sample for the study. Feedback from eight students between the ages of 17 and 20 years of age was selected to provide the quota sample, thus, allowing for any comparisons to be drawn.

Data collection and tools

In the initial study, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted as well as five focus groups comprising at least four participants each. Prior to conducting these engagements, a group of 10 volunteer online students participated in a pilot exercise where they were provided with the 10 questions that would be used during the interviews and focus groups. The aim of this pilot exercise was to allow for feedback

regarding the clarity of the proposed questions and their intent. The questions were divided into four sections:

1. The PST role
2. The Importance of affective support in online studies
3. The perceived value of the PST role
4. The support online students seek

Considering their responses to the questions, students were asked to ‘vote’ for whether the PST role should be retained in its current format or adapted to become a support mechanism of a more generic nature.

Because participants were based across the country, sessions were conducted via the Microsoft Teams platform and recorded with their consent. Audios were then manually transcribed verbatim, after each session. The decision to manually transcribe the sessions was made to “allow for a fuller emersion and deeper understanding of the data that [came] from hearing the students speak” (Scheepers & Van den Berg, 2022a, p. 10). These same manual transcripts provided the dataset for the current study and were re-analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis (TA) model of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012). TA was selected as it allows for “systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning and [themes] across a data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Heeding the caution of Braun and Clarke (2012), who explain that it is inevitable that the researcher brings with them their preconceptions when interrogating a data set, an inductive process was adopted when deciding which themes were most relevant to the study.

Ethical considerations

According to Terrell (2022), of key importance when conducting research that involves human participants is ensuring that all ethical considerations are accounted for. Participants in this study were made aware that the data gleaned from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews would be used for the purpose of informing the institution’s provision of affective support to online students in general, and the PST role in particular. Participants were assured of confidentiality as well as the voluntary nature of their involvement in the study. Prior to engaging with these students, the necessary ethical clearance was obtained from the PHEI in question. All engagements with the participants were further guided by the three fundamental principles at the core of ethical research: respect for persons; beneficence; and justice.



Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is required to follow clearly established concepts and procedures, allowing the researcher to establish objectivity (Creswell, 2021). To achieve trustworthiness triangulation, peer debriefing and member checking were undertaken. As this study unfolded, each process was carefully documented to ensure dependability, while confirmability was achieved through adopting a position that was as neutral as possible and allowing the data to accurately represent the thoughts and ideas shared by the participants (Cope, 2014; Terrell, 2022). In the current study there was no preferred outcome guiding the process and because the aim was an improved experience for adult online learners, it was imperative to allow the rich quotes shared by the participants to lead the way.

Presentation and discussion of findings

During the six-phase TA process, the following three sub-themes emerged in support of the main theme: determining whether adult learners attribute value to the provision of focused affective support when enrolled for online studies?

- Sub-theme 1: Autonomy first, support second
- Sub-theme 2: Context determines the need for support
- Sub-theme 3: Generic support makes us feel better

Each theme will be discussed below, as they relate to the objectives of the current study and the literature review conducted.

At the outset of each of the sessions, participants were provided with a summary of the intention behind the PST role, and the institution's rationale for including this affective support mechanism within its online model. From the responses received, it was clear that although students were aware of the role and the individual who had been allocated as their PST, they did not necessarily associate the role with their emotional well-being. As one participant commented, *"I did not know that, and I have to say I am quite curious why [the institution] thought of having a role dedicated to that kind of thing"* (TD23). This apparent curiosity regarding the need for affective support gave rise to the first sub-theme.

Sub-theme I: Autonomy first, support second

Of the 23 adult participants (21 years and older), 17 indicated that the overarching reason for having enrolled in distance studies was related to their preference to work autonomously and at their own pace without the need for additional external support mechanisms. As three participants shared:

Megan: *I'm a big girl now, I know what needs to be done, so I just get on and do it. I really prefer to just sort things out for myself. I know that the support is there if I need it, but I haven't yet.*

Ananda: *I am a self-starter; I like to work on my own and to just put my head down and do what needs to be done. I will say it was nice to hear from [my PST] and [the institution] ... but none of the information I could not have found out on my own if I needed to. So, for me specifically, I would say the [PST] support was a nice-to-have, but I wouldn't say it was necessary.*

Imran: *We know the [PST] support is there if we need it, and that's great, but personally I just like to keep it simple; set up a schedule that suits me and tap into the knowledge of my lecturers to guide me through the course work when I need them.*

This emphasis on autonomy and not actively seeking additional support aligns with literature and the adult learner's preference to manage their own learning (Alghamdi et al., 2023; Malone, 2014). It also begins to address the objective of understanding the importance adult online learners place on their autonomy. As Leong (2022, p. 6) explains, self-managed learners “feel they can successfully make decisions that are related to their learning needs, and they see themselves developing autonomy with respect to these decisions”. Although eight of the adult learners shared that they had made some use of the support offered by their PST, they also referenced their preference for “getting things done on [their] own” (Daniel).

Annelize: *I didn't reach out too much to [my PST] because, like the others have said, I'm also a self-starter, I can motivate myself, I can go out on my own ... I prefer studying online, and the reason for that is because it's in the comfort of my home and at my own pace.*

In contrast to the above, five of the adult learners, and six of the younger participants from the quota sample indicated that they believed the support provided by the PST to be essential. Their reasons for placing importance on this form of support varied, resulting in the second sub-theme.



Sub-theme 2: Context determines the need for support

When discussing the reasons certain participants placed value on having access to the PST role, the responses varied depending on the individual's context and experience in an online setting, as two adult learners explained:

Jenna: I completed my undergrad qualification in 2010, so getting back into studying, and studying online, has been a massive adjustment for me. I will take all the help I can possibly get. Knowing my PST is just a WhatsApp away is really reassuring.

Karel: I was last in an academic setting seven years ago, and to get back into that mindset has been daunting. Knowing that I have my PST to help me with the basics has been incredibly important.

Comments such as these corroborate the findings of Lolich and Lynch (2017, p. 124) who found that several adult learners who had participated in their study who had been “out of education for a while”, felt overwhelmed due to their not being provided with the “support that matched their needs”. A study by Kenyon et al. (2022) also found that several adult learners believed they were possibly too old to resume their studies and feared that without the necessary support, they would not cope.

While these two participants cited the hiatus in their studies as their reason for valuing their access to a PST, others attributed this reliance to having to manage multiple roles in addition to being a student:

Daylene: I am studying while also juggling work and family, so it's my PST that helps me to stay on top of my studies. If it wasn't for his calls and reminders about deadlines and stuff, I would have given up ages ago.

This comment echoes the findings of Garip et al. (2020), Farrell and Bruton (2020), Kahu et al. (2014), and Veletsianos (2020), who each found that the need to balance the competing demands of work, family, and social commitments often placed adult learners under severe pressure which could have negative consequences for their studies if not correctly managed and adequately supported.

Three of the younger learners from the quota sample shared their own, significantly different, reasons for relying on the support provided by their PST:

Sakhile: You have to do all of the assignments on your own, you have to do all of the work on your own ... so just having somebody looking out for you makes a massive difference. I think this is definitely the best way to do distance studies.

Shannon: *Oh, I place a very high importance on [PST support], like, I need it. I'm young and my parents have always been there to take care of stuff, so I need a person like [my PST]. I can't sit and feel like I have no help, no one to just WhatsApp. I need that, so I would say [PST support] is absolutely essential throughout the year.*

Tamara: *I switched from contact to online after my first year and it was so different that I felt really lost to start with. Having a PST to call on, even for just basic help with access, really made a huge difference to my confidence.*

Whatever the reasons provided, it was clear that context played a dominant role in determining the frequency and nature of the support online students were seeking from their PST. It was also apparent that this was linked to an understanding of PST support as being essentially generic in nature, rather than presenting as an affective support mechanism. Having such timeous access to this generic support ensured a sense of emotional well-being, which led to the third sub-theme.

Sub-theme 3: Generic support makes us feel better

As noted, none of the participants in the current study appeared to have made the connection between the presence of a PST and their emotional well-being. Instead, students' appreciation for access to their PST tended to be grounded in this individual's ability to problem-solve and to provide them with information as and when they needed it. As three participants shared:

Zama: *[My PST] is like my go-to person; anything I need I know I can just ask her, and she will get it sorted.*

Kamini: *[My PST] helped me with my student card and timetable, he also showed me how to order my books online.*

Stanley: *I was having trouble contacting one of my lecturers, so I asked my PST for help, and she was happy to help me, so that was great.*

This appreciation and apparent preference for support that is essentially generic in nature aligns with the finding of Junaidi and Tasir (2021), whose study found that even though students acknowledged the importance of emotional support and affirmation, what they valued most was support that provided them with the information they sought. It is not uncommon for students entering an online learning environment to experience levels of anxiety or self-doubt regarding their ability to navigate the various systems, access their course content, and generally make sense of what can appear to be a strange and daunting learning environment (Eloff et al., 2023; Khairuddin et al.,



2020; Peacock & Cowan, 2019). The data gleaned from the current study revealed much the same, with the PST being a key role-player in assuaging many of these initial fears:

Jack: *Even after orientation I was nervous, I honestly felt quite overwhelmed by the whole thing. My PST scheduled a few extra sessions to take me through the basics of the online platform we were using and encouraged me to ‘play’. She joked and said, “you can’t break it”, and I think that made me feel better.*

Sumaya: *I moved from a contact campus to online and the difference was huge. My PST helped me with my registration and selecting the correct modules, she also sent me the link for our online orientation when I couldn’t find it. Just knowing I could ask her when I was uncertain about anything definitely made me feel calmer.*

Summary of findings

Figure 2 provides a visual summary of the themes and findings, and suggests a shift in the focus of the current PST role.

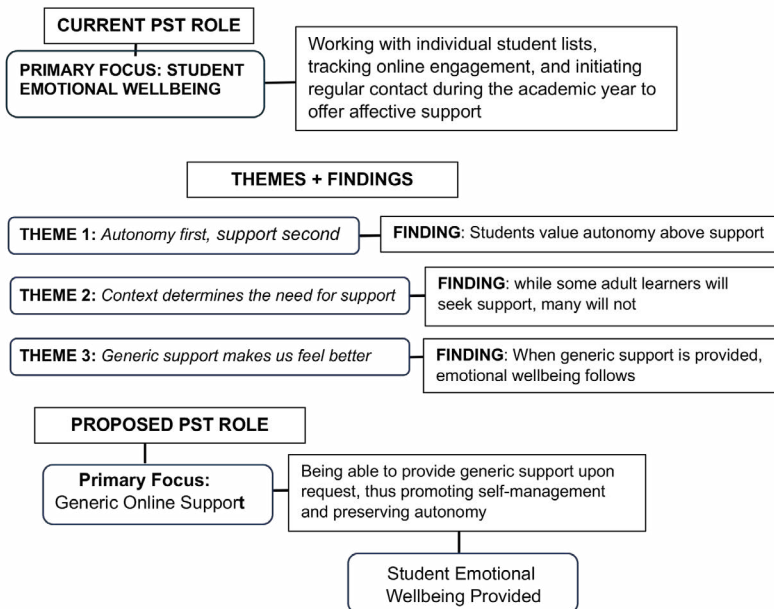


Figure 2: Summary of findings

Source: Author's own

From the experiences shared by the participants in the current study, it was clear that although the adult learners engaged in distance studies with the institution were aware of the PST role, they appeared to view this as more of a help-desk type service, rather than a role intentionally crafted for the purpose of their emotional well-being. While some spoke of enjoying frequent informal engagements with their allocated PST during the academic year, the majority admitted to only knowing this person in passing, suggesting that the role in its current format was not adding to the student experience in the way the institution had envisioned. The findings of the current study suggest that by shifting the focus of the current role from the proactive provision of student emotional well-being to a role that caters for on-demand support of a more generic nature, the needs of the adult learner will be better served.

Limitations and further research

The researcher acknowledges that this is a small exploratory study with certain limitations. The current study was conducted with students who attended the same PHEI in South Africa and who were enrolled for a qualification being offered in the distance mode. The aim of this study, however, is for institutions outside of the private HE arena to find meaning in the results and to use the findings to improve the learning experience of adult learners enrolled in their distance programmes. In addition, this study only considered the students' age and did not take into consideration broader contextual factors such as ethnicity, socio-cultural influences, or the geographical location of participants. As such, further research that addresses these factors in relation to the need for affective support in online education, particularly within a South African context, would be of value. In addition, there is merit in exploring whether the provision of generic support that is qualification-specific would be of value to adult learners. Do students enrolled in numerical or financial modules require different support to those engaged with more theoretically based content?

Conclusion

As the literature suggests, and the current study confirms, a significant number of adult learners who enrol for online studies do so because of the autonomy and opportunity for self-management that this mode of study affords them. The research also strongly suggests that while adult learners may value having access to support during their studies, their preference appears to be for the type of support that allows them to navigate the day-to-day complexities of online study, rather than a support mechanism



solely focused on their emotional well-being. Naturally, there may be exceptions to this when adult learners either opt to resume their studies after a lengthy break, or decide to add the role of student to their already busy lives. In these instances, it would not be unusual for students to reach for support that offers the type of affective care provided by a PST, or similar role. Based on an analysis of the data, and engaging with the participants in the current study, however, the recommendation is to consider replacing the current PST role with one that is focused on providing support of a more generic nature; with student emotional well-being becoming the end-goal rather than the starting point. As the data suggests, there is already a disconnect between the institution's intention behind the PST role and how the participants in this study have interpreted or made use of this support mechanism. The researcher believes that by responding to the student voice and making the recommended changes to the nature of the support provided, the institution would be taking a clear and decisive step towards better meeting the needs of its adult online learners.

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**Cultivating Inclusive Classrooms:
Equipping Pre-Service Teachers for Indigenous
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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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**Teachers' Resilience in Managing Learners in
Diverse Classrooms: A Qualitative Case Study in
the Outjo Circuit of the Kunene Region of Namibia**

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Teachers' Resilience in Managing Learners in Diverse Classrooms: A Qualitative Case Study in the Outjo Circuit of the Kunene Region of Namibia

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored teachers' resilience in managing diverse classes in the Kunene region of Namibia, specifically the Outjo circuit. Through interviews and questionnaires with 25 teachers from both junior primary, senior primary, and secondary phases, the research examines how resilience influences teachers' capacity to handle classroom challenges. Findings indicate that teachers view resilience as crucial for effectively navigating diverse classroom environments, supported by factors such as cultural awareness, language support, inclusive teaching practices, and communication skills. However, they faced obstacles like absenteeism, discipline issues, low self-esteem, language barriers, and tribal tensions. Additionally, teachers reported inadequate preparation due to limited training and resources, constraining their ability to implement inclusive practices. To address these issues, teachers recommended strategies like fostering self-awareness, individualised support, and incorporating learners' first languages into instruction. These insights inform potential policy and intervention developments aimed at strengthening teacher resilience and fostering inclusive, effective learning environments in remote areas like the Outjo circuit.

Keywords: Diverse classrooms; inclusive education; Kunene region; Outjo circuit; qualitative case study; teacher resilience.



Introduction

Namibia's transition from segregated to inclusive classrooms represents a significant shift in the country's approach to providing education for every learner, including those with special needs. In addition to being mandated under the sector policy on inclusive education (Republic of Namibia: Ministry of Education [MoE], 2013), the commitment to implementing inclusive education encompasses greater social justice, equity, and inclusion objectives. The government has proved its commitment to inclusive education by buying into the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994), which highlights the significance of this approach in ensuring that all learners have access to high-quality education. Indeed, implementing an inclusive education policy requires teachers to accommodate and support all students in the same classroom, regardless of colour, ethnicity, or degree of learning ability. This method exemplifies the fundamental concepts of equality, diversity, and inclusion, intending to ensure that every learner has access to high-quality education and opportunities for success. Furthermore, inclusive education recognises that each learner has unique strengths, challenges, and learning styles (MoE, 2013). As a result, teachers and other stakeholders in education such as school principals, heads of department, and education officers are responsible for providing learning environments that meet the different needs of all learners, such as social, emotional, psychological, and physical. Through collective efforts, they should ensure that each learner may fully participate, interact, and advance academically and socially.

The Kunene region, in Northwestern Namibia, has a population of 90 000 people, the majority of whom are Himba (Education Management Information System [EMIS], 2022). The Himba people are a captivating ethnic group residing primarily in the Kunene region of Northern Namibia, with a smaller population across the Kunene River in Southern Angola. The Himba people of Namibia are a semi-nomadic pastoralist group deeply rooted in their traditional lifestyle. Known for their distinctive appearance, characterised by reddish-brown skin and elaborate hairstyles, the Himba have successfully preserved many of their ancestral customs and beliefs. However, their nomadic existence, coupled with geographic isolation and economic challenges, has significantly hindered educational opportunities for Himba children (EMIS, 2022). Despite these challenges, efforts are being made by the MoE (2013) to address these challenges through initiatives such as mobile schools, community-based education

programmes, and scholarships Their unique cultural practices and traditional lifestyle have fascinated outsiders for decades.

As Namibia's youngest and most underdeveloped region, people encounter human rights issues, including a scarcity of educational resources. The Kunene region has 77 schools, of which 72 are public schools and five private schools (EMIS, 2022). There are 50 primary schools, 20 combined schools and seven secondary schools in the Kunene region. The region supports approximately 22 393 primary learners and 7 503 secondary learners. In addition, the region employs 1200 primary and 983 secondary teachers. Of the 1200 primary teachers, 65 had no teacher training qualification, compared to six (6) secondary teachers. Given the Kunene region's fluctuating conditions, teachers might associate resilience with the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, such as drought, resource scarcity, and educational challenges. The region itself faces significant barriers to quality education, such as isolation, poor infrastructure, and teacher shortages (EMIS, 2022).

Nonetheless, the government has put in place a variety of initiatives and regulations to raise the quality and accessibility of education. Some of these initiatives include expanding classrooms and residences, recruiting additional teachers, offering government subsidies and free education, and increasing teacher capacity through ongoing training and the creation of a school nutrition programme. Such development to improve educational resources has the potential to attract teachers from other parts of Namibia. Namibia, like many developing countries, faces challenges in teacher recruitment and retention. The process typically involves a centralised system managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, (MoLSW) and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). This centralised approach ensures consistency in standards and procedures across the country. Based on the Namibian National Employment Policy (Republic of Namibia: Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare [MoLSW], 2013) and Human Resources Development Policy Framework (Office of the Prime Minister [OPM], 2012) the teacher recruitment process in Namibia likely involves the following steps:

- **Identification of teacher shortages:** The Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture (MoEAC) identifies subject areas and regions with teacher shortages through regular assessments of the education system.
- **Advertising vacancies:** Vacancies are typically advertised through national newspapers, online platforms, and possibly local media outlets.



- **Application and screening:** Prospective teachers submit applications, which are screened based on qualifications, experience, and other relevant criteria.
- **Written examinations:** Qualified applicants may be required to write examinations to assess their subject knowledge and pedagogical skills.
- **Interviews:** Shortlisted candidates are typically interviewed by a panel of education experts to evaluate their suitability for teaching.
- **Background checks:** Successful candidates may undergo background checks to verify qualifications and conduct.
- **Appointment and deployment:** Appointed teachers are assigned to schools based on the needs of the education system.

Nevertheless, teachers in the Kunene region face numerous challenges. These include a dearth of trained teachers and resources in the area, as well as the community's different requirements due to the region's multi-ethnic population and diverse linguistic and cultural origins. Gu and Day (2007) identified several factors contributing to teachers' professional challenges. These included: negative interactions with parents, the pressures of performance-oriented policies, work-life imbalance, student behaviour issues, inadequate administrative support, and a lack of collegiality among staff. Aligning with Mokaleng and Möwes (2020), the lack of qualified teachers in remote regions like Kunene has a profound and detrimental impact on learners in the classroom. In their study, Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) found that teachers without proper training may lack the pedagogical skills to deliver engaging and effective lessons, inadequate subject expertise can hinder learners' understanding of complex concepts, and teachers may struggle to modify teaching materials to suit the specific needs and contexts of their students. Therefore, the lack of qualified teachers in Kunene has far-reaching consequences for learners, affecting their academic achievement, future prospects, and the overall development of the region. To address this issue, Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) suggest a comprehensive approach, including investing in teacher training, providing incentives for teachers to work in remote areas, and improving school infrastructure. Furthermore, as the population grows year after year and the number of learners in each classroom multiplies, this intensifies the teachers' challenges of teaching diverse classrooms. As a result, it is extremely important to investigate teachers' resilience in dealing with these challenges.

Extensive empirical evidence demonstrates that, in most parts of the world, teachers face a large work demands and adverse conditions which impair their resilience and

quality of life and may even compel them to slump in their job (Gu & Li, 2014; Naeimi, 2016; Platsidou & Daniilidou, 2021). Resilience is defined as the ability to adapt and overcome challenges, bouncing back from adversity (Yeo, 2011). It is about mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility that allows individuals to navigate through tough times and emerge stronger (Naeimi, 2016). This aligns with Platsidou and Daniilidou's (2021) characterisation of resilience as the capacity to endure stress, process emotional pain, and progress, despite setbacks. Resilient teachers, as described by Fernandes et al. (2021), effectively employ coping strategies to navigate adversity.

This study specifically focused on teacher resilience. In the context of the teaching profession, resilience can be conceptualised as a capacity, a process, and an outcome (Mansfield et al., 2012). It involves the capacity of an individual teacher to utilise personal and contextual resources to overcome challenges (Beltman & Mansfield, 2018). Resilience is also a dynamic process where individual teacher characteristics and their personal and professional environments interact over time as teachers employ specific strategies. Ultimately, resilience leads to the outcome of a teacher experiencing professional growth, commitment, enthusiasm, satisfaction, and well-being (Beltman & Mansfield, 2018). To further establish a foundational understanding of this construct, it was essential to provide preliminary definitions. Brunetti (2006) characterises teacher resilience as a factor that sustains teachers' commitment to teaching amidst challenges. Gu and Day (2007) offer a similar perspective, conceptualising it as a teacher's capacity to navigate adversity, uphold their dedication to the profession, and concurrently engage in professional growth. Yonezawa et al. (2011) further contribute to this understanding by defining teacher resilience as the ability to confront and manage challenges to ensure student success. Moreover, Wuest and Subramaniam (2024) defined teachers' resilience as the ability to navigate personal and environmental challenges while maintaining their commitment to teaching. Marzoghpour (2024) conceptualises teachers' resilience as a dynamic interplay between personal attributes (e.g., self-esteem, anxiety, cognitive abilities) and contextual factors (e.g., support networks, workload) that influence responses to stress. Furthermore, Fernandes et al. (2021) offer a comparable definition of teacher resilience as the capacity of a teacher to adapt, learn, and grow in response to challenging or stressful conditions within the educational environment. It is the ability to maintain a positive outlook, commitment to teaching, and effectiveness in the face of adversity. In essence, teacher resilience is the ability to 'bounce back' from setbacks and continue to thrive as an educator.



Teachers in the Kunene region of Namibia require exceptional resilience due to the numerous challenges posed by the environment. These challenges include harsh weather, poor infrastructure, poverty, limited resources, cultural diversity, and isolation (EMIS, 2022). Given these factors, teachers in the Kunene region must be adaptable, resourceful, and committed to their profession to overcome these challenges and provide quality education. These factors create a demanding environment that requires teachers to be exceptionally resilient.

According to Hue and Kennedy (2014, p.112), a “diverse classroom” refers to a learning environment that encompasses learners from a wide variety of racial, ethnic, economic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. It also refers to the presence of learners’ learning styles, interests, and abilities. Such a classroom environment requires the teachers’ resilience in response to instructional and behavioural challenges that may occur. Moreover, Clara (2017) added that resilient teachers have been defined as those who demonstrate the ability to adapt and persevere in the face of challenges and adversity, possess effective behaviour management strategies, and demonstrate empathy and understanding towards learners who may exhibit challenging behaviours or face personal difficulties. This aligns with the perspective of Howard and Johnson (2004) (as cited in Mansfield et al., 2016), that resilient teachers cultivate a mindset that emphasises the positive aspects of their work and experiences, celebrate successes, no matter how small, and maintain optimism. Furthermore, Yuan (2018) presents a similar viewpoint that resilient teachers derive a sense of pride and fulfilment from their work and demonstrate a strong commitment to their school community and the teaching profession (Yuan, 2018). Gu and Day (2007) discussed two approaches to define resilience. In the first approach, the authors define resilience as a psychological construct that examines personal qualities like self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, resourcefulness, and health. In the second approach, they defined resilience as a multifaceted concept shaped by social interactions. Gu and Day (2007) believe that while psychology primarily focuses on individual traits and characteristics associated with resilience, social work offers a broader perspective. Psychology views resilience as a complex interplay of factors within social systems, rather than solely as an individual attribute. These qualities are thought to help individuals cope with adversity and remain resilient. This approach aims to uncover the characteristics of a resilient individual. In the second approach, they view resilience as a complex and multidimensional process that exists within a social system of interrelationships.

Resilience has been studied in many disciplines, such as the social science, psychology, engineering, and medical field (Fredrickson, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Luthar et al., 2000). While some studies have focused on teacher's resilience, very few have explored the resilience of teachers to thrive in the face of a diverse classroom (Mansfield et al., 2012). However, resilience in most educative research is often defined and viewed in the context of diverse learners. Resilience, when viewed through the lens of diverse learners, encompasses a complex interplay of factors influenced by various sociocultural, economic, and personal characteristics. Those with physical, sensory, cognitive, or emotional impairments often demonstrate exceptional resilience in overcoming challenges to achieve their educational goals (Day & Gu, 2013; Mansfield & Beltman, 2019).

For example, Castro et al. (2010) focuses on teacher resilience, specifically the dynamic process of managing challenges and the role of individual agency, while the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2018) defines resilience as the capacity to adapt to change and overcome adversity within a globalized context, and Stewart et al. (2021) describe resilience as the ability of teachers to keep faith in themselves and their efficacy when faced with challenging behaviour exhibited by learners with differing needs. Additionally, the literature tends to define resilience as the "individual's ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity" (Yuan, 2018, p.26). They Mansfield et al. (2016, p.80) define resilience as the capacity of an individual to harness personal and environmental resources to "bounce back" and continue to thrive in the face of challenges. These definitions are consistent with the American Psychological Association's definition that resilience is the ability to adjust effectively in the face of hardship, trauma, tragedy, threats, or major sources of stress, such as issues with one's family, relationships, career, or finances (OECD, 2010; UNESCO, 2019).

In the educational setting, resilience lessens the negative effects that difficult life situations, such as work pressure, family problems, relationship problems, school stress, health problems, and catastrophic life events (such as death or loss) may have on teachers. Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) discussed school resilience and how teachers who work in a diverse setting can adopt resilience to manage problems that stretch them to the limit. Studies have confirmed the significance of cultural competency, social-emotional learning, supportive school environments, and resource accessibility in promoting the resilience of teachers and reducing the negative effects of stress and



burnout (Allen et al., 2015; Cefai, 2007; Mansfield et al., 2016). In Uganda, Wabule (2020) found that higher workload, a lack of assistance, difficult learners' behaviour, satisfying the complex and varied needs of learners, and a negative public perception are some of the challenging situations for teachers.

However, as stated by Jennings et al. (2013), social recognition enhances a teacher's capacity to create and manage a well-organised learning environment that offers learners the best possible instructional support. In a similar vein, Fullan (2009) and Sahlberg (2011) emphasise the significance of wide public support and a strong agenda that improves the mental health and competency of teachers. It is asserted that teachers who receive more positive feedback from supervisors cultivate happy feelings at work, are better able to handle pressure at work, and can create and maintain supportive learning environments. Patterson et al. (2004) found seven essential components that support teachers' resilience: 1) Having a positive attitude in the face of hardship; 2) remaining committed to your priorities; 3) being adaptable in how you reach your objectives; 4) taking initiative; 5) fostering a supportive environment on a personal and professional level; 6) upholding high standards of performance for parents, teachers, and learners; and 7) fostering a sense of shared responsibility and participation (Wabule, 2020).

Regarding teaching in diverse classrooms, Forghani-Arani et al. (2019) and Doll and Song (2023) state that teachers face complex challenges. These challenges include tailoring instruction to individual learning styles and academic readiness, navigating cultural and language barriers, addressing unconscious biases, managing behavioural differences, and fostering meaningful parental participation from various backgrounds. However, by differentiating instruction based on learners' individual needs, learning styles, and abilities, teachers can ensure that all learners have access to appropriately challenging and engaging learning experiences. This might involve providing additional support for struggling learners, offering enrichment activities for advanced learners, and adjusting teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles. According to Ragoonaden et al. (2015) and Santoro and Forghani-Arani (2015), the strategies for facilitating and promoting resilience among teachers in diverse classrooms involve adopting proactive approaches to address challenges, fostering a supportive learning environment, and promoting the success of all learners. Finally, prioritising self-care and seeking support from colleagues, mentors, and mental health professionals is crucial for maintaining resilience and preventing burnout. Cornelissen (2016) and Schmidt

and Janusch (2016) assert that teachers must recognise their limitations, set boundaries, and practice self-care strategies such as mindfulness, exercise, and seeking emotional support when needed. The same authors agree that by implementing these resilient strategies, teachers can create inclusive learning environments where all learners feel supported, challenged, and empowered to succeed academically and personally.

Nonetheless, there are still gaps in our knowledge of the precise elements that support teachers' resilience in handling diverse classrooms and the processes by which these elements function in Namibia. According to Clark et al. (2014), to enhance teachers' individual and collective resilience, research calls for the need to understand how resilience operates in the dynamic and evolving field of education. With this background in mind, the study aims to investigate teachers' resilience in managing learners in diverse classrooms in the Kunene region of Namibia. The study was directed by the aims listed below:

- To determine the awareness of resilience in educational processes in teachers in the Kunene region.
- To investigate factors that contribute to teachers' resilience in managing learners in varied classrooms throughout the Kunene region.
- To explore how teachers in the Kunene region perceive the issues of cultural diversity, linguistic variety, and diverse learning requirements among learners.
- To identify the resilient techniques that teachers from the Kunene region use to promote inclusive practices, reduce inequities, and support all learners' academic and socio-emotional development.

This study contributes to the existing literature on inclusive education and teacher resilience by providing insights into the experiences of teachers in the Kunene region of Namibia. In addition, the study informs policymakers, teachers, and stakeholders about effective strategies for managing diverse classrooms and promoting teachers' resilience in challenging educational contexts. This research supports efforts to enhance inclusive education practices and support systems.



Method

Approach and design

The current study used a qualitative research approach and a case study design to explore teachers' resilience in managing learners in diverse classrooms. According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2017), qualitative research is renowned for its capacity to comprehend phenomena from the participants' perspective. Creswell's (2012) assertion highlights a core strength of case study research as its capacity to delve deeply into a particular phenomenon. Unlike quantitative methods that often prioritise breadth and generalisability, case studies prioritise depth and context-specific understanding; hence, the choice. The study aims to capture the richness and complexity of the human experiences, perceptions, and behaviours of teachers teaching in the remote area of the Kunene region in Namibia.

Study setting

The Outjo circuit is an education circuit within the Kunene Region of Namibia. It encompasses schools in the Outjo, Khorixas, and Fransfontein areas. Approximately 7 969 learners are enrolled in the circuit's 20 schools (including one private school). A significant challenge is the lack of qualified teachers, with 33% of teachers deployed in the circuit being unqualified. This is due to various factors, including the region's remoteness and lack of housing for teachers. Some schools in the circuit face infrastructure challenges, particularly in terms of sanitation and classroom facilities. The circuit faces issues such as substance abuse among learners, lack of parental involvement, and limited access to educational resources.

Population and samples

The population of a study is the entire collection of individuals, objects, or events that a researcher draws conclusions on (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2017). In the current study, the population comprised 100 teachers in the Outjo circuit in the Kunene region of Namibia and a sample of 25 teachers were purposefully selected for the study. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental or selective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique used in research. The selection criteria were that the teacher must have four years of teaching experience and have lived in the Kunene region for three consecutive years. By strategically selecting teachers who face similar

remote teaching challenges, researchers are more likely to gather in-depth and relevant data. These teachers' experiences can provide richer insights than a random sample that might include teachers from non-remote areas. Additionally, a population of 20 schools in the Outjo circuit was included in this study. Nine junior primary, seven senior primary, and four secondary schools were purposefully selected based on their rural and remote locations. This selection criterion allowed researchers to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of teachers in these challenging environments. Notably, most teachers work in the junior primary phase (13 teachers), followed by senior primary (9 teachers), and secondary (8 teachers).

Instruments for collecting data

A self-administered questionnaire with open-ended questions and structured interviews with all participants were used to collect data. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), structured in-depth interviews can be used to obtain in-depth, rich information about participants' thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motives, and feelings regarding a topic under inquiry. Furthermore, open-ended questions allow respondents to elaborate on their views, experiences, and opinions, resulting in more comprehensive data. They also reveal the emotional tone and sentiment that underpin responses, providing useful context for understanding attitudes and opinions.

Data collection procedures

According to Cohen et al. (2011), researchers must consider informed consent from the beginning of a study. This often entails obtaining permission to access the research site and from the individuals involved. In this study, permission was requested and obtained from the Kunene region directorate of education prior to data collection. The participants were also informed about the research purpose. It was further ensured that the data collection processes did not disrupt the participants work. The participants were interviewed in the comfort of their own offices and they selected the interview date and time that suited their schedules. The regional school counsellor administered the questionnaires to the participants, and they were given a day to complete and return them. The interviews, on the other hand, were conducted after school hours to avoid classroom interruptions and they lasted approximately 45 minutes.



Data analysis

The interview transcripts and questionnaire responses were transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed thematically, which refers to identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes across the data (Creswell, 2012). The transcribed data were read repeatedly to gain a holistic view of the experiences of the participants on teachers' resilience in managing learners in diverse classrooms. The meaningful segments in the text were labelled with a code. To ensure the validity of the findings, the analysis process was discussed between the three researchers until the final set of categories and the predominant themes accurately representing the interviews had been established. To protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms were used (T1-25) in the reporting process. The T1-25 are used for this paper only.

Ethical considerations

Prior to collecting data, permission to conduct the study was granted by the Directorate of Education, Arts, and Culture of Kunene region and the principals of the participating schools. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture granted permission for the research to be conducted on 24 January 2024. Ethical considerations were observed as the researchers made telephonic appointments prior to visiting the schools and explained the scope and purpose of the study as well as the intended outcomes to both the school principals and teachers (participants). Participants' consent was sought and obtained, and they were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. Participation was voluntary and the participants were allowed to cease their participation without any fear of retribution. All potential participants agreed to take part in the study.

Findings

Data presentation

The thematic analysis of interview data and open-ended responses revealed key themes directly connected to the research aims of this study. Before the presentation of data and findings, it is important to reiterate the research objective of the study as follows:

- To determine the awareness of resilience in educational processes in teachers in the Kunene region.
- To investigate factors that contribute to teachers' resilience in managing learners in varied classrooms throughout the Kunene region.

- To explore how teachers in the Kunene region perceive the issues of cultural diversity, linguistic variety, and diverse learning requirements among learners.
- To identify the resilient techniques that the teachers from the Kunene region use to promote inclusive practices, reduce inequities, and support all learners' academic and socio-emotional development.

First, the biographical information of participants (interviewed teachers) is displayed in Table 1 below, followed by a discussion of the emerging themes.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

No	Demographic Characteristics	Total	%	
1	Gender	Male	10	40%
		Female	15	60%
2	Age range	20-25	0	0%
		26-30	2	8%
		31-35	4	16%
		36-40	7	28%
		41-45	2	8%
		46-50	3	12%
		51-55	2	8%
		56-60	1	4%
3	Qualifications	Bachelor of Education [B.Ed. Hons]	15	60%
		Basic Education Teacher Diploma	8	32%
		Advanced Diploma in Education	1	4%
		Master's degree in Education	1	4%
		PhD in Education	0	0%
4	Years of experience	1-5	2	8%
		6-10	3	12%
		11-15	7	28%
		16-20	6	24%
		21-25	2	8%
		26-30	2	8%
		31+	3	12%
5	Phase of teaching	Junior Primary	13	52%
		Senior Primary	9	36%
		Secondary	6	24%

N=25



Table 1 shows an overview of the biographical information of the participants. The analysis of 25 teachers reveals a predominantly female participation (15 females and 10 males), with the majority having experience clustered between 11–15 years (7 teachers) and 16–20 years (6 teachers) of service. Notably, most teachers work in the junior primary phase (13 teachers), followed by senior primary (9 teachers), and secondary (6 teachers). In addition, Table 1 shows a considerable disparity in teachers' qualifications. Most of the teachers have a Bachelor of Education (Hons) (15 teachers) or a Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) (8 teachers), while two teachers possess an Advanced Diploma or a Master's Degree in Education.

Theme I: Understanding resilience in education

When asked about their understanding of resilience, the participants offered a variety of perspectives. Resilience, as described by teachers, encompasses intentional strategies, approaches, and interventions to develop resilience in diverse learners. It means being able to recover quickly, despite facing various challenges in a diverse classroom, ensuring that teaching and learning continue uninterrupted. To further emphasise the authentic voices of the participants, verbatim excerpts from their responses were included. This approach allows their perspectives to be directly heard and understood. The following are extracts from participants:

“Mhmm... resilience is the ability to cope and bounce back from a difficult experience. A teacher needs to manage a class with learners from different backgrounds. (T4)

Resilience, essential for teachers..., aah... involves the capacity to handle and rebound from challenging situations. This skill is vital for effectively managing classrooms with learners from diverse backgrounds. (T3)

This trait is crucial for teachers, as it impacts their performance in the classroom, including their ability to handle and manage behaviours and diverse attitudes from learners of different grades and backgrounds. In addition, the participants' responses further suggest that resilience involves the capacity to cope and bounce back from difficult experiences, allowing teachers to effectively manage classrooms with learners from diverse backgrounds. One participant indicated that:

To me... mmmh... resilience is the process through which many protective factors-things that will help you to cope, and cope, and risk factors things that make it harder for you to cope-interact. It can help protect you from mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. (T5)

The participants further mentioned that resilience refers to protective variables, which facilitate coping and protect teachers from mental health conditions including anxiety and depression. For instance, another participant stated that:

“resilience is the capacity to navigate and rebound from challenges, proves indispensable for educators overseeing classrooms populated by learners from varied backgrounds” (T9).

The teachers further alluded that resilience is the ability of teachers to endure and maintain their effectiveness in the face of adversity, which is essential for teachers to successfully traverse diverse classrooms and guarantee the success of every learner. In this case, one participant defined resilience:

“as the ability to handle and manage various behaviours and attitudes from different learners in different grades and find your footing to cope well” (T19).

Theme 2: Factors contributing to teacher resilience

In response to the question about the factors that contribute to teacher resilience in managing diverse classrooms, the participants highlighted the significance of fostering resilience through cultural sensitivity and inclusive practices in diverse classrooms. They explained that the factors affecting their resilience include cultural awareness, language support, inclusive teaching practices, careful communication, and fostering a positive classroom environment. Below are some examples of data extracts:

I am committed to employing a variety of teaching methods and strategies that cater to diverse learning styles and abilities, ensuring all learners have an equal opportunity to succeed. (T5)

...mmmm... yeah... I strive to create opportunities for learners to share their cultures and learn from each other, fostering a richer learning experience for everyone. (T4)

The participants emphasised that, to promote diversity, it is essential to incorporate cultural understanding, encourage interchange and appreciation, and offer linguistic support. For example, one participant stated that:

recognising the importance of language acquisition, I will provide necessary support and accommodations to ensure all learners can fully participate and reach their full potential” (T6).

Another participant shared that:

I actively promote respect for cultural and tribal differences in my classroom. I encourage learners to embrace these differences and value each other as individuals. This message resonates well with them because I share real-life examples of how our school staff members value and respect one another despite their own backgrounds. Seeing this positive role modelling helps learners understand the importance of celebrating diversity. (T6)



The participants further indicated that it is crucial to choose words and use examples carefully to maintain objectivity and promote a positive outlook, especially for learners whose mother tongues are not the same as the language spoken in the area. One participant (T1) emphasised the importance of clear and unbiased communication in teaching, emphasising the importance of carefully selecting words and examples to ensure all learners feel included and respected. They also emphasised the importance of active listening and observation to better understand each learner's needs and perspectives.

mmm.....communicating effectively with learners who spoke different languages or dialects challenged me to improve my communication skills. (T3)

I learned to use simplified language gestures and non-verbal cues to convey information clearly. I developed listening skills to better understand learners needs and foster a more supportive environment. (T11)

This suggests that the participants feel that strictly using English in the classroom encourages homogeneity and valuing ethnic and tribal distinctions fosters a friendly atmosphere. participants suggested that demonstrating a commitment to diversity, active listening, customised learning methodologies, and individual needs support are beneficial for all learners.

Theme 3: Challenges of teachers in diverse classrooms

The analysis of data revealed that teachers in diverse classrooms face a complex set of challenges that impede the teaching and learning process. The participants narrated that they struggle with classroom management issues like indiscipline, absenteeism, late coming, and low self-esteem among learners. Below are the extracts from the interview to substantiate these inferences:

In my case ... mhhh ... the challenges are learners with low self-esteem and those coming from impoverished families. (T7)

Absenteeism, low self-esteem, and poor cleanliness are the most challenging issues in this location. (T9)

Disciplined learners, absenteeism, and tardiness. I personally respond to each infringement as soon as possible to prevent the problem from worsening. I also informed the learners that if they misbehaved, I would call their parents; they are terrified of that. (T22)

Furthermore, the participants reported that they deal with issues beyond their immediate control, such as learners' backgrounds (cultural, tribal, and socioeconomic), limited time and resources, and their personal biases. One participant shared that:

“... here ... teachers are getting learners from diverse backgrounds example culturally, tribally and living conditions, which is not easy at all” (T15).

In addition, language barriers due to learners not knowing Afrikaans or preferring their mother tongue, learning difficulties, and resistance to participate in assessments, further complicate the teaching experience. The participants in diverse classrooms often handle a high workload with insufficient support from school management. For example, one participant narrated that:

“When I had learners from different backgrounds who did not know Afrikaans before, it gave me headaches” (T12).

The participants indicated that they face a lack of parental involvement and the additional responsibility of implementing learning support for learners who are behind (repeating grades) or transferred to the next grade without mastering the basic competencies of the current grade. Moreover, large class sizes and a decreasing level of overall support can make it even harder for teachers to manage everything effectively.

That is, one participant stated that:

“learners with learning difficulties tend to distract others and usually speak in their mother tongues and this made it harder to maintain classroom management as intended” (T18).

Another participant added that:

“In my class, a learner refused to complete an exam. I confronted the learners and warned her of the consequences of not writing. I imposed punishment, and the learner cooperated afterwards” (T20).

Another participant alluded that:

As a teacher, I need to get to know my learners, maintain consistent communication, and practice. Time constraints, insufficient resources, personal beliefs and biases, and inadequate guidance are some of the major challenges that teachers face. On the other hand, teachers will demonstrate teacher equality, enthusiasm, and commitment, as well as positive outcomes for learners. (6)

mmm... learners from diverse cultural backgrounds face problems such as misconceptions, language barriers, cultural variances, and socioeconomic inequities. (T13)

Theme 4: Resilient strategies used by teachers

When asked about their resilient strategies for managing diverse learners, the participants shared several approaches that they regard as effective. One participant



shared that resilience includes cultivating a positive classroom culture, fostering independence, and instilling a sense of responsibility among learners. The following extracts from the interview responses resilient strategies for managing diverse learners:

Teachers who emphasise self-care are better prepared to instil confidence in their learners. Teachers inspire learners to believe in themselves and their talents by demonstrating self-compassion and a love of learning. (T9)

I always make it clear to the learners to embrace cultural and tribal differences and for them to value each other and everyone regardless of their differences. learners tend to understand this concept very well because I gave them examples of how staff members also value one another regardless of differences. (T10)

The responses above suggest that the teachers emphasised the importance of engaging with individual learners to understand the underlying reasons for their behaviour and providing appropriate consequences for misconduct. In addition, another participant responded that:

“Encouraging learners to use their first languages and incorporating multicultural materials into the classroom creates a welcoming environment where all learners feel accepted and valued. This sense of belonging ultimately fosters a more positive learning experience for everyone” (15).

A further strategy emerging from the teachers’ responses is related to the significance of self-awareness and clarity regarding the primary duties of a teacher and enabling them to anticipate and promptly address any challenges that may arise. The participants also stressed the importance of identifying learners facing difficulties and offering extra classes, remedial teaching, and personalised attention to support their learning. One participant shared that *“I keep myself physically and mentally fit at any cost”* (T3). Another participant added that:

Fostering an inclusive classroom requires teachers to be attentive to all learners. This means actively listening to their needs and concerns. It is also important to provide a scaffolded approach to learning, where instruction adapts to different learning styles and paces. By being aware of each learner’s strengths and challenges, teachers can provide targeted support that benefits everyone. Celebrating diversity is another key element. (T11)

The findings further suggest that the participants advocated for acknowledging and processing one’s own emotions, drawing inspiration from colleagues, practising active listening and empathy, maintaining a calm and composed demeanour, and developing cultural competence to effectively navigate diverse classroom environments. The

participants suggested that:

Learn what is shaping learners. Create a safe space to learn about team member's backgrounds and what has been vital in shaping their lives. Find out how learners feel, confront stereotypes head-on, walk in someone else's shoes, enforce consistent classroom rules, use supportive language and be positive all the time. (T1)

Peer assistance and mentorship programs promote teamwork and a sense of community. Building trust and rapport with learners facilitates open communication and creates a safe learning environment. Finally, structure and routine establish a predictable and secure atmosphere in which learners can thrive. (T18)

I promote positive reinforcement and recognition to recognise learners' accomplishments and boost confidence. To me... aaah... promoting cultural exchange and appreciation, language support and accommodation, inclusive teaching practices, and community building activities is vital. (T8)

Overall, the findings suggest that resilient teachers in diverse classes tend to use a variety of strategies to effectively address problems. These may include fostering an inclusive culture, using culturally responsive teaching practices, developing strong relationships with learners and their families, implementing flexible and differentiated instruction, encouraging empathy and understanding among learners, and seeking ongoing professional development to improve their skills in addressing diverse needs.

Moreover, the findings suggest that teachers can promote a healthy learning environment by establishing boundaries between work and personal life, managing stress, and engaging in self-care. Some participants believe that strategic planning is essential for being an effective resilient teacher, which includes setting clear goals, using approaches like peer tutoring and teamwork, and practising effective time management.

Discussion

The current study investigated teacher resilience in managing classrooms with diverse learners in Namibia's Kunene region. The findings shed light on a variety of aspects related to resilience, cultural diversity, and effective teaching strategies in the Kunene region. The key findings, based on the research objectives, are discussed below.



Teachers' understanding of resilience in education

The first theme highlights teachers' diverse perspectives on resilience. It emerged that teachers view resilience as more than just bouncing back from difficulties, but intentional strategies to overcome challenges and ensure continuous teaching and learning in diverse classrooms. The ability to manage the behaviours and attitudes of learners of different backgrounds is seen as essential for maintaining classroom effectiveness. Teachers view resilience as a multi-faceted concept involving strategies to support learner resilience and personal ability to bounce back from challenges in diverse classrooms. It allows them to maintain effective teaching despite various learner backgrounds and behaviours. Resilience protects them from mental health issues like anxiety and depression. The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Mansfield et al. (2016, p.80), who defined resilience as an "individual's ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity". This is also consistent with the American Psychological Association's (2012) definition, which states that resilience is the ability to adjust effectively in the face of hardship, trauma, tragedy, threats, or major sources of stress, such as issues with one's family, relationships, career, or finances. This study produced results that corroborated the findings of a previous work in this field. For example, Gu and Day (2007) described resilience as a psychological concept that focuses on personal characteristics such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, resourcefulness, and overall health. These qualities are believed to equip individuals to cope with challenges and maintain resilience.

Factors contributing to teacher resilience

The second theme emphasises the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusive practices in fostering teacher resilience. Teachers stress the significance of cultural awareness, language support, and fostering a positive classroom environment to promote diversity. By incorporating cultural understanding and offering linguistic support, teachers aim to create an inclusive learning environment where all learners feel valued and supported. Teachers must be sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of their learners. Understanding cultural norms, values, and practices can help teachers better connect with their learners and create a more inclusive learning environment. This includes recognising and valuing cultural diversity, incorporating culturally relevant content into lessons, and promoting respect for different cultural perspectives among learners. This finding collaborated with those of previous studies (Allen et al., 2015; Cefai, 2007; Mansfield et al., 2016) that confirmed the significance of cultural

competency, social-emotional learning, supportive school environments, and resource accessibility in promoting the resilience of teachers and reducing the negative effects of stress and burnout.

In addition, inclusive teaching practices involve creating learning experiences that meet the needs of all learners, regardless of their background or abilities. This includes differentiating instructions to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities, providing additional support for learners who may need it, and fostering a sense of belonging for all learners in the classroom. Inclusive teaching practices help create an equitable learning environment where every student can succeed. The participants emphasised clear and unbiased communication, active listening, and respecting diverse perspectives as factors contributing to effective communication. Effective communication is essential in building positive relationships with learners and fostering a supportive classroom environment. Therefore, teachers must communicate clearly and respectfully with learners, using language that is inclusive and free from bias. They should also be attentive listeners, actively seeking to understand learners' perspectives and concerns. By promoting open and respectful communication, teachers can create a safe and welcoming space where learners feel valued and understood. The present findings are consistent with other research findings which confirmed the significance of cultural competency, social-emotional learning, supportive school environments, and resource accessibility in promoting the resilience of teachers and reducing the negative effects of stress and burnout (Allen et al., 2015; Cefai, 2007).

Similarly, teachers play a crucial role in creating a conducive environment by establishing clear expectations, promoting mutual respect among learners, and celebrating diversity. By fostering a sense of community and belonging in the classroom, teachers can help learners feel more engaged and resilient in the face of challenges. Creating a safe and inclusive space through celebrating differences and promoting mutual respect is crucial for learning. This finding concurs with those of Jennings et al. (2013), which suggest that social recognition enhances a teacher's capacity to create and manage a well-organised learning environment that offers learners the best possible instructional support.

Challenges for teachers in different classrooms

The third theme outlines the complex challenges faced by teachers when dealing with diverse classrooms. These include indiscipline, absenteeism, language barriers, and limited resources. These challenges not only affect classroom management, but



they also impact the overall teaching and learning process. Teachers often handle high workloads with insufficient support, facing issues beyond their control such as learners' diverse backgrounds and personal biases. These challenges arise due to cultural, tribal, socioeconomic, and linguistic differences. In addition, large class sizes, and a lack of time and support can create a strain on teachers, and teachers acknowledge the need to be aware of, and address their own biases. These results are consistent with those of other studies and suggest that teachers today grapple with a multitude of complex challenges (Allen et al., 2015; Mansfield et al., 2016 & Wabule, 2020). Cerna and Bannon (2019) and Doll and Song (2023) highlighted some of these challenges, such as tailoring instruction to individual needs, navigating cultural and linguistic diversity, mitigating unconscious bias, managing behavioural differences, and fostering meaningful parental involvement across various backgrounds.

Differentiation, for example, is a key strategy to address these challenges. By tailoring instruction to the learners' individual needs, learning styles, and abilities, teachers can ensure that all learners have access to appropriately challenging and engaging experiences. This may include providing additional support for struggling learners, offering enrichment activities for advanced learners, and adjusting teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles. This finding concurs with Ragoonaden et al. (2015) and Santoro and Forghani-Arani (2015) who found that the strategies for facilitating and promoting resilience among teachers in diverse classrooms involves adopting proactive approaches to address challenges, fostering a supportive learning environment, and promoting the success of all learners.

Resilient strategies used by teachers

Finally, the fourth theme explores resilient strategies employed by teachers to manage diverse learners effectively. These strategies include fostering a positive classroom culture, providing personalised support, and practising self-care. The results showed that the participants emphasised the importance of engaging with individual learners, maintaining clear communication, and promoting cultural competence to navigate diverse classroom environments successfully. From the current study, it is understood that a positive classroom environment thrives on learner independence, responsibility, and mutual respect. To achieve this, teachers should cater to the individual needs of learners through targeted interventions and personalised attention. Additionally, prioritising self-care, collaborating with colleagues, and continuous learning are essential for teacher well-being and professional growth. Finally, culturally responsive teaching methods that celebrate diversity and promote empathy are key to fostering

a successful learning environment for all learners. It is worth noting that other studies have also reported on some strategies in this regard (Ragoonaden et al., 2015; Santoro & Forghani-Arani, 2015). Ragoonaden et al. (2015) reported on strategies such as adopting proactive approaches to address challenges, fostering a supportive learning environment, and promoting the success of all learners. The authors also found that prioritising self-care and seeking support from colleagues, mentors, and mental health professionals is crucial for maintaining resilience and preventing burnout. Accordingly, Cornelissen (2016) and Schmidt and Janusch (2016) emphasised the importance of teachers' ability to recognise their limitations and set boundaries. Cornelissen (2016) recommend self-care strategies like mindfulness, exercise, and seeking emotional support when needed. These studies further suggest that by implementing these resilience-building strategies, teachers can create inclusive learning environments where all learners feel supported, challenged, and empowered to succeed academically and personally (Cornelissen, 2016; Schmidt & Janusch, 2016).

Conclusion and practical implications

The current study revealed critical issues faced by teachers in diverse classrooms, including indiscipline, absenteeism, language barriers, and insufficient resources. The findings have substantial consequences for teachers, policymakers, school administration, and parents alike.

Practical implications

For teachers

- Addressing indiscipline and absenteeism: The current study highlights indiscipline and absenteeism as critical issues. Teachers can leverage the findings to:
 - Collaborate with school management to develop strategies for addressing these issues, including implementing the customised code of conduct mentioned in the separate study.
 - Develop engaging lesson plans that cater to diverse learning styles and needs to reduce boredom and potential disruptive behaviour.
 - Implement attendance incentives and support systems to address absenteeism and encourage regular participation.



- Overcoming language barriers: The current study identifies language barriers as a challenge. Teachers can:
 - Work with school administration to access resources for differentiated instructions that cater to diverse language abilities.
 - Develop culturally responsive teaching practices that value students' backgrounds and languages.
 - Explore collaborative learning strategies to promote peer support and language acquisition.
- Addressing insufficient resources: The lack of resources hinders effective instruction. Teachers can:
 - Advocate for increased funding by collaborating with school administrators and parents to present data on resource needs.
 - Get creative with available resources by utilising technology and low-cost learning materials.
 - Share resources and best practices with colleagues to maximise the use of available materials.

For policymakers

- Investment in education: The current study emphasises the need for increased educational funding. Policymakers can:
 - Allocate resources to address teacher workload, class sizes, and access to learning materials.
 - Develop programmes to support teachers in diverse classrooms through professional development and training for managing language barriers and other challenges.
 - Invest in research and development of effective teaching strategies for diverse classrooms.

For school administration

- Collaborative code of conduct: Partner with teachers and parents to develop a customised code of conduct as suggested in the separate study. This will establish clear expectations and consequences for student behaviour.
- Resource allocation and budgeting: Advocate for increased budgets for learning materials and allocate resources effectively based on teacher needs

identified in the study.

- Teacher training and support: Prioritise professional development programmes to equip teachers with strategies for managing diverse classrooms, addressing language barriers, and utilising technology effectively.

For Parents

- Active engagement: Attend school meetings and participate in discussions about the customised code of conduct.
- Home-school communication: Maintain regular communication with teachers to understand classroom expectations and challenges.
- Supporting language learning: Collaborate with teachers to understand their strategies for addressing language barriers and explore ways to support learning at home.
- Advocacy for resources: Join efforts with teachers and school administration to advocate for increased educational funding.

By implementing these practical implications based on the study's findings, each stakeholder group can contribute to improving the learning environment for students in diverse classrooms.

Future research

Further research is required to explore the perspectives of school administration and parents on navigating diverse classroom cultures using a mixed-methods approach. Understanding how cultural backgrounds influence learning environments can inform the development of even more effective strategies that promote mutual understanding and accommodation of cultural values and principles within the classroom, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and successful learning experience for all learners. It is, however, crucial to consider the possibility of bias in teachers' responses; thus, with a small sample size, caution must be exercised, as the findings may not apply to other circumstances.

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**Reviewing English teacher education and
challenging context in India: A multilingual turn in
Continuous Professional Development activities**

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Reviewing English teacher education and challenging context in India: A multilingual turn in Continuous Professional Development activities

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Abstract

Teacher education for language teaching is based on the premise that teachers can deliver quality education when they are supported with adequate training about updated pedagogies in addressing learner needs and making classrooms socially just and inclusive. In the contemporary world, multilingual education has gained momentum on account of the majority of learners and teachers being multilingual. Based on their diverse pedagogical needs, teachers need to be supported through in-service continuous professional development (CPD) activities with a multilingual turn. This paper critically reviews the state of affairs in Indian language teacher education to make teachers ready for delivering English education in multilingually diverse classrooms. It presents a pertinent discussion on the lack of multilingual CPD activities in Indian language education and teacher training policy. To address this gap, the present paper adopts a narrative overview approach to report two examples from short-term research projects in India that provide evidence of the benefits of adopting a multilingual turn in CPD of in-service Indian teachers. Thereafter, drawing from the positive experiences of the teachers in these projects, it operationalises the multilingual pedagogical needs of Indian teachers which are equally applicable to other multilingual teacher education contexts, globally. It classifies different types of translanguaging which can be practiced in the classroom and presents classroom strategies to be included during multilingual CPD training. It is hoped that such multilingual CPD activities would help teachers cope with the contextual challenges of dealing with linguistically diverse classrooms. It would also help them systematically scaffold instruction to cater to the cognitive and affective needs of their multilingual learners and deliver education in a socially just manner.

Keywords: Language of instruction; literacy skills; multilingual turn in CPD; teacher training in ML practices; translanguaging pedagogy.



Introduction

The primary stakeholders of education are learners. Catering to their needs paves the way for sustainable education. Sadly, most young multilingual learners globally are challenged by the condition that they are expected to develop knowledge and show competence in a language that is not one of their home language(s). In fact, the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report (2016) makes a very powerful case of the large cohort of children from low socio-economic status (SES) families globally, who learn under such compelling conditions. It argues that the imposed language of instruction, used in a monolingual manner, negatively impacts multilingual children's intellectual development, because they do not receive instruction in their home language(s). Researchers like Phillipson (2009) and Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) have also voiced concerns against the monolingual use of English (or any other dominant language) as the language of instruction, because it amounts to disregarding multilingual learners' home language resources, their multi-cultural identities and in more extreme cases, ridiculing such usage, thereby violating the learners' basic linguistic human rights and denying them social justice. Alongside this, to cater to learners' multilingual needs, teachers need to be supported through continuous professional development (CPD) activities "to mitigate the crisis of mismatch between the language of instruction and marginalised learners' home languages" (UNESCO GEM, 2014: pp. 186-187). Such a move would help teachers deliver quality education and make space for the inclusion of diverse linguistic needs of their learners.

India is an interesting case in point in this regard because of its colonial past and complexities arising due to a host of socio-political and economic factors impinging on the country's democratic model of governance. In India, researchers and teacher educators in the pre- and post-independence era have studied what constitutes challenging contexts in schools, and primary education quite intently (Amritavalli, 2007, 2013; Dixit, 2023; Maley, 2001; West, 1960). These researchers have identified a range of factors contributing to multilingual children's difficulties in and outside of class. A combination of factors have been identified, such as low SES, poor levels of nutrition, mismatch between home language(s) and language of instruction, and lack of support for literacy practices at home. A recent four-year project spanning three different sites across North, East, and South India has provided compelling evidence that in the absence of language of instruction to home language(s) overlap, learner's

intellectual and academic development are negatively impacted (Tsimpli et al., 2020). Hence, there is a dire need for Indian teachers (and other teachers in comparable contexts) to recognise the multilingual and multicultural resources children bring to class and utilise them to help build links between stronger and the newly emerging language, and duly value their contributions (Cummins, 2021; Lightfoot, Mathew et al., 2022). Therefore, the central aim of this paper is to review the language teacher education in India and propose the benefits of training teachers in multilingual strategies so that they can utilise learner resources and value their contributions.

The paper is organised in the following order: The context of teacher education for pre- and in-service Indian teachers who teach English as a subject or use it as the language of instruction, is presented. Thereafter, a historico-critical review of what constitutes challenging contexts to acquire English, a language of global equity and social power, is given. In the following section, based on a narrative overview approach evidence is provided of good practices in teacher training programmes conducted through short-term research projects in two states in India—Orissa and Telangana. The evidence is provided to demonstrate the pivotal role of teachers to harness learner resources in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. In the last part of the paper, conclusions are drawn regarding good practices and strategies that can be included in multilingual education (MLE) for pre-service teacher training and to build on multilingual and translanguaging pedagogy-based CPD activities that in-service teachers can be supported with and in-keeping with the recommendations of the UNESCO GEM reports of 2014 and 2016.

English teacher education in India

History of National Council for Teacher Education of India

In India the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE), a statutory government body was founded in 1993 by an act of Parliament (Act No. 73 of 1993). It has four regional committees to take care of the four zones as north, south, east, and west of India. It was created with the mandate of “planned and coordinated development of teachers across the country” and “maintain standards of teacher education” (National Council of Teacher Education [NCTE], n.d.(b)). It was further amended through 2014 regulations. The body has been responsible for educating pre-service teachers and training those in service. NCTE has worked towards establishing quality standards in primary and secondary education, and the all-round development of teachers.



The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education was designed by the council in 2009 to bridge pre- and in-service teacher education and forge links between higher and primary education. In 2021, a draft of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) (National Council for Teacher Education, 2021) was brought out by the council in keeping with the guidelines of the recent Indian National Education Policy (NEP) (Ministry of Human Resources Development, 2020). This document emphasises on the need to develop ‘teacher agency’. It introduces “self-assessment rubrics” called Teacher Self-Assessment Rubrics (National Council of Education and Research Training [NCERT], 2019, pp. 28–29) that teachers can apply to assess their current knowledge and skills and make plans to achieve further. Each teacher can go through four developmental stages: *beginner*, *proficient*, *expert*, and *lead* teachers. In the NPST standards, CPD of teachers is construed as “the fourth strand of teaching skills”, which can be descriptively estimated by teachers and institutions (National Council for Teacher Education, 2021:pp. 41–42). This is in line with “the four pillars of support” that teachers can be provided with according to the UNESCO GEM 2014 report (p. 187).

Pre-service teacher training

NCTE of India has had fifteen recognised graduate and postgraduate programmes since 2014. Of these, the most popular ones are Diploma in Early Childhood Education, Bachelors Education, and Masters Education and in several combinations of integrated programmes of these three diplomas, along with the modality of regular, open, and distance programmes. These programmes include ‘Pedagogy of English’ through which they acquaint prospective teachers with methods of teaching English in general and teaching skills such as listening and reading. However, a thrust on MLE for Indian classrooms, and training for using multilingual pedagogies are not dealt in a nuanced manner in these pre-service teacher-training programmes.

In-service teacher training

While the pre-service teacher education programmes are well-established in their scope and objectives as laid out by NCTE, the professional journey of growth of the vast number of Indian teachers must be considered during service to assess the quality of education they deliver. The recent policy documents like NEP 2020 and NPST 2021 do address the need to support teachers’ developmental journey; but, the implementations for CPD are rather top-down. Thus, what is recognised as in-service

CPD activities are faculty development programmes, conferences, and webinars conducted by NCTE. For instance, NCTE's (n.d.[a]) latest annual report of 2021–2022 documents that the NPST run webinars based on only the administrative details of the number of such events and participating organisations. There is no report to study the impact of implementation or actual use of the NPST framework by teachers. Thus, implementation and validation of knowledge generated through systemic CPD activities in India are lacking and not documented in a widespread manner. Scarcely documentation that is available is mostly done by expert teacher-researchers from higher education.

Only a few of well-documented CPD activities are found in English language teacher education and reported by expert teacher researchers (Bolitho & Padwad, 2015; Dhanavel, 2022; Kaushik & Khanna, 2024; Mukhopadhyay, 2023). Since the interest of the current paper is in understanding the challenges of professional development that language teachers (more specifically English teachers) face, the challenges posed by English language education in India must be scrutinised.

Challenging context of English learning in multilingual India

History of the construct of challenging context

An understanding of what constitutes difficult learning circumstances has made researchers deliberate on factors that give rise to difficulties (also referred to as deprivations/ challenges). The construct of 'difficult circumstances' which is also referred to as 'challenging contexts' (and will be used in this paper) has undergone a series of refinements in India (and globally) where the prevalence of such contexts is very common (Anderson et al., 2021).

In the colonial times, Michael West documented his work of forty years in India, which was published in the form of a book titled 'Teaching English in difficult circumstances' in 1960. This was a first attempt at conceptualising the construct of challenging or difficult circumstances or "unfavorable (sic) circumstances" (p. 1) in India. It was conceptualised as low reading ability of Indian children, poor teacher proficiency in English coupled with large and crowded classes, and unfavourable weather conditions that made classroom teaching inconvenient. Subsequently, Maley (2001) conceptualised 'difficult circumstances' based on the author's teaching experiences in the Global South as a combination of large classes, poor teaching



resources, and challenging weather conditions. More recently, Anderson et al. (2022) added another factor contributing to the challenges in English education as lack of pre- and in-service teacher training to support teachers in their varied and multilingual contexts of teaching.

Apart from these sources of conceptualising ‘difficult’ or ‘challenging’, there have been individual expert researcher formulation of challenging context as being related to the low socio-economic status (SES) of learners. Low SES background learners do not get access to quality English education (Kalyanpur et al., 2022). However, if their autonomy is utilised in class, it improves their learning outcomes in reading (Amritavalli, 2007). The SES factor is found to be further intertwined with learners’ social class, caste, religion, and gender of the Indian learners in their inaccessibility to quality English education (Borooah & Sabarwal, 2021). Dixit (2023) has considered the complex psychological reaction that teachers have when they must deal with English education, a language they do not find easy to communicate in but are expected to teach in a monolingual manner. This, Dixit (2023) states is a top-down administrative goal. He opines that teacher beliefs regarding English language teaching pose a significant challenge in the classroom rather than the actual lack of pedagogical resources. In more recent studies, as reported in Mukhopadhyay and Tsimpli (2024), challenges in the English-Medium Instruction (EMI) context centre around poor reading comprehension skills negatively impacting language and content learning outcomes in primary grade children. However, the reading outcomes can be improved if teachers use translanguaging and multilingual practices during instruction (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023).

Addressing challenges of English education: India-based teacher initiatives

Ways to address the challenges of English language education is first by recognising the power of the language in India owing to its colonial past (like in many other South Asian and African countries) and critique the hegemony of English, as it goes against the norms of linguistic human rights and social justice (Mohanty & Skutnabb Kangas, 2022; Padwad 2023). Voicing for accessibility of good quality English education across different SES backgrounds of learners is a way to provide social justice which can be affected through education. Equitability in accessing English and knowledge through it can materialise if avenues are created for introducing quality English education. This must be provided early across SES groups and the policymakers must be informed through documentation of groups that remain marginalised in accessing English

education, given its global status in providing jobs and economic success in life (Borooah & Sabharwal, 2021).

The second step is to take initiatives to critique and break away from such monolingual norms by decentring English language education and build teacher agency by forming teacher groups where they can think, and act locally to meet their learner needs (Banegas et al., 2022). A recent example of practical application of building teacher agency and providing localised solutions is the initiative of All India Network of English Teachers (AINET). Here teachers have participated in cycles of research inquiry to take responsibility of their learning by engaging in practices to address their local needs (Banegas et al., 2022; Padwad, 2018). This initiative was one among many taken up by teachers in other global contexts, thereby establishing ways to decentralise teaching of English in countries where it is not the first language of either the teachers or their learners. Taking the initiative forward, Padwad and Smith (2023) have reported the work of teacher associations in South Asia, like AINET in India and Nepal, amongst others, to build “insider expertise” and conduct exploratory research “to understand the benefits of being engaged with local issues and finding solutions” (pp. 14-15).

To complement reports of expert researchers, there are a few first-hand reflections shared by Indian teachers to demonstrate how they cope with challenging circumstances in India. One such compelling account is provided by eight teachers from West, East, and South India who see mixed-ability learner groups from underprivileged backgrounds to be a challenging factor in their context (Gode et al., 2021). This report is also another initiative of AINET to showcase successful attempts of teachers to cope with challenges locally. Padwad and Smith (2023) have reported another set of individual reflections from Indian teacher researchers who have engaged in becoming social media managers to understand the benefits of using technology to widen their networks and create teacher communities in a purposeful manner. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Whatsapp were used to conduct CPD activities with participant teachers becoming more trained as media coordinators and learning to conduct such events ethically and systematically.

A third direction of countering the hegemony of English has been to initiate expert researchers into classroom inquiries, and present solutions for Indian classrooms. These initiatives have been in multiple directions as (i) to address challenges in a local way such as build learner autonomy by getting them to bring self-selected texts to develop



reading comprehension skills (Amritavalli, 2007); (ii) to demonstrate the benefits of developing teacher agency in class to take decisions to address learning challenges (Padwad, 2018), (ii) document teacher practices through in-depth and systematic researcher reports based on classroom transactions (Anderson, 2022); and (iv) report the ‘uptake’ from teacher training programmes to use multilingual reading strategies in class to keep learners engaged and motivated (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023, 2025; Mukhopadhyay & Tsimpli, 2024).

Another important strand of teacher classroom research as a local example of breaking away from the hegemony of English-only mode of instruction in class has been to present voices that in the Indian multilingual context code-switching and mixing, are common not only in social contexts, but also in a classroom context (Amritavalli, 2013; Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Lightfoot, Balasubramanian et al., 2022). Another example by Coleman (2017) presents teacher-researchers’ critique of monolingual ways of English education that creates a gap in multilingual learners’ knowledge development. Coleman reports about Indian teacher researchers experimenting with multilingual modes of knowledge transaction. So, in a multilingual country like India, social justice for education can be provided when multilingual ways of classroom communication are recognised, appreciated, and valued (Mohanty, 2012). The demands of social equity and justice through English education presented from marginalised groups needs recognition as being tied to issues of their “social and personal emancipation and dignity of living”, which encompasses much more than only “the logic of prosperity, and success through EMI” (Padwad, 2023, p. 125).

The multilingual turn in English language education

Addressing the growing demands on teachers to utilise multilingual resources in class, one needs to take cognizance of the process of learning multiple languages (English being one of them) in the educational context of a society like India that is historically and pervasively multilingual. Second language learning and acquisition cannot be equated with the ease of learning one’s mother tongue/ home language because of the differences in quality, and quantity of exposure, context of learning (naturalistic vs. classroom), the impact of cross-linguistic and cognitive influences on learning a second (or an additional language) from previously known languages (Singleton & Leśniewska, 2021), and individual variations in communicative abilities (Lightbown & Spada, 2020). Moreover, the construct of second language learning has also faced serious criticism in the light of the fact that it has monolingual assumptions

of achieving mastery like native speakers of the target language (here English) (May, 2013; Ortega, 2013). In a similar vein, comparisons of multilingual speakers of English have met with severe criticisms because of equating multilinguals as additions of monolingual capabilities (Garcia, 2009). Therefore, it is important to recognise and accept the multilingual turn in second language learning, and the role of teachers in providing sustainable education to the vast numbers of multilingual learners. One way of preparing English teachers towards providing such a model of education is to train them to use multilingual and translanguaging pedagogy so that learners' multilingual repertoire can be fruitfully employed to help them use what they know to develop comprehension in the lesser developed language (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023, 2025).

Multilingual professional development needs in Indian Teacher Education

To comprehend the role of language teachers, more specifically English teachers, in language education, it is imperative that the context in which teachers are expected to perform and prepare learners with future higher prospects, is taken into consideration. In recent times, to cater to parental aspirations and global needs for access to higher education and jobs, government-run schools in many states in India, have introduced English as the language of instruction from primary grades. However, the argument of 'early exposure' has been at the cost of 'quality of exposure' in the target language (here English) (Rao, 2016). This is because for most Indian learners, the language of instruction (English) neither overlaps with their home language(s) nor is it used in the wider speech community of the learners who come from low SES families. Thus, English education which is supposed to provide equity and equality in education, ends up creating a disadvantage for those it is meant to be beneficial, and empowering. In fact, access to quality English education has been found to create a sharp divide among Indian learners due to varying levels of incomprehensibility in the language of instruction (as English) (Borooah & Shabbarwal, 2021). Numerous children have ended up developing poor literacy and oral skills in the language, while their home languages have remained largely underused in schools. This has also resulted in early dropouts.

In keeping with the needs of multilingual learners, it would be logical to consider multilingual training needs of pre- and in-service Indian teachers to (i) train them to employ the home languages of learners in a systematic and purposeful manner; (ii) increase their metalinguistic awareness to make cross-linguistic connections between the languages to enhance vocabulary, and reading comprehension skills; and



(iii) encourage translanguaging in classroom communication in a graded manner to enhance proficiency in the target language, and make the learners feel valued for their contributions through code-switching, and gradual attempts to use the target language communicatively. Before looking at how to design such a multilingual training module, a few examples of the impact of short-term multilingual training conducted by expert researchers on Indian teachers to get evidence for the validity and usefulness of this pedagogical method, will be looked at.

Institutional barriers to teachers' professional development are often compensated by individual endeavours to engage with challenges in the instructional contexts and seek evidence from classroom-based enquiries. For instance, Dhanavel (2022) has recently documented success stories of individual CPD endeavours of experienced Indian language teachers. The directions of CPD has been from gaining awareness about hegemonic culture of CPD to teacher motivation, reflection about training programmes, perceptions about such programmes, self-assessment of performance in class, teacher cognition about decision making, and the use of technology.

However, in all the above examples, there is no mention of teacher development in knowing about and practicing multilingual (ML) pedagogy in a systematic manner. There are various examples of Indian teachers employing home languages to teach English and expressing their opinion about such uses (Erling et al. 2017; Meganathan, 2015) or consciously alternating between languages as instances of translanguaging (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Lightfoot, Balasubramanian et al., 2022), and reflecting upon them (Anderson, 2021, 2022; Lightfoot et al., 2022). However, the initiative to engage in CPD activities on multilingual pedagogy is largely missing. It is also under researched in India. Hence, the need to gain awareness and look for ways to integrate this aspect in teacher training is an important goal of this paper and a novel area of research.

Method of analysis

To demonstrate the usefulness of training teachers in multilingual pedagogy, a qualitative analysis approach has been adopted in this paper. The specific approach adapted for the selection and discussion of the Indian in-service teacher projects is a narrative overview approach (Green et al., 2006), which comprises of a critical synthesis of previously published research.

Based on this approach, an analysis of two examples of specially designed MLE-based teacher training programmes undertaken by researcher teams in Orissa and Telengana in the recent times, is presented. The analysis underscores the impact of multilingual teacher training programme on Indian teachers.

Both the examples presented in the current paper are examples of interface of institutional to individual specialised multilingual CPD activities and show the results on improved teacher practices and positive learning outcomes. However, a point to be noted is that the size of the teacher groups who have benefitted from such specialised CPD is rather small when the Indian education context is considered.

Findings from short-term MLE teacher training programmes in India

MLE teacher training programme in Orissa

The first example of MLE-based CPD is from a series of teacher training programmes conducted as a unique kind of CPD for in-service teachers in rural sectors in Orissa, a state in Eastern India. This has been reported in the project by Panda and Mohanty (2009 and 2014) and later by Mohanty (2023). They further report that in Orissa, to address the needs of many marginalised learners owing to their tribal status, they launched a series of MLE programmes in 2007. In these programmes, avenues were created to use 21 tribal languages, which are home languages of the children, along with the state language Odiya (a modern Indian language) and English for primary education. A particular programme called MLE Plus deserves special mention. MLE Plus used Kui and Saora, two tribal languages, in eight government run schools. The programme adopted “a cultural-psychological approach” by introducing ‘reading-together’ activities where teachers and learners could employ their multilingual repertoire to develop comprehension skills (Panda & Mohanty, 2014, pp. 118-120). According to Panda and Mohanty (2014), the success of the programme and the teacher training during this period was due to developing a sustainable model of “culture-community-classroom interface” (p. 120).

Furthering the cause of language of instruction being “aligned” to learners’ home language(s), Mohanty (2012), reports that the impact of the model of mother-tongue-based MLE (MT-MLE) was such that “it was incorporated in the state language policy by 2014” (pp. 567-572). The recommendations were to support late exit from the MT-



MLE model, and the use of children's tribal language in class supported by teachers who are proficient in children's home languages. Furthermore, pre-service and in-service teachers would be provided with "composite training on language pedagogy for MLE classrooms" to support the development of proficiency in the tribal languages (Mohanty, 2012, p. 572). Teachers would be incentivised based on their improved practices. As a result of the success of MLE training and classroom practices, the model has been adopted in "21 tribal languages and teacher training modules" to cater to the needs of most children from low SES tribal families (Mohanty, 2012, p. 572).

The researchers have attributed the success of these programmes as "partial" because they are still very local and not spread out in large areas of the state. Nevertheless, they explain that the success has been a result of using home languages (e.g., the tribal languages) of the marginalised learners to teach the mainstream state language, Odiya, and English. It is also related to the integration of cultural identity of children in class to give them confidence, and motivation to improve their performance. They also raise an important point about moving from an early-exit to a late-exit of MLE model to make education more sustainable and fulfil the linguistic human rights of every child.

Translanguaging and multilingual teacher training programme in Telangana

The second example of MLE-based CPD is from a short-term six months teacher training project led by the University of Cambridge in collaboration with the EFL University in 2019 (Lightfoot, Mathew et al., 2022; Mukhopadhyay, 2020) and another longer duration teacher training project from 2022 till 2023, Hyderabad (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023; Mukhopadhyay et al. 2025). Both were located in Telangana, a state in the Southern part of India.

The first training programme was conducted on twenty-two teachers to raise their awareness of the translanguaging, and multilingual strategies that they could use in English, and content classes to develop proficiency in the language of instruction (English), and comprehension across subjects. The teacher participants who gained training in such strategies were observed for a three-month period with collaborative support from research assistants. Teacher reflections post lessons were also collected. The training was found to be locally aligned to the needs of the teachers to provide them with a multilingual CPD experience that was at an interface of collective training and individual efforts at using the multilingual repertoire of the learners

using Telugu, Hindi, and English (Mukhopadhyay, 2020). The teachers reported that they transitioned away from mere translations of lexical phrases to systematically plan how to employ the home languages to teach comprehension in English (Lightfoot, Mathew et al., 2022). Along with their conscious efforts to plan for multilingual inputs in class, they also voiced that building trust and engagement of learners is not easy and would need sustained efforts from teachers.

The second teacher-training programme was a refinement on the previous training design by making it more aligned to the use of translanguaging pedagogy to teach reading and vocabulary in a contextualised manner using the school English and environmental science textbook units from Grade 5. The training objective was to offer a teacher-learner intervention on reading development, and vocabulary enhancement of primary grade learners that lasted for nine months. It underscored the need to gain awareness about the benefits of using multilingual repertoire, practicing multilingual strategies, specifically translanguaging pedagogy, and systematically develop reading comprehension, and vocabulary skills.

The longer duration teacher training multilingual programme was closely aligned to the recent Indian NEP (Ministry of Human Resources Development, 2020) that “recognising multilingualism and learners’ linguistic needs constitute an important principle of education” (p. 4). NEP further proposes that teachers can give bilingual support by “using bilingual books” (p. 80) and learners should get multilingual support till grade eight and as required beyond that period. Ten government-run low-cost primary schools were selected for the training programme. Ten teachers from those schools received the training. The training programme sought to enhance teaching methods to build strong reading comprehension skills in multilingual children who came with limited home-literacy support.

The programme trained the teachers in the structured use of home languages to build cross-linguistic vocabulary links and develop contextual vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English, mediated by learners’ home languages such as Telugu, Hindi, Dakhini, and other languages of children who came from families of migrant speakers. The teachers were specifically trained to create multilingual vocabulary banks (refer to Appendix 1) and encourage verbal reasoning and critical thinking through guided translanguaging discussions in peer groups.

The training was divided into two parts—in the first part, the teachers participated in two workshops where they were made aware of the translanguaging pedagogy and



its differences from the translation strategy that only considers content explanation in class. They were also given hands-on experience on multilingual strategies to: (a) develop cross-linguistic links of vocabulary items according to their parts of speech and frequency of use (according to British National Corpus [BNC]); (b) develop lesson plans incorporating translanguaging methods to teach reading; (c) design vocabulary and pre-, while-, and post-reading tasks to scaffold comprehension skills, and use of vocabulary in context skills.

In the second part of the training module, the teachers were observed in class to understand their uptake from the workshops. Alongside this, they were also assisted in making lesson plans and creating multilingual vocabulary banks along with the trainers. The teachers were expected to use both lesson plans and multilingual vocabulary banks as pedagogic translanguaging inputs in class. Added to these, they were expected to handle the following: (i) classroom communication with the learners helping them use home languages to express comprehension of texts in English; and (ii) brainstorm ideas to help learners participate in speaking and writing tasks in which they could use English in combination with their home language(s). Such attempts would show evidence of developing learners' linguistic multi-competence. Based on their classroom practices and communication, the teachers were found to show evidence of the following as uptake from the ML training and collaborative sessions on developing translanguaging lesson plans:

- vocabulary enhancement translanguaging strategies used: developing a multilingual vocabulary bank to gloss the difficult words and phrases across three languages and helping learners contribute to the bank; help learners use their home languages to express meaning and relation of words cross-linguistically; and use learners home languages to extend meaning of words to create semantic networks, synonyms, antonyms, phrasal verbs, and fixed expressions (refer to Appendix 1).
- reading comprehension translanguaging steps used: use questions in home languages, and English while reading to scaffold comprehension; list key points, and bilingual summaries to consolidate comprehension; and use clarification questions to check concept formation using learners home languages (refer to Appendix 2 and 3); and
- challenges faced: designing translanguaging lesson plans with vocabulary and reading tasks aligned to the units of the textbook was not easy; the teachers

require continued support regarding this; using translanguaging activities in a collaborative manner engaging the learners working in peer groups was also difficult for the teachers.

For more details about the opportunities and challenges the teachers faced on implementing the translanguaging pedagogy in reading classes refer to Mukhopadhyay et al. (2023 and 2025).

To conclude, the analysis shows that there was evidence from grass-roots level on the positive impact of preparing teachers to deal with heterogeneous multilingual classrooms in India. Based on these two examples of the significance of using multilingual resources and translanguaging pedagogy in English classrooms in India (Lightfoot, Mathew et al., 2022; Mohanty, 2012; Mukhopadhyay, 2020; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023, 2025; Panda and Mohanty, 2009, 2014), a plan for the multilingual turn in teacher training and CPD activities that would hold good for not only India, but also comparable multilingual contexts of language teaching, and teacher research, will be presented in the section that follows.

Implications of MLE based Indian teacher training programmes

In-service English teachers in India have the provision of engaging in systemic CPD activities planned by their institutions locally or the government bodies such as National Council for Teacher Education and National Council of Education and Research Training at the centre and their counterparts as State Council of Education and Research Training (SCERT) and Regional Institute of English (RIE) in different states of India. A few of the teachers as researchers have been found to engage in individual CPD activities by creating avenues from their instructional contexts. They have been found to engage in various strands of CPDs such as the selection of appropriate tools for self-reflection, and documentation of the impact of CPD activities, deep engagement with pedagogical practices and learner trends, sharing knowledge with peers about the impact of CPD activities and use of technology to document change (for a full review refer to Mukhopadhyay, 2023). The success of such individual instances of CPD activities is based on good examples of intrinsic motivation of teacher researchers. Their CPD practices and impact of reflections are trends that can be picked up also at the institution levels to garner more interest and gain awareness of the need to engage in CPD activities. However, the need for building institutional level CPD activities that are based on robust research findings remains an



underdeveloped field in India. Added to this, the need to develop and practice CPD activities that are specially designed to suit the needs of multilingual teachers and MLE instructional contexts is equally underdeveloped. Thus, the remainder of the current paper addresses this gap.

CPD for English teachers: A multilingual turn

Drawing on the positive impact of training teachers on multilingual pedagogies in the two short-term projects presented above, a host of strategies that can be used for both in-service and pre-service language teacher training programmes and CPDs will now be elaborated on. These can serve multiple purposes, such as (i) upgrade teachers' metalinguistic (and cross-linguistic) awareness to use multiple language resources in combination with the language of instruction (English), and (ii) raise their socio-effective consciousness of the emotional and social reasons for providing all children with a safe and stimulating context of growth, and sustainable education. Along with the strategies, teachers' background knowledge regarding their multilingual pedagogy needs and classification of translanguaging since its initial formulation in the early 1990s are discussed below.

Defining multilingual pedagogy needs

To cater to the needs of multilingual learners in the instructional context, teachers must be able to employ learners' home languages in class in a systematic and planned manner. This would require teachers to be trained in aspects of languages that can be drawn together to provide multilingual inputs by creating positive contacts between languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Cummins, 2021). They would also need to have background knowledge about how to draw from common aspects of languages (e.g., parts of speech of words when they are used in discourse: paint as a noun vs. paint as a verb → denominals in English). Therefore, it is crucial to operationalise a working definition of multilingual pedagogy needs of teachers. The following three features of teacher knowledge can be used to operationalise their multilingual pedagogy needs:

1. Teacher cross-linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness

Working in multilingual instructional contexts would require teachers to have cross-linguistic proficiency across the languages they can use to support the language of instruction which is often societally perceived as the most important or powerful language (like English). Language proficiency levels of individuals across languages

might vary. However, to be able to use languages for classroom communication in a sustained manner would require a B1 level proficiency of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages standard (Council of Europe, 2001 and 2020). Added to this, teachers would also need to use metalinguistic awareness to draw comparisons between languages that could be cognate or non-cognate. The comparisons could be attempted at lexical (e.g., converting nouns to verbs: a book → to book a ticket; In Hindi use the same root as a verb and a noun: *chalna* = to walk), morpho-syntactic (e.g., use lexical morphemes to change part of speech and usage in a sentence: play → playful; rona (=to cry) → *ronda* (=adj., one who cries a lot) and discourse (e.g., linear in English vs. cyclical in Indian languages) levels.

2. Teacher pedagogical knowledge about bi/multilingual behaviour and MLE

Two aspects of unique bi/multilingual behaviour are translation and code-switching that speakers can utilise based on their shared languages while communicating with one other (for a review refer to Treffers-Daller, 2018). While translation is typically common in the written modality, code-switching is more frequent in the oral modality. As a third variant, in classes that have multilingual teachers and learners, who have shared languages that need not be the dominant language of instruction, fluid use of languages can take place. This is construed as ‘translanguaging’ as somewhat distinct from translation that focuses only on meaning explanation. Translanguaging goes beyond the scope of translation and helps in using multilingual repertoire for classroom communication (Garcia, 2009; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023). While much of this behaviour can be spontaneous, as has been found in classes in India (Lightfoot, Mathew et al., 2022), this can also be planned and used consciously by teachers and learners in class (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). The goal of translanguaging would be to raise language-learning outcomes across languages and aim for multi-competence. All these multilingual behavioural aspects are not completely exclusive from each other; they overlap and yet have their distinctive features that teachers must be aware of. For instance, there are overlaps between code-switching and translanguaging communication as Treffers-Daller (2024) explains. It is common for teachers to be working in contexts where languages are taught separately within a predominant MLE model (but a monoglossic one). In contrast, when teachers function in multilingual societies like that of India, they can use languages in a more fluid manner (Mohanty, 2018). Teachers can alternate between linguistic resources for a variety of pedagogical



purposes and with the goal of improving language proficiency of the target language as well as other used languages (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023).

3. Teacher awareness on Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency transfer and hierarchy of languages

There has been a long-standing debate on the distinction of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) on issues such as the following: Does the latter relate to a different and higher variety of a language? Does it socially advantage only a select few learners who have access to this variety of language? While the original constructs of Cummins (1981) stand the test of time, the author has attempted to clarify and address the conflict by arguing that CALP is an academic variety of language that children primarily learn in a schooled setting. It has distinctive characteristics from the communication skills. However, neither is it a higher variety nor is it totally exclusive from BICS. Furthermore, access to this variety is not exclusive to the educated classes (Cummins, 2021). Cummins (2021) cautions that academic language achievement does not guarantee academic success in general and cognitive functions of academic language such as analysing, hypothesising, and evaluating do not remain confined to school-based print language. These functions can be available for outside classroom activities as well. Thus, teachers need to be sensitised about the BICS/CALP distinction (Cummins, 2021). They need to be trained on the requirement of using CALP-based instruction through translanguaging episodes in literacy and academic development. In doing so, their learners would be frequently challenged to use their cognitive resources, and linguistic repertoire to express critical thinking skills, advanced understanding of content, and application of ideas. Alongside this, in practising translanguaging instruction and/or communication, teachers must be made aware of the hierarchy of languages that they can help to mitigate in the instructional context. The hierarchy to selectively use mainstream languages may create a learning disadvantage for learners from low SES families who may speak different varieties of a dominant language or minority languages (Mohanty, 2012). Hence, teachers should ideally strive for inclusive language practices during translanguaging to promote social equity in the classroom sphere (Sah & Li, 2024).

Evolution of translanguaging pedagogy

An understanding of the evolution of phenomenon of translanguaging becomes necessary. Since its inception in the Welsh-English education system, translanguaging was construed as the use of language repertoires by Williams (1994, 2002) in class. Subsequently, it was interpreted to being a conscious and systematic alternation between input and output languages by Baker (2001). It was argued that such dual-language processing would give rise to deeper language learning. The construct was strongly endorsed by Garcia (2009) and Garcia and Lin (2017) to legitimise learner practices of strategically using several language resources at their disposal in a fluid manner. It was proposed as a tool for academic, and cognitive learning. These author's perception of using translanguaging was to encourage the use languages in a fluid manner and not differentiate between two or more language systems in use. Their attempt was to counter the hegemony of raciolinguistic identities of languages of power (e.g., English as the language of instruction). This was conceptualised as 'unitary' (or strong) form of translanguaging. Researchers who supported unitary translanguaging departed from the original conceptualisation of translanguaging (Garcia & Lin, 2017; Otheguy et al., 2019), which is perceived as a weak form of using two or more languages in alternation (Baker 2001; Cummins, 2017; Williams, 1994). Researchers in support of the weak form also denoted it as cross-linguistic translanguaging where the distinctiveness of language systems was not questioned, but rather learners were encouraged to use their linguistic resources systematically to learn the developing language(s) (Cummins, 2021; Lyster, 2019). In this framework, the development of academic language skills of each language separately was taken into consideration as well as their social needs to use multiple languages for communication (Jaspers, 2018). More recent formulations of translanguaging have continued to emerge from good practices of teachers in that language resources are utilised to scaffold learning in a heteroglossic manner. In that sense, in language education, both unitary and cross-linguistic frameworks of translanguaging can be used in class. They would both be based on the notion of dynamic bi/multilingualism as well as maintaining productive contact between languages for transfer to happen (Cummins, 2021). Through both pathways, the needs of minority learners are prioritised and the monoglossic (or two solitudes notion, as discussed in Cummins, 2008) understanding of MLE is consciously avoided.



In more recent formulations of the construct of translanguaging, two significant features have emerged: one is the aspect of planned or pedagogical translanguaging formulated by Cenoz and Gorter (2022) that is closer to its original formulation by Williams (2002). It refers to the systematic and planned alternation of languages between input and output to facilitate learning. As this requires a higher level of cognitive stimulation and, hence demanding, it gives rise to “improved learning outcomes of language, and content learning” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022:p. 345). The second is the inclusion of a social turn in translanguaging introduced by Sah and Li (2024) to alert that due to linguistic hierarchies between languages in a context, one can easily overuse the mainstream dominant languages giving rise to ‘selective translanguaging’, thereby perpetrating social injustice (Mohanty, 2018) even while using the model of translanguaging. Hence, one must be critically aware of the power of languages and try to mitigate the same by including learners’ home languages that are not dominant and are only used by a lesser number of speakers as an example of ‘inclusive translanguaging’ (Sah & Li, 2024).

In Figure 1, the various forms of translanguaging and their possible intersections along two continua are represented:

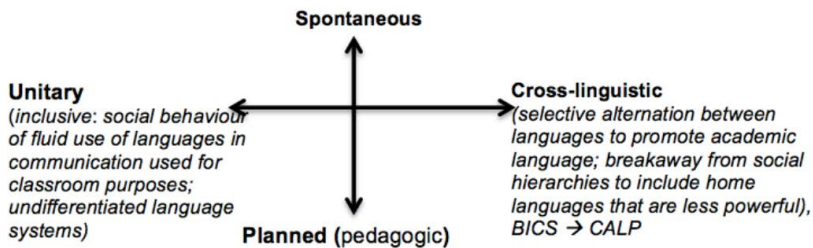


Figure 1: Classifying different forms of translanguaging

Source: Adapted from Cummins (2021)

Teachers can use strategies from each of the quadrants based on their background knowledge, training, and skills to use translanguaging. Their choice might be based on their proficiency across the languages to be used, and learners’ perceived needs, and ability to use translanguaging to enhance their academic learning goals.

An understanding of what constitutes translanguaging, and the extent to which it is mediated by two factors—one, that it can be regulated as spontaneous to being

planned (or pedagogic) and two, the consciousness to resist against including only the socially dominant language along with English in a translanguaging setup—is a crucial understanding for teachers. Raising teacher awareness and studying their attitudes towards translanguaging, must be included in any CPD for teachers with a multilingual turn.

CPD strategy training for multilingual and translanguaging pedagogy

Practicing translanguaging pedagogy in class would require teachers to consider three aspects of classroom communication: (i) language of instruction; (ii) language of knowledge transaction (like explaining concepts, elaborating details, giving examples and so on); and (iii) language of interaction (discussion with learners, between learners). For each of these, different aspects of translanguaging, as presented in Figure 1, may be employed to scaffold instruction and use learners' home languages for purposes of social equity and equality. Teachers can be trained to use these aspects in alternation in a localised manner to benefit their learners. This would be in keeping with the principles of dynamic bi/multilingualism (Herdina & Jessner, 2002) and to support the development of CALP or academic register (Cummins, 2021) for success.

To offer CPD training to multilingual teachers, the catalytic role of translanguaging pedagogy must be highlighted (Cummins, 2021). Teachers can be made aware of the different directions in which this pedagogy can be used to transform their practices by involving their learners in class in an ethical and socially just manner. There has been classroom-based research to provide evidence that there could be a few possible directions to use translanguaging pedagogy in class in general. They are as follows:

1. to use linguistically appropriate practices like creating language graphs, multilingual big books and newspapers, involving parents and family members to read multilingual texts together from primary grades: positive impact of such practices was found in a study conducted in Canada (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2019);
2. to use language biographies and cross-linguistic comparisons of lexical items from primary grades: significant impact of use of multilingual vocabulary bank on reading comprehension was found in India (Lightfoot, Mathew et al. 2022; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023);
3. to affirm and mobilise learner multilingual repertoires: evidence for the role of such strategies was found in Italy (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2022) and in India



(Amritavalli, 2007; Kalyanpur et. al. 2022); and

4. to leverage the power of teacher agency: the influence of this was found in France (Mary and Young, 2021) and in India (Mukhopadhyay, 2020; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023).

All these strategies work on the principles of utilising metalinguistic awareness to scaffold learning and acknowledging and using learners' home resources. This promotes a socially just and cognitively effective means to support education needs of a large majority of multilingual learners who do not enjoy home language to language of instruction overlap.

Developing reading comprehension skills through multilingual and translanguaging strategies

While the above examples are translanguaging practices that can be used in the classroom for developing general language proficiency, CPD training in multilingual and translanguaging pedagogy to be fruitful in the reading class must be tailor-made to the language proficiency levels, learning needs and contextual challenges of learners. In the Indian context, based on project experiences reported in the second example in the context of Telangana, a state in the South of India, a few strategies are proposed that could be used specifically to scaffold comprehension, the foundation of academic success and transferable from a stronger to a newly emerging language (Cummins, 2017). The strategies can be grouped under the overarching three directions of classroom communication (i-iii) mentioned above. In each of these directions positive results have been reported (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023). They can, thus, be tailored to scaffold reading comprehension in the early years of schooling of multilingual learners who may not have much home support for literacy development.

The first strategy could be that of developing a multilingual vocabulary bank that is inclusive of words and phrases that the teacher can select as difficult for the learners. The software lexical tutor by Cobb (accessed on 2022) can be used to select words according to the K-level of difficulty based on the BNC. An example of a multilingual vocabulary bank is given in Appendix 1 based on the first part of a text titled 'Karate Kitten' used in a Grade 5 English textbook in Telangana, India. It is a narrative text about a mother who gets a kitten as a pet to overcome loneliness. The kitten has a special quality of practicing karate and can execute karate steps when instructed. This leads to a lot of action at home giving rise to humour and laughter. This bank

can be utilised as an example of linguistically appropriate practice by designing further vocabulary tasks to enhance lexical knowledge of learners. It can also be an example of using learners' multilingual repertoire by asking them to contribute to the bank to work collaboratively with the teacher.

A second strategy to employ learners' multilingual repertoire and scaffold reading would be to design cross-linguistic vocabulary tasks to generate meaning and word relationships (e.g., antonyms, synonyms, phrasal verbs) across two or three languages. An example of such a task concept is presented in Appendix 2. The concept of antonyms is presented in a task-based approach (Robinson & Gilabert, 2020) with incorporation of salient forms in the input and by increasing the complexity of instructions from task 1 to task 4. First, the meaning equivalents of the words are attempted in English and Telugu followed by the antonyms in both languages and finally matching antonyms in English to test meaning retention in the target language. Likewise other word relationships can be attempted such as denominals (drink water to water the plants; keep the change in the pocket to pocket the change), phrasal verbs (e.g., run into, run on, run out), idioms (e.g., to bell the cat), and metaphors (e.g., a furry friend, a finicky feline).

A third strategy to scaffold reading is to build learners' background knowledge or schema, a prerequisite for processing ideas and building links with existing knowledge. Teachers can do this by activating learners' life experiences and background knowledge about concepts, feelings, and attitudes (Anderson, 2021; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023, 2025). In activating background knowledge, teachers can use translanguaging communication in class to give learners an opportunity to brainstorm, discuss, and share background knowledge related to the theme of a text. An example is provided in Appendix 3 based on the text 'Karate Kitten'. The pre-reading task included in Appendix 3 can be used to familiarise the learners with the theme of the lesson while using their background knowledge. Learners discuss the concept of 'pet/s' 'pet shop', and 'cage' while discussing the questions. This would be an example of promoting cross-linguistic translanguaging as well as attempting to practice fluency in the target language. Practicing this form of communication would be in the framework of dynamic multilingualism. For further unitary and cross-linguistic translanguaging strategies on reading development refer to the translanguaging reading model in Mukhopadhyay et al. (2022) and the uptake of Indian teachers based on training of this model in Mukhopadhyay et al. (2023).



A last strategy that teachers can be trained on is the use of multilingual assessment to promote cross-linguistic translanguaging, since language assessments have a monolingual assumption and usually expect responses through one language. An example item is included in Appendix 4. In this example, a propositional inferential question is given that can be answered based on deducing the links between the ideas that there is a hat at the feet of the boy who is blind and needs help. Hence, the boy's expectation is he will get money from others when he keeps the hat near his feet. The input language is English for the question and in Telugu for the options: the language alternation is to facilitate comprehension responses in the learners; the question can be read out for easy access to learners and make the assessment multimodal. English translations are also provided below each option for reference. In case a learner responds using the English options, that would also be a valid possibility. The Telugu options can be read aloud so that lack of literacy skills in Telugu does not impede comprehension and the learner can choose the correct option (C). This multilingual multimodal multiple choice question item is an example of cross-linguistic pedagogical translanguaging in reading assessment by alternating the language of input systematically, yet keeping the two language systems intact. Here comprehension is assessed through the selection of correct option (or in the receptive manner) and not through language production.

Conclusion

The multilingual teacher training pedagogy, as a CPD initiative, proposed in the current study can become a tool for inclusive multilingual education. It can provide social justice, since multilingual resources of learners can be used for literacy development, knowledge transaction, and their multilingual identity formation. Teachers can also form identities that would allow them to easily navigate through the heterogeneity of multilingual classrooms and cater to the diverse needs of their learners. The ideas for MLE CPD included in this study can serve as sustainable practices of professional development and make teachers self-driven to create opportunities of growth either through personal efforts and/or create a network amongst trusted colleagues. Building on teacher self-agency, planning for multilingual CPD activities can be initiated at institutional and state levels as policy requirements to support teacher growth. It could become a mechanism to share good practices, reflect on what works versus what can pose as challenges in such activities. Alongside this, recognising the agency of teachers would make teachers feel appreciated and help them to sustain their professional development activities for longer periods of time in their teaching careers.

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Appendix

1. Creation of multilingual vocabulary bank

The following vocabulary bank was created based on a text titled ‘Karate kitten’ for Grade 5 English textbook used in India (unit 2: 21–38: <https://scert.telangana.gov.in/pdf/publication/ebooks2019/5th class english.pdf>).

These items were selected based on their difficulty and comparability across three languages: English (language of instruction), Telugu, and Hindi (Indian modern languages and home languages of the children attending this lesson).

English	English meaning	Telugu	Hindi
pet	an animal that is kept in the home as a companion and treated kindly	పెంపుడు జంతువు <i>Pempudu jantuvu</i>	पालतू <i>paalatoo</i>
cage	a space surrounded on all sides by bars or wire, in which animals or birds are kept	పంజరం <i>Pañjarāṁ</i>	पिंजरा <i>pinjar</i>
responsible	to have control and authority over something or someone and the duty of taking care of it, him, or her	బాధ్యత <i>Bādhyaṭa</i>	जवाबदार <i>javaabadaar</i>
homemaker	a person who manages a home and often raises children instead of earning money from a job	గృహిణి <i>Gṛhiṇi</i>	गृहणी <i>gruhani</i>
alone	without other people	ఒంటరిగా <i>Ontarigā</i>	अकेला <i>akela</i>
several times	more than two and fewer than many; some	చాలా సార్లు <i>Cāla sārḷu</i>	कई बार <i>kaee baar</i>
days passed	a period of time that has gone by or when recounting an event that has happened in the past	రోజులు గడిచాయి <i>Rōjulu gadicāyi</i>	दिन बीत गए <i>din beet gaye</i>
on my own	unaccompanied by others; alone or unaided	నా స్వంతంన <i>Nā svantaṁ na</i>	अपने दम पर <i>apne dam par</i>

2. Developing cross-linguistic links between vocabulary items: A task-based approach

Task objective: Building cross-linguistic word relations: Antonyms

Step 1 : Teacher writes English words on the board.

English	Telugu meaning 1	Telugu meaning 2	Hindi meaning
small			
near			
buy			
day			

Instruction 1: Read English words on the board. Do you know the Telugu meanings of these words? Discuss with your group and one of you will share the answer with the class. (5 minutes)

Step 2: She then writes the Telugu words on the board. If the children do not know, she reads the words for them

English	Telugu
small	చిన్నది Cinnadi
Near	సమీపంలో Samipanilo
buy	కొనుగోలు Konugolu
day	రోజు Rāju

Instruction 2: Do you know the opposite words for the Telugu words written on the board? Discuss in your group and one of you will share the answer. (5 minutes)

Instruction 3: Can you tell me an English word for the Telugu opposite in column 3? Discuss in your group. If you don't know, I will tell you. (5 minutes)

English	Telugu	Telugu Opposite
small	చిన్నది Cinnadi	
Near	సమీపంలో Samipanilo	
buy	కొనుగోలు Konugolu	
day	రోజు Rāju	

(Note: for column three - Telugu Opposites the teacher needs to fill the responses from the children)

English	Telugu	Telugu Opposite	English word for Telugu opposite
small	చిన్నది Cinnadi		big
Near	సమీపంలో Samipanilo		far
buy	కొనుగోలు Konugolu		sell
day	రోజు Rāju		night

Instruction 4: Now match the pairs of the opposite words.

a.	small	1	night
b.	Near	2	big
c.	buy	3	far
d.	day	4	sell

3. Building prior knowledge in pre-reading phase: Use of cross-linguistic translanguaging

Greetings: Good morning children! Today we are going to read an interesting story of a mother and son and how they get a special kitten.

Instruction 1: Let us work in pairs. Discuss with your friends and answer the following questions.

Manam jaṅṅagā pani cēddārṁ. Mī snēhituḍitō carciṅ ci, ī krindi praśnalaku samādhānamivvaṅḍi.

(A teacher may use these questions as prompt questions for discussion in peer groups.)

1. Have you ever seen a pet shop in your locality? *Mīru eppudaina mi inti dhaggara pempudu janthuvulanu amme dhukanam chusara?*
2. What type of pets do we usually see in our homes? Or which animals can we keep as pets? *Elanti pempudu janthuvulanu manam sadharanamga illalo chustham?*
3. Which is your favourite pet? *Miku baaga ishtamaina pempudu janthuvu edhi?*
4. Should animals be kept in cages like we do to pets? Why? *Janthuvulanu ilanti bonullo unchala? Endhuku?*

Instruction 2: Now let's hear from each group what you have discussed.

Ippuḍu prati gumpu nuṅḍi mīru ēmi carciṅcārō vindārṁ.

4. Multilingual reading assessment



B. Reading

The Blind Boy

A blind boy sat on the steps of a building with a hat at his feet. He held up a sign board which said:

I am blind. Please help.

There were only a few coins in the hat. A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign board, turned it around, and wrote some words. He put the sign board back so that everyone who walked by would see the new words.



1. Why does the boy have a hat at his feet?
 - A. Ṭōpī nēlapai paḍindi kābaṭṭi.
Because the hat fell on the ground.
 - B. Ataniki iṣṭam lēdu kābaṭṭi.
Because he does not like it.
 - C. Tadvārā prajalu andulō ḍabbulu veyyagalarani.
So that people would put money in it.
 - D. Atanu dānini am'mutunnāḍu kābaṭṭi.
Because he is selling it.



**Translanguaging as leverage for developing
inclusive communication in superdiverse contexts
of inner-city schools**

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Translanguaging as leverage for developing inclusive communication in superdiverse contexts of inner-city schools

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Abstract

This article reports on the findings of using translanguaging as leverage for developing inclusive communication in superdiverse contexts of inner-city South African schools, where English is the language of instruction. The study employed sociocultural and experiential theories and a qualitative research approach. Purposive sampling was used to select the two participating schools. The participants comprised eight teachers and 33 learners from two inner-city secondary schools in Pretoria, Gauteng province, South Africa. Data were gathered through classroom observations, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and workshop reflections and were examined using inductive thematic analysis. The findings revealed participants' awareness of the pedagogical benefits of translanguaging for concept clarification, heightened motivation and interest in the subject, learner engagement, and improved academic performance. Furthermore, there was an acknowledgement of learner identity, inclusive communication in learning, and acceptance of language and cultural differences with improved learner-teacher relationship. Some teachers were sceptical about the implementation processes, while most learners enjoyed translanguaging and benefited from it, as opposed to monolingual English classes. Challenges of raising teacher awareness of the benefits of translanguaging and implementation can be addressed using distance education for teacher professional development of in-service teachers. Future research is required to explore the integration of translanguaging methods with assessment activities and the model for support through distance learning avenues.

Keywords: English second language; inner-city school; inclusive communication; multilingualism; superdiversity; translanguaging.

Introduction

A rapid increase in immigration contributes to the development of superdiversity, as migrants enter the country with diverse languages, cultures, and beliefs. South African schools, which are the context of the current study, have become superdiverse environments due to the combination of South African and foreign learners. Although language diversity is not a new phenomenon, teachers or education systems are mainly grounded in using one language for the purpose of teaching and learning in countries like South Africa, as per their language policies (Mayor et al., 2012). This approach is a major challenge in schools, as classes are multilingual, yet learners are being taught in one dominant language, with most learners not able to comprehend the language of instruction. This approach negatively affects the learners' academic performance, including their confidence and attitudes.

Superdiversity refers to the multifaceted diversification of communities worldwide across various dimensions, including language, race and ethnicity, countries of origin, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and migration history (Park et al., 2018). Multilingualism denotes the capacity to utilise, communicate, or compose in multiple languages (García & Wei, 2014).

Multilingual practices in education are used to bridge language gaps among superdiverse learners in the classrooms. Having multilingual learners in superdiversity contexts of inner-city schools is challenging for both teachers and learners, as there is no inclusive communication, which also affects social interaction, as some teachers and learners do not know each other's languages (García, 2023). Some learners come to school being proficient in their home language only (Mayor et al., 2012). When learners are introduced to instructions in a second language, but lack proficiency in that language, it negatively affects their academic performance (Rodríguez, 2009). According to Omidire (2019b), being taught in a language in which one lacks sufficient academic ability has unwanted consequences that have been well documented, however, in the past, learners' home languages have been excluded as practical tools for early learning. Teachers are also not equipped to deal with complex experiences that learners bring from "multiple places, cultures, and languages" (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 18). This implies that active assistance is required in helping schools, learners, and teachers alleviate the language hurdles that have emerged in the multilingual world (Ayob, 2020).



According to Ayob (2020), globally there is a need to use different languages, including the first language (in the current study, first language refers to the learners' mother tongue, while home language refers to the language of teaching and learning) of the learners in classes, for teaching and learning. This statement is supported by García and Wei (2014), that learners' first languages should be integrated into learning, thereby alleviating the effects of an imposed monolingual language, while enhancing teaching and learning. The imposed ideas of monolingual teaching are rapidly giving way towards methods that develop upon many overlapping linguistic repertoires (Ayob, 2020). The primary language should be integrated into the learning environment, moving away from enforced monolingual practices, particularly in multilingual contexts (Mgijima & Makalela, 2016).

It is of the utmost importance that the education system regards linguistic diversity as a resource and not a challenge. Sub-Saharan Africa should integrate multiple languages for teaching and learning across the curriculum (Chikiwa & Schafer, 2016). Research shows that an effective strategy to bridge the learning and communication gap is translanguaging, which strives to close the gap between learners' altered life domains (García, 2023), inspiring learners to acknowledge and utilise language diversity as a resource for learning which assists all learners to develop and prepare for a globally interconnected society, and modify operational methodologies (García & Wei, 2014; New London Group, 1996). Translanguaging is a genuine "pedagogical approach involving the use of one language as a scaffold for language development and learning in another" (Omidire, 2019a, p. 4).

Historical antecedents of translanguaging

Translanguaging denotes the way in which bilingual individuals seamlessly utilise their linguistic resources and disregard established language classifications to construct meaning and communication (García, 2023). Translanguaging encompasses more than elucidating how multilingual individuals articulate themselves when faced with a monolingual environment. The prefix "trans" indicates that bilingual individuals employ their linguistic practices to transcend state-sanctioned language systems (Vogel & García, 2017, p. 3). Translanguaging differs from code-switching, which segregates languages into distinct codes or structures that are alternated for communication (Velasco & García, 2014). Code-switching is restricted, as it perceives bilingualism as distinct languages rather than a fluid phenomenon.

Translanguaging enhances the efficient use of the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) while fostering the advancement of the home language. Instead of shifting to English in Grade 4, as is typical for most South African learners, extending the use of the home language, perhaps beyond primary education, would promote the enhancement and consolidation of the home language (Alexander, 2012; Heugh, 2013). Marginalising or degrading the primary or native language is a disadvantage to some pupils (Probyn, 2019). In other cases, the implicit message of the hidden curriculum indicates that some learners are marginalised and less accepted in the school setting, compared to their peers.

Bartolomé (1994, p. 176) criticised the deficit viewpoint commonly attributed to “subordinated learners”—non-English-speaking, working-class youths who are generally regarded as less competent within the educational framework. The author contended that such learners frequently occupy a marginalised position in educational institutions, influenced by both overt curricular decisions and covert signals within the hidden curriculum (disregarding or devaluing learners’ native languages, prioritising English, and harbouring expectations or assumptions that certain students possess lesser capabilities due to their linguistic or cultural backgrounds) (Bartolomé, 1994). The prioritisation of the dominant school language over home languages may seem pedagogically warranted, although it can impede learners’ development of academic language (Benson, 2004). Individuals learning a secondary language rather than their original tongue may be regarded as inept or lethargic. Such deficit perceptions foster intolerance and discrimination (Del Carmen Salazar, 2013). The difficulties encountered by learners in mastering an additional language are frequently attributed to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, rather than acknowledging the impact of the learning process itself (Del Carmen Salazar, 2013). The disparity between a learner’s native language and the language of teaching may impact the educational process.

Most learners in South African schools receive instruction in their native language throughout the foundation phase (Grades R–3), however, this practice ends in the intermediate phase (Grades 4–6) and beyond (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2010). While 80% of children in the foundation phase receive education in their native language, fewer than 30% persist in learning in their home language during the intermediate phase and subsequent levels (DBE, 2010). Mda (2004) acknowledged that language is essential to learning and underscores the important link between



linguistic recognition and basic human rights. The language rights specified in Section 6 of the South African Constitution (1996) and the Language in Education Policy (Department of Education (DoE), 1997) are shaped by the views on language expressed in the Constitution (Mda, 2004).

Disregarding an individual's language, culture, and history in an educational setting may lead to a degrading experience. Bartolomé (1994) argued that a humanising pedagogy may be realised by considering the environments, backgrounds, and viewpoints of learners. Mother tongue comfort signifies the joy of employing one's own language, which allows a person to feel truly themselves while immersed in their expressions and thoughts (Childs, 2016). Zinn and Rodgers (2012) asserted that both learners and teachers benefit from acknowledging their identities and competencies. As stated earlier, most learners and teachers in South Africa employ their primary language in foundation phase environments, hence simplifying the acquisition of linguistic and conceptual skills with relative ease. The shift from Grade 3 in a home language to education in a different language eliminates the familiarity of the known language.

Translanguaging may function as a deliberate and systematic approach to augment the use of the mother tongue or primary language inside the intermediate phase. The native language can thus function as a medium for the requisite educational language. The aim would thus be bilingualism or multilingualism rather than prioritising competency in the LoLT. Bilingual or multilingual individuals have a unique approach to interacting with people who understand the same languages. They can articulate responses with sophistication, in stark contrast to the limited communication abilities of monolingual individuals (García, 2009). "On being a multilingual being" elucidates the fluid interaction possible as languages proficiently and effortlessly emerge from the speaker's mouth. Implementing a humanising pedagogy requires "listening closely, being present, communicating, and paying attention" (Zinn & Rodgers, 2012, p. 87).

Translanguaging, as a multilingual tool, can augment an individual's presence in interpersonal encounters. Implementing emancipatory linguistic practices in educational contexts presents numerous problems. Heugh (2015, p. 280) cautioned that "multilingualism, especially in education, signifies various interpretations across distinct contexts". Thus, understanding the social context in which languages are employed is crucial (Hoadley, 2011). Teachers, not curriculum policymakers, determine classroom dynamics and their experiences require thorough examination.

In “*A Cry from the Classroom*”, Childs (2016) depicts the challenges encountered by teachers through vivid imagery of violence: they are bludgeoned and bruised, battered and broken, sliced and slashed, scarred and scraped, emphasising their fragility and insufficiency.

The teacher’s identity is diminished when they fail to meet the needs of learners and the curriculum. This shortcoming frequently emerges in the inadequate implementation of multilingual pedagogies, such as translanguaging. Although studies continually acknowledge the need of translanguaging, instructors often display diminished enthusiasm for its application. Besides time limitations, some conceptualisations of language practice also provoke resistance to translanguaging. When languages are viewed as rigid systems with fixed boundaries, it becomes difficult to recognise the fluid interchange among them. The impact of linguistic viewpoints from the Global North continues to be substantial in South African curricular materials and pedagogical methods. Conceptualisations of language as separate and independent entities, developed in Europe around the late 19th century, persist in shaping present language practices. These views are challenged by a more sophisticated understanding and utilisation of language that originated in Africa (Heugh, 2015). Traditional language training isolates languages to avert the pollution of their original forms (García, 2009; Makalela, 2015). Conversely, contemporary language education approaches promote the amalgamation of languages, acknowledging the significance of dynamic linguistic practices in authentic communication (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2015; Heugh, 2015; Hornberger, 2006; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Link, 2018). Expanding upon a previous collaboration with Hornberger, Link (2018) contends that translanguaging must be adopted not merely as a classroom technique, but as a vital teaching approach that challenges monolingual ideas and validates learners’ linguistic identities. Notwithstanding this, the South African educational curriculum persists in categorising languages into home language, first additional language, and second additional language, thereby, supporting the notion of languages as discrete and independent systems. This method does not accurately represent the linguistic experiences of learners and educators, whose daily lives entail continual interactions among languages.

In response, experts promote a more humanising pedagogy that respects the complete humanity of both educators and students. Del Carmen Salazar (2013) underscored the importance of a humanising pedagogy for the success, well-being, and



resilience of both teachers and learners. This pedagogy, shaped by Freire's principles, allows teachers and learners to develop into more complete social, cognitive, and transformative individuals actively participating in the world (Freire, 1972). "More fully human" emphasises that incorporating an individual's language, culture, and history in the classroom promotes fulfilment and well-being (Childs, 2016, p. 36). Translanguaging strategies enable fluid transitions between domestic and academic languages. This liberating process promotes and enhances learning.

The use of the translanguaging approach as a supportive strategy in multilingual classrooms is generally impacted by external challenges related to the South African socioeconomic macroclimate, which profoundly influences the teaching and learning process, including outcomes (Omotoso & Koch, 2017). Consequently, the translanguaging strategy has significantly enhanced learners' social and academic experiences by providing support and facilitating the learning process in classrooms (Cummins, 2019; García, 2019; Ncobo et al., 2016; Omidire, 2019a). The current study's findings indicate that translanguaging has been fundamental in promoting inclusive communication and maximising learner involvement in classrooms. This method served as a crucial support resource by integrating various languages, hence enhancing the learning process and comprehension among superdiverse learners in bilingual classrooms (Leask, 2019). The implementation of translanguaging in classrooms fostered a sense of belonging, confidence, and comfort; enhanced learner-teacher relationships; promoted active learner participation; bolstered self-efficacy; cultivated a sense of self-identity; clarified concepts; increased subject interest; engendered a positive attitude towards learning; facilitated inclusive communication; improved academic performance; and embraced learner diversity (Makalela, 2018).

Teachers' and learners' experiences in superdiversity classrooms

Research has shown that teaching in superdiversity contexts where multiple African languages are used as LoLT, has become a new and innovative pedagogical approach in South African schools (Gobodwana, 2023). Translanguaging is one of the effective approaches employed in the classroom to promote inclusive pedagogy and learning, in particular communication (García, 2023). This approach is used for content clarification as well as maximum learner participation. According to García (2023), this approach was very helpful and learners were able to clarify certain words of information in their respective languages especially if they did not understand in English. This presupposes a specific degree of expertise in those languages. Research by Mgiijima and Makalela

(2016) recognised IsiXhosa as one of the most intricate African languages, posing comprehension challenges for some learners, even among native speakers. Ngcobo et al. (2016) similarly articulated apprehension that students with inadequate competency in their African languages may experience exclusion during classroom instruction and learning. These studies emphasise that although translanguaging is frequently seen as a novel instructional approach, its efficacy is contingent upon learners' linguistic proficiency and the wider social environment. Consequently, it is essential to acknowledge translanguaging not alone as an instructional strategy, but as a social accomplishment that arises from and strengthens learners' cultural and linguistic identities. Translanguaging involves an individual's utilisation of their many linguistic resources for communication, as well as the collaborative interplay between languages, wherein meaning is co-created with others (Ticheloven et al., 2021).

Teachers in global, regional, and national educational systems encounter a variety of sociocultural and linguistic diversity among ethnic groups of learners (Krause & Prinsloo, 2016). This requires the teachers to be ready and trained to teach in such classrooms and be willing to allow learners to speak and learn in their languages that the teachers are not familiar with (Gobodwana, 2023). In one study, teachers regarded the implementation of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms as being very efficient (Feller, 2021). Consequently, this research showed that translanguaging is the most strategic resource to be used daily in multilingual classrooms as a method of leveraging the learners' linguistic repertoires that develop inclusive learning and communication (Gobodwana, 2023). Translanguaging has been regarded as an educational approach that compliments the learners' linguistic interiors (García & Wei, 2018).

According to Charamba (2022), translanguaging promotes maximum participation, supports translanguaging practices, and improved academic performance. This suggests that translanguaging is the most effective method for instruction in schools when some learners lack proficiency in the language of instruction (Bonomi, 2020). It is believed that using translanguaging, learners develop their multilingualism and become proficient without compromising the development of English language proficiency (Ndhlovana & Charamba, 2023).

Teacher and learner attitude towards translanguaging

According to Makalela (2015), when multiple languages are used for teaching and learning, subject interest and content comprehension increases among learners.



This method has demonstrated efficacy in enhancing inclusive communication and reducing academic challenges or failures due to a comprehensive knowledge of the concepts (García, 2023). Research indicates that the language attitudes of both teachers and learners may vary due to distinct contextual circumstances, including professional, personal, and institutional influences (García, 2023). Teachers must maintain a positive approach towards translanguaging to foster a peaceful classroom environment, particularly in the context of superdiversity (Bialystok, 2018; Ismaili, 2015). While most teachers involved in the current study had a favourable disposition towards translanguaging, research indicates that participants in previous studies demonstrated both negative and positive attitudes towards the practice.

Despite the minor challenges teachers may encounter, they must retain a cheerful demeanour to foster an enjoyable classroom environment, while acknowledging the linguistic variety among learners (Bialystok, 2018; Ismaili, 2015). When teachers engage with learners during lessons, by permitting them to utilise their complete language repertoire, they facilitate the occurrence of translanguaging, which fosters positivity among learners and leads to progressive classroom lessons (Omidire & Ayob, 2020). While some researchers contend that translanguaging poses a threat to legacy languages, García (2023) asserts that it is the most crucial approach for culturally superdiverse learners to communicate effectively within a learning environment. The current study indicates that although all the learners had positive feelings towards the general implementation of translanguaging in the classroom, some learners underrated the usage of their ethnic tongues (García, 2023). Their reason for undervaluing their indigenous languages was that they regarded them as a problem instead of a strategy and resource used to improve learner academic performance and maximise their participation during teaching and learning (García, 2023).

The effect of translanguaging on communication

To realise its transformational potential, translanguaging must provide multilingual and bilingual learners with the same opportunities afforded to monolingual learners (Wei & García, 2022). Language, race, and gender must not perpetuate divisions that result in disparities in education (Wei & García, 2022). Historically, numerous African languages have been segregated due to ethnic, cultural, and linguistic disparities; however, through translanguaging, these languages are acknowledged and utilised in educational settings as resources to augment academic interactions and understanding of concepts in multilingual classrooms (Charamba, 2021).

History has shown that language has never been an obstacle to formation of new relations among people from different races and ethnicity (García, 2023). This was proven by the Mapungubwe and Monomotapa people who had linguistic diversity, but had built relations through trade and interethnic marriages (Manyanga & Chirikure, 2019). This is demonstrated in the present study as learners differed linguistically, however, were able to work together using different languages, not forgetting that some of the learner's parents are married to foreign nationals and yet are able to communicate and live together. The use of, and interconnection between languages is endorsed by the Language Policy of 2020, whereby multilingualism is promoted in South African institutions of higher learning. Translanguaging procedures encompass the enhancement of receptive and productive skills through communication and written text methods, enabling learners to practice utilising many languages (Makalela, 2015).

Translanguaging is used in multilingual classrooms where learners are afforded a chance to utilise their complete linguistic capabilities (Nyimbili & Mwanza, 2021). The advantage of translanguaging is that it reduces limitations among languages and disturbs language fixity in monolingual classroom practices (Carrim & Nkomo, 2023). It encourages uniform structures to allow active communication and participation through the learners' indigenous languages in the English classrooms for which they are also advised to use both their indigenous language and English (McKinney, 2020). Social inclusion allows learners to communicate and reach out to one another on a personal and family level, which helps learners to become close, socialise linguistically, and share their heritage, which ultimately enables translanguaging among them (McKinney, 2020). A study conducted by Sefotho (2022) at two South African primary schools, investigated the application of Ubuntu translanguaging as a systematic method to enhance multilingualism. The research employed semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to examine educators' integration and comprehension of language policy in fostering multilingualism. The teachers still experience some challenges in navigating effective methods of teaching through translanguaging and thus, recommend the use of the Ubuntu translanguaging approach, which is a structured method of teaching and learning in African languages. This approach was endorsed by Makalela (2016), who believes that it fosters inclusion in society. This indicates that the concept of employing translanguaging in South African languages inside multilingual classrooms should serve as a resource to foster inclusion within society, aligned to language in education policies of the country (García, 2023). It has also been found



that translanguaging empowers a harmonious environment, supportive of the learners' learning, and making them feel included (Omidire & Ayob, 2020). Moreover, the affordances of distance education can be employed for in-service teacher training and teacher professional development to enhance teachers' understanding of best practices in the implementation of translanguaging as a multilingual pedagogy. According to research conducted by Ndhlovana and Charamba (2023), utilising a translanguaging approach in multilingual classroom encourages the beneficial development of social and cognitive outcomes. Translanguaging requires transformation and decolonisation in the educational context, offering prospects for the formation of identity and providing a safe and positive linguistic experience for learners (Ndhlovana & Charamba, 2023). This perception challenges monoglossic philosophies that are prevalent in South African classroom contexts. The translanguaging method allows language diversity, and disregards language inequalities and hierarchies, because of its suppleness and dynamic nature (Ndhlovana & Charamba, 2023).

Translanguaging benefits

Translanguaging is not merely the incorporation of many designated languages into classroom practice; rather, it is fundamentally “reconstitutive and transformative of the power relations between the named languages in society” (Wei & García, 2022, p. 322). According to Wei and García (2022), it is important to understand translanguaging and its potential to decolonise education, especially because teachers focus only on the institutional LoLT; thus, teachers must fully engage learners' full repertoire. Overall, inclusive educational practices can be developed, and such practices should not categorise the languages of multilingual learners as primary or native vs supplementary or additional (Wei & García, 2022). The implementation of translanguaging during teaching and learning has been shown to be effective and efficient to the learners, as they understood better and enjoyed being taught, since multiple languages were used to assist them (Wei, 2011).

Translanguaging is emphasised as enabling learners to have a sense of acceptance in the multilingual classroom, and learners react positively to this approach (García et al., 2017). According to Probyn (2019), most South African learners are multilingual and speak African languages, however, power and recognition is given to English, which is aligned to their school language policies. The learners' multilingual abilities are influenced by their diversity, economic factors, and urbanisation; therefore, the concept of translanguaging plays an influential role, emanating from the sociocultural

factors (Bourdieu, 1991). When translanguaging is implemented in the classroom, collaboration and association are developed among learners, and meaning-making is created effectively (Mgijima & Makalela, 2016). Translanguaging allows for learners to leave the constraints of one particular language, and additionally permits them to use any of the languages they are familiar with to make educational meaning of academic concepts (Makalela, 2015).

Translanguaging is important and beneficial to learners, because it gives them a sense of self-identity and belonging, and stimulates team work and social cohesion (García, 2023). When multilingual learners from the same contextual backgrounds, including the teachers, are placed in the same classroom setting, a non-threatening, but harmonious and learning effective environment is activated (Omidire, 2019a). Permitting learners to utilise their native languages in the classroom, fosters a positive educational environment, social space, and instructional classrooms, which support creativity and innovation from learners (Leask, 2019). It further allows learners to communicate and represent their morals and identities more efficiently (Kepe & Linake, 2019). The creativity and critical thinking of multilingual learners should be allowed to flourish as they develop their own comprehension skills through their unique language use (Wei & García, 2022). According to Shohamy (2013, p. 229), “translanguaging is one such example of moving freely within, between and among languages”.

According to Williams (2002), translanguaging is a multilingual educational approach that employs many linguistic strategies, wherein teachers, as facilitators of information, endeavour to create bilingual and multilingual opportunities for learners, considering their cultural backgrounds, identities, and the learning environment. Adamson et al. (2019) suggest that this provides the learners the opportunity to discuss educational concepts. To this end, translanguaging in the context of the present study advocated the development of inclusive communication during teaching and learning, which improved learner participation and subject interest with the teachers facilitating learning. Numerous scholars have emphasised that translanguaging enables learners to utilise their linguistic resources to facilitate teaching and learning, hence enhancing their comprehension of the subject matter or concepts being presented (García, 2019; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Lewis et al., 2012; Wei & García, 2016).



Study purpose

The objective of this research was to examine translanguaging as leverage for developing inclusive communication in the superdiversity contexts of inner-city schools. This research also aimed to explore and elucidate educational challenges and concerns from various perspectives during translanguaging strategies, particularly educational concepts. The research sought to understand the extent to which translanguaging strategies are significant; their advantages and disadvantages were explored, with a focus on inclusive communication. The guiding research question was: How can translanguaging serve as leverage for developing inclusive communication in the superdiversity contexts of inner-city schools? A qualitative approach was employed to address the research topic.

Participant selection

Participants were selected from two South African inner-city schools (A and B). The two participating schools were selected through purposive sampling. English serves as the medium of instruction in both schools, which were chosen based on their diversity, as they have learners of multiple races from different provinces of South Africa as well as from outside the country. The selected participants were eight middle school teachers with teaching experience in diverse inner-city schools, all of them second-language teachers employed in fee-paying public schools in Pretoria, and 33 Grade 8 learners aged from 13 to 15 years old from schools A and B, as they have been exposed to a second language for several years and are expected to be proficient at this level (Cummins, 2019). The participants were chosen according to their multilingual capabilities in superdiversity schools. Table 1 below provides more details of the participants' characteristics.

Table 1: Selection of participants

Case	Participant Count	Educational Level Taught	Teaching Experience (years)	Data Origin
School A	Four (4) teachers	Grade 8	1–36	Semi-structured interviews Questionnaires
	Eighteen (18) learners	Grade 8 learners (aged from 13 to 15 years)	N/A	Focus group discussions Questionnaires
School B	Four (4) teachers	Grade 8	1–20	Semi-structured interviews Questionnaires
	Fifteen (15) learners	Grade 8 learners (aged from 13 to 15 years)	N/A	Focus group discussions

Study context

The current study was conducted in Pretoria, South Africa at two urban high schools located in distinct areas of the city. School A is situated on west side of the city, and School B is in the Pretoria CBD. This research was conducted in school terms two and three of the academic year; term 2 runs from April to June, while term 3 runs from July to September. Most learners attending these schools were from the local vicinity. Some walked to school, some used taxis and buses, and others were dropped off and collected by parents. The learners represented diverse cultures, religions, and ethnicities and were from South Africa and countries such as Zimbabwe, and the Republic of Congo. The languages spoken included Shona, Tsonga, French, isiZulu, and many other African languages. All these data were obtained through questionnaires. The teachers' home languages were also diverse, and included Shona, Afrikaans, English, Tsonga, Ndebele, and isiZulu. The two schools involved in this study are tuition-based high schools located in urban areas. The schools have limited resources, and the classrooms are of moderate size, equipped with certain teaching and learning materials such as charts on the walls, and projectors, although some are not



working. The schools are very big and open, with educational facilities separate from the playgrounds, resulting in minimal noise levels at both institutions. The learners were well disciplined.

Data collection approaches

The Institutional Ethics Review Committee of the University of Pretoria granted approval to conduct the research. Permission was also obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education, and the principals of the two participating schools. Informed consent was obtained from the eight teachers as well as the 33 learners of the schools and their parents. Both the study's participants and the participating schools will remain anonymous and confidentiality will be exercised in all aspects. The participants' responses were audio and video recorded with their permission.

Information was gathered through focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, workshop, classroom observation, field notes, and questionnaires. A workshop was conducted in each school with all the participating teachers, on translanguaging and how to implement it in the classroom. Videos on translanguaging were played for participants to enhance their understanding. Sixty questionnaires (30 for teachers, 30 for learners per school) were given to potential participants at each participating school to complete individually as a way of collecting their biographic information. Only the teachers and learners who returned the questionnaires participated in the study. Most of the participants did not complete the questionnaires due to their unwillingness to participate. The questionnaires assisted in identifying participants and understanding their background. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using audio and video recording to explore in-depth knowledge, understanding, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes on the use of translanguaging as leverage for developing inclusive education.

Focus group discussions were conducted using audio and video recording with the 33 participating learners across both schools, with two groups per school. One lesson was observed using audio recording, focusing on the implementation of translanguaging, learner response, attitudes and feelings, and the teacher's teaching and learning methods applied. Field notes were employed to document observations during interviews, focus group discussions, workshops, and classroom observations. Furthermore, a researcher's reflective notebook was employed as a mechanism to contemplate the study's procedure, facilitating necessary adaptations and modifications

(Maree, 2010). A reflective notebook was utilised to document observations, reflections, and opinions during the intended study. This reflective notebook fostered reflexivity and mindfulness by enhancing awareness to individual prejudices and preconceptions.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify, examine, and document the themes and sub-themes that arose from the data. The textual data was analysed to gain a deeper understanding of translanguaging as a tool for fostering inclusive communication in the superdiverse environments of urban schools. Colour coding was employed to distinguish the identified themes and subthemes. The inductive analysis facilitated the identification of the categories relevant to the topic of teachers and learners.

Findings and discussion

Positivity and improved learner participation

Findings from this study show that even though some learners had challenges with speaking their own languages, use of the translanguaging approach was beneficial, as some concepts were clarified and interpreted through numerous languages. This was also helpful to learners in the English medium of instruction who are not proficient in the LoLT. There was a notable contradiction from the learners, as they acknowledged the use of linguistic diversity in the class as being very helpful to them, in particular in concept clarification; they developed a greater subject interest, a positive attitude towards learning, inclusive communication, improved learner participation, learning about different cultures and languages “*You get to learn other languages*” (L4, FGD3B, R234); “*You also learn their culture*” (L3, FGD3B, R238), and improved relationships with their peers and teachers. The contradiction was that, while learners need to use diverse languages for learning, they felt this detracts from their opportunities to learn and speak English, which they believe essential for global interaction. “*Yes, because if they don’t learn English now, and let’s say we go out into the world, they are going to, the knowledge that they’ve learnt at school with that language, and if they had to communicate with another person, let’s say from the States or anywhere, they wouldn’t be able to interpret it*” (L5, FGD3B, R123). The lesson observation has shown that teacher 2 still confused translanguaging with direct translation/code-switching. The findings showed that the teacher was teaching the learners in Afrikaans and giving them direct translation to English, she was also code-switching along the lesson. “*Okay, translate (vertaal). The room is where it’s taking place (die kamer is waar dit plaasvind). They act (hulle tree op)*” (T2, LO, R5).



The South African Constitution states that every learner is entitled to be educated in their home languages; however, both these schools are using mainly two languages, English (home language) and Afrikaans (first additional language), in which most learners are not proficient. Using translanguaging, inclusive communication, learner confidence, subject interest, and positive attitudes were developed and active participation “*It’s what we need because ge o bua Sepitori (when you speak sepitori)? E tliša vibe ya gore o kgone go enjoy lesson (it brings a vibe in the class during lessons)*” (L8, FGD1A, R50). Teacher 4 further emphasised that concepts are “*easily explained or better understood if there was reference to child’s home language spoken*” (T4, SA, R14). Translanguaging stimulated flexibility, positivity, and creativity among learners. A sense of belonging and learner self-identity was recognised using this method, which also stimulated maximum participation. This approach also gave both teachers and learners exposure to new languages and improved their listening skills. One teacher emphasised that “*sometimes there are some things that you might explain better in your own language. So, I believe that people should be given that opportunity to express themselves in their language where they feel comfortable...*” (T5, SB, R42). The study showed that as per the participating teachers’ and learners’ responses, they found it beneficial when using a translanguaging approach in the classroom, which was further emphasised by learner 1 who indicated “*...because it creates interest...*” (L1, FGD1A, R78), teacher 3 also appreciated the approach as the participant felt that learners have really improved “*...now it’s finally coming together...*” (T3, SA, R70) emphasising that the pedagogy enhanced educational results and classroom interactions.

Improved communication

Findings from the current study show that the participating teachers showed a positive attitude towards the implementation of translanguaging. They were comfortable and preferred this notion to monolingual teaching, as it built inclusive communication. Through the implementation of this approach, the teacher participants witnessed maximum learner participation; learners were comfortably and confidently able to express themselves during teaching and learning. This is complemented by teacher 3’s response who highlighted that “*...The benefit to the kids was to understand it better, you know my father used to work on the mines and they have a language like, almost like a trans language which they call “Fanagalo”, which was a mixture of a lot of African languages, everybody, even the white people working on the mines could understand it and it just made it easier to communicate ...*” (T3, SA, R22). Two participating teachers, however, had

concerns when learners used their multiple languages in the classroom, especially when they do not know the learners' languages, and were fearful of losing track of learner discussions and being unable to properly facilitate the learning process. The participants' concerns were influenced by the complaints from the learners that some of the learners laughed at their languages and gossiped about them taking advantage of the fact that these learners do not understand their languages.

The findings further indicate that all the participating learners acknowledged that using translanguaging in the classroom helped them communicate better, as they can actively participate, express themselves, and easily understand the subject content. Some believe that utilising their native languages has facilitated prompt responses to inquiries, enhanced communication, clarified concepts, ensured mutual understanding, encouraged questioning, and articulated thoughts effectively, provided support during challenges, and fostered comprehension among individuals. Although some learners did not appreciate the use of ethnic tongues as a support structure to maximise their participation and communication, *"Sir because... We can talk to each other mostly, you know. When I say something to them, it's like, ah, what is he saying?"* (L8, FGD3B, R88), research shows that when using the translanguaging approach, learning is simplified, and there is a thorough comprehension of academic concepts.

It has been found that learners used their multimodal language ranges efficiently to communicate and interrelate, with improved levels of communication and enjoyment among them (Carrim & Nkomo, 2023). Consequently, translanguaging nurtured learners' creativity and stimulated them to exceed expectations. The use of their full language range empowered learners to use their personal background, familiarities, and multilingual thoughts in the classroom (Carrim & Nkomo, 2023). The outcomes of the research have demonstrated that when flexibility among pupils through their diverse languages is allowed, creativity and improved communication are stimulated, as well as an increased participation in the classroom. Consequently, these findings indicate that translanguaging could be more extensively included into classroom practices across various educational settings.

Evidence indicates that translanguaging tactics and approaches can be integrated into the foundation phase to enhance learners' reading skills, as demonstrated in the research review (García & Lin, 2017). Teachers can discover pupils' background knowledge by concurrently utilising their heritage language and English, contrasting the two languages and employing intercultural and multilingual reading resources.



Utilising learners' backgrounds and incorporating texts that resonate with their experiences, establishes a connection to the material, so rendering the subject more relevant and improving reading comprehension (Carrim & Nkomo, 2023). Furthermore, learners' English vocabulary can be enhanced by home languaging, the application of translations, the incorporation of texts in learners' home language and English, the utilisation of multilingual resources, and the employment of learners' multimodal semiotic repertoire. Utilising terminology from learners' heritage languages and employing translations during and post-reading helps enhance speaking and listening abilities as well as comprehension of the text. Learners may consult the texts in their home language to comprehend the meaning of a word in the English text (García, 2023). Employing a bilingual print environment that incorporates vocabulary from learners' home languages and English helps enhance learners' English vocabulary. Moreover, the teacher can leverage learners' multimodal semiotic resources by employing gestures, visuals, facial expressions, and bodily movements to enhance the understanding of English vocabulary and subsequently, English reading comprehension. Overall, the findings of the current study suggest that implementing translanguaging in multilingual classrooms enhances inclusive participation, deepens conceptual understanding, and fosters a good learning environment. Although educators and students predominantly regarded the method favourably, certain apprehensions regarding linguistic exclusion and facilitation difficulties were also articulated.

Improved relationships

The findings from the current study show that most of the participating learners differed culturally, biologically, demographically, and linguistically. The linguistic diversity among them was deep, however, the learners have found ways to navigate communication gaps among them in the classroom through translanguaging. The findings show that there was a developed sense of cultural and linguistic differences, improved social cohesion, respect and discipline, positive learner behaviour, and a change in stereotypes and negative perceptions about other people's cultures and languages *"It doesn't have any effect on us because you can learn from different people. It educates you about other people... Culture, religion, and all of that."* (L9, FGD1A, R122). The learners all began to learn their peers' languages and culture *"And you get to learn, like, other languages from other kids"* (L9, FGD1A, R76).

Moreover, the teacher might encourage learners to utilise their entire semiotic repertoire during tale re-enactments to enhance reading comprehension. Learners can acquaint themselves with the structural elements of the English language by employing multilingual resources and utilising their native language. The use of multilingual texts and a multilingual print environment enable learners to analyse phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics across different languages. Furthermore, by employing their home language, children can improve their comprehension of English language structure. Employing advanced cognitive skills and engaging prior information can enhance learners' verbal reasoning capabilities, hence improving reading comprehension.

The learners' past knowledge aids inferences, hence improving verbal reasoning and reading comprehension. The improvement of learners' oral language abilities can be accomplished by employing their heritage language in discussions and explanations, while juxtaposing the language of intake and output to promote deeper understanding. Employing diverse multilingual resources enhances learners' English literacy ability. The learners' literacy competence includes a comprehension of print concepts and genres. The use of multicultural texts, materials written in learners' native languages and English, together with a bilingual, print-rich environment, is beneficial in this setting. Teachers may create a multilingual reading nook comprising books from various genres to improve learners' reading and writing skills. Knowledge can enhance learners' verbal reasoning skills, hence enhancing reading comprehension.

The study's findings indicate that despite the drawbacks of translanguaging such as time consumption, uneven language usage in the classroom, and the involvement of teachers untrained in multilingual instruction or superdiversity, the eight participating teachers acknowledged that a translanguaging approach has been useful in terms of facilitating the teaching and learning process "*There is social...It improves the social relationships*" (T8, SB, R38). This is complemented by the response from the 33 participating learners who also agreed that the approach has afforded them the opportunity to freely communicate and actively participate in the classroom activities. Learners indicated that they felt "*included*" during teaching and learning "*Because we understand what he or she says*" (L7, FGD1A, R87). This method is important as it minimises disorder in the class, bridges the communication gaps, and further curbs many academic exclusions and challenges. Of the 33 learners, only four found it useful, however, complained about time consumption "*Because it's a waste of time*



explaining one thing in different languages” (L8, FDG2A, R 147), “It takes a lot of time and energy” (L2, FGD2A, R179); including language and religious imbalances “Yes, for some of us. We have Indians at school; we might not consider that religion because we say we are Christian. We have also Muslim people and we don’t consider their religion as well” (L4, FGD2A, R183); in the classroom as other languages are completely unknown to the rest of the learners, therefore they felt that their languages are not acknowledged. One participating teacher appreciated the approach, but was concerned that during assessment only English is used for which the participant wished that diverse languages should be used to enable comprehension of the assessment by learners “And I’ve seen it has also helped make them understand when their mistakes occur. But my main point is, it cannot be 100% the other language, if they are going to be assessed in another language. So, I don’t know if I’m making sense” (T8, SB, R18). The findings of the current study indicate a necessity to rectify inconsistencies and to re-evaluate a comprehensive analysis of classrooms (García, 2023). To this end, there is a need to accelerate translanguaging in schools as the use of this approach fostered open-mindedness, a sense of belonging and confidence, and improved inclusive communication in learners. The findings show that social cohesion was developed including improved relationships and collaboration among learners and teachers.

Based on the responses from the participating eight teachers and 33 learners, the findings revealed participants’ recognition of the pedagogical advantages of translanguaging, including concept clarification as the learners could better understand the concepts taught using diverse languages. The participating 33 learners further indicated that they experienced increased motivation and interest in the subject, enhanced their engagement during the lesson, and increased learner participation. Of the 33 learners, 30 learners felt the acknowledgment of identity, appreciated inclusive communication in class, and appreciated the linguistic and cultural diversity. All the participating teachers and learners acknowledged that it strengthened learner-teacher relationships, and a heightened sense of belonging “*We learn new things every day*” (L5, FGD2A, R206); “*We learn about other people’s culture. You learn about other people’s culture. We embrace other people’s culture*” (L1, FGD2A, R210). García (2023) asserts that both teachers and learners can get a more profound sense of humanity whenever their customs, traditions, and heritage are acknowledged and embraced within the educational environment. Arts-based methodologies, including poetic inquiry accompanied by pictures, were employed to bolster the case for integrating a translanguaging method into educational institutions and teacher education curricula.

Expertly crafted photos and writing can profoundly affect the viewer emotionally and intellectually (García, 2023).

The significance and impact of this investigation reside in the redefinition, scrutiny, or validation of fundamental aspects of the teaching and learning experience in multilingual classrooms. According to García (2023), the poetry featured also demonstrated that an innovative linguistic activity like translanguaging, is not a simple solution. Research shows that poetry and imagery served as poignant reminders that failing to accommodate learners and their identities dehumanises them, reducing them to mere reflections of their former selves (García, 2023). This context-specific endeavour encourages all participants to extract what aligns with their experiences and apply the insights to enhance educational methods in various settings. Insights into translanguaging provide a pragmatic approach to fostering more humane teaching and learning experiences in multilingual classrooms. Translanguaging is presented as an educational tool to harness the diverse linguistic and cultural assets that learners and teachers contribute to classroom environments.

Contribution and limitations of the research

The findings of the current study indicate that teachers acknowledge that there is a need for the implementation of translanguaging, as it has proven to be an effective strategy for teaching multilingual learners. Consequently, to enhance translanguaging, teachers should allow learners to fully optimise their linguistic repertoires and incorporate multilingual resources, multilingual writing activities, as well as multilingual reading groups or circles. Even though they are restricted by the schools' language policies, teachers firmly believe that the language policies should be amended to allow for efficient teaching and learning. The current study has shown that when learners are afforded the privilege to freely utilise their full linguistic repertoire through the process of teaching and learning, they become more active, their communication improves, and they perform well, as they can use their authentic voices. The study contributes to the knowledge on the use of translanguaging as leverage for developing inclusive communication in superdiversity classrooms for effective teaching and learning. Furthermore, the study shows that it is important that the education system regards linguistic diversity as a resource, rather than a challenge. Consequently, the Department of Education is required to redevelop new multilingual policies that allow for the implementation of translanguaging which will have implications on assessment tasks, time allocation of lessons, and resources such as multilingual textbooks and qualified



teachers. The current study will also assist the Department of Education in providing the necessary resources to ensure the smooth implementation of translanguaging in South African schools. A limitation of this study is that it was carried out in only two urban schools within a designated district. The limited sample size may render the results non-generalisable to other contexts within the same geographical region.

Conclusion

The findings of the current study have shown the significance of the use of translanguaging and suggest that it is beneficial since it contributes positively to learner communication, participation, and performance. The study concurred with the findings from earlier research that indicated that utilising multiple languages in education enhances learner engagement; learners become more interested, positive, creative, and flexible, and most importantly, develop a deeper comprehension of the content or subject matter (Makalela, 2015). The current study has shown the positive influence of using the translanguaging approach in the classroom to facilitate learning and providing support to learners. This contributed to the alleviation of negative perceptions regarding the use of African languages for classroom instruction by learners; instead, learners appreciated and preferred this method as they enjoyed learning.

The current study revealed the challenges faced by both teachers and learners in the classroom, such as socioeconomic challenges, language policies, and social challenges. The study has closed a gap in the research literature by focusing on Grade 8 learners, as most prior research focused on higher grades and institutions. The use of translanguaging is, thus, recommended as part of the curriculum across the country and globally, as a way of improving teaching and learning in multilingual classrooms. Language policies should move away from monolingual pedagogies to multilingual ones. Translanguaging should be recognised as an effective strategy to be used in superdiverse classrooms across the curriculum. This research also recommends the integration of technology, which includes multilingual translating audio/videos, digital learning, and resources like textbooks being considered. Furthermore, one of the ways teachers could be supported to adopt the implementation of translanguaging is through distance education which provides an easily accessible way for further training, development, and support. It is recommended that future research should focus on the types of language policies that would best suit superdiversity classrooms where a translanguaging method is used, models of distance education that can be used, as well as the integration of the translanguaging method with assessment activities.

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**Translanguaging as a responsive pedagogy
for enhancing reading comprehension in bi/
multilingual classroom contexts**

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Translanguaging as a responsive pedagogy for enhancing reading comprehension in bi/multilingual classroom contexts

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Abstract

Classroom situations have globally shifted from monolingual to multilingual perspectives due to globalisation and movement across the world. This has raised awareness of the fluid and porous nature of linguistic boundaries between and across nations. The situation necessitates adoption of new approaches in teaching and learning in multilingual classroom contexts. Translanguaging pedagogy is one of the approaches that allows concurrent use of several languages in multilingual classrooms. This article investigates how teachers could use translanguaging to develop reading comprehension in bi/multilingual classroom contexts. The participants were four Grade 5 teachers, two of whom teach English and two teaching Sesotho. The study employed a quasi-experimental design and used pre- and post-tests on reading comprehension, in both English and Sesotho. The experimental group was subjected to a translanguaging intervention between the pre- and post-tests periods to determine the impact of the intervention. The results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group confirming translanguaging as a pedagogy that could improve learners' reading comprehension. The study concludes and recommends translanguaging as relevant in assisting teachers' use of learners' linguistic repertoires to improve reading comprehension in multilingual classroom contexts.

Keywords: Linguistic repertoires; monolingual; multilingual; pedagogy; reading comprehension; translanguaging.



Introduction

Worldwide migration has contributed to the identity of people to become fluid and complex (Garcia & Lin, 2017). The intranational and international levels of mobility have raised awareness of the fluid and porous nature of boundaries, not only between nation states, but also between the 'named' languages (Makalela, 2019). This has caused the linguistic shift from literacy to bi/multiliteracy where "most people aspire to gain competency in two or more languages" (Alexis, 2023, p. 59), which has become a norm and a reality for many people. The belief of a child acquiring a second language at a particular age has now become history and impractical, as children acquire multiple languages at an early age. Linguistic diversity has extended to the classroom contexts and as a result, teachers must be prepared with appropriate pedagogies in developing reading comprehension of learners from different linguistic backgrounds. Teachers should know and understand the need to change from a monolingual approach to the one that would fit the prevailing circumstances of multilingual classrooms. The purpose of this study is to examine the feasibility of using translanguaging as a pedagogy that could assist teachers in developing bi/multilingual learners' reading comprehension. This is because reading is considered the backbone of language proficiency and a tool that is normally used to assess fluency in a language, which is reflected through the ability to understand, infer, and retell what one has read (Sefotho, 2019). Bi/multilingual reading comprehension development needs consideration, as it remains under-researched and under-theorised, especially in the African context where there is a growing population of bi/multilingual learners. There is, therefore, a need to consider strategies or pedagogies that could be relevant and be used by teachers in developing reading comprehension in the new era of multilingualism. It is important to rethink and look at how knowledge of more than one language could be used as a resource and not a barrier in bi/multilingual classroom settings.

Classroom situations have also shifted, globally, from the monolingual perspective to a bi/multilingual state. Learners come to the classroom with diverse linguistic knowledge and competence in more than one language. However, this diverse linguistic knowledge appears to have been rarely utilised to enhance learning. In most classroom situations, the use of language is a monolingual one, one language at a time (Charamba & Nkomo, 2022; Sefotho, 2022), where it was historically believed that there could be some language 'cross-contamination' if languages are used concurrently. It was believed that "separating the languages, the teacher avoids, ... cross-contamination,

thus making it easier for the child to acquire a new linguistic system as they internalise a given lesson” (Jacobson & Fattis, 1990, p. 4). Qureshi and Aljanadbah (2022, p. 247) note that “historically, languages were considered separate entities; hence, any use of a first language (L1) in a second language classroom was frowned upon and considered as an interference in the second language (L2) development”. This is also supported by Creese and Blackledge (2010) who indicate that moving between languages in one classroom has “traditionally been frowned upon in educational settings, with teachers and students often feeling guilty about its practice” (p. 105) yet using these languages would be “a pragmatic response to the local classroom context” (p. 105). Research has proved that there is no ‘contamination’, but it is a resource to knowledge (García & Otheguy, 2020) when all the languages are being used concurrently. Thus, the authors argue, it is because there is no separation of languages, but a single linguistic system in the mind of a bilingual or multilingual person (Garcia & Otheguy, 2020). Therefore, it is recommended that teachers be trained to use relevant approaches in multilingual classroom contexts. There is a need for change from the ‘old’ monolingual approach to accommodate the status quo and use the linguistic resources that learners bring to the classroom (Sefotho, 2022). Regardless of research and recommendations on the concurrent use of languages, teachers continue to inherit the pedagogy of separating languages in their teaching in bi/multilingual classroom situations. The historical monolingual approach has been found not to be appropriate in bi/multilingual classroom contexts.

Researchers recommend a need for applying flexible pedagogies that will fit the existing bi/multilingual paradigms (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). This calls for new and diverse approaches or models of teaching to teacher training institutions in to equip teachers with ways of utilising knowledge of more than one language as a resource in bilingual or multilingual classroom settings to enhance learning. Translanguaging has been recommended as one of such approaches that could enhance the simultaneous use of two or more languages (Chu, 2017; Garcia & Wei, 2015). Several studies that were done in various parts of the world (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, Wei, 2018) suggest that translanguaging in bi/multilingual classroom settings “creates positive experiences at school and maximises pedagogic and cognitive benefits” (Sefotho & Makalela, 2017). While there is vast research on translanguaging as an approach in bi/multilingual classroom contexts, there is a scarcity of research on its effectiveness on bilingual reading comprehension levels/categories especially in the Global South. Research that has been conducted on reading comprehension in South Africa, shows



that learners have poor reading comprehension which impact on their academic performance (Hurst & Mona, 2017). This study, therefore, is intended to investigate the effectiveness of translanguageing as a pedagogy to enhance bi/multilinguals' reading comprehension skills in South African multilingual classroom contexts. South Africa is one of the countries that support the incorporation of more than one language in the teaching and developed policies to that effect. It has developed a policy based on its eleven official languages, "including English, the de facto lingua franca of the new world community" (Alexis, 2023, p. 59). These official languages shape the country's language in an education policy, which is implemented in all public schools. The language policy embraces the bi/multilingual status and incorporates the use of more than one language in schools (Centre for Environmental Rights, 1996)). Research confirms that learners can enhance literacy and oral competency in their weaker language when they simultaneously use all the linguistic resources they have (Alexis, 2023). Translanguageing is recommended as an appropriate pedagogy in making use of the linguistic repertoires that learners bring to the classroom (Sefotho, 2022) to develop their reading comprehension. It is, therefore, against this background that the current study investigates the possibility of using translanguageing as a pedagogy in developing reading proficiency in bi/multilingual classroom settings.

The effectiveness of translanguageing

Translanguageing is defined as a practice that helps bi/multilinguals make meaning using two or more languages concurrently (Sefotho & Makalela, 2017); a process of meaning-making where linguistic boundaries are fluidly crossed over and disrupted (Makalela, 2019). Translanguageing brings about the idea of languageing—which is what people do with the language and not what the language is (Wei, 2022). This means it embraces the use of languages as communicative resources, not bounded entities. Translanguageing is about transcending and breaking such boundaries and differences (Wei, 2022). It is considered as "one step further from multilingualism in challenging the racio-linguistic ideologies that view bilingual learners as having separate languages and languageing lives ... a pedagogy for inclusion and social justice" (Wei, 2024, p. 203–204). It, therefore, appears to be an appropriate model that could be used by teachers to build on the appropriate methods of teaching in bi/multilingual classroom contexts. Furthermore, translanguageing is considered as an approach that allows one to utilise the knowledge of various linguistic repertoires. One could receive information through one language and produce the output in another language or languages

(Baker, 2011; Garcia, 2009). In other words, one could read or listen to a text in L2 and retell the text in writing or speaking in L1 (Sefotho, 2019). This idea of making use of the linguistic knowledge originated from Williams (1994), where students were allowed to internalise and understand the information in a language that they easily understand (Welsh), and then give an output in a target language (English). This approach was used to enhance deeper understanding of the subject matter (Hassan & Ahmed, 2015) and to improve their understanding and proficiency of the target language, while making use of the several languages they know. Williams (2002, p. 4), noted that “in translanguaging, the pupil internalises the words they hear, assign their own labels to the message or concept, and then switches the message or concept to the other language; augments the message or concept and supplements it”.

Colin Baker (2011) developed William’s practice into translanguaging. The author considers language as what people do with it to make meaning and not what is defined to be. Furthermore, other linguists such as Garcia (2009), brought the practice to the classroom situation where they see a classroom as an environment where learners bring all their linguistic repertoires which could be used as a resource. Considering this, Makalela (2019) and Otheguy et al. (2015) present translanguaging as an approach that allows learners to access their full linguistic repertoire without having to be constantly aware of socially and politically defined boundaries of named, national, and state languages. According to Wei and Garcia (2022), one should acknowledge the existence of the ‘named’ languages as representations of identity, social, and cultural background of a person (Creese & Blackledge, 2015). This is an indication that there are no boundaries between languages in multilinguals. Translanguaging is about transcending and breaking such boundaries and differences (Wei, 2022) as multilinguals do not think in a ‘named’ language, ‘one at a time’. Instead, there is a cognitive interdependence known as the common underlying proficiency (Chu, 2017) which originates from Cummins (1979) theory of language interdependence. Translanguaging emphasises that all funds of knowledge—including linguistic repertoires, acquired through all languages and in all cultural contexts, should be valued (Wei, 2022) and used as communicative resources in the process of meaning-making. For the current study, translanguaging is considered as a pedagogy that allows learners to use all their linguistic repertoires, their home language, and English as a second language, to enhance their reading comprehension. Nur et al. (2020, p. 971) show that “translanguaging is accurately adapted to facilitate inference-making strategies using the learners’ mother tongue and English in the same classroom lesson ... [and it is]



a way to reinforce students' bilingualism in using all of their languages as a resource for learning, reading, writing, and thinking in the classroom". This implies that for translanguaging to take place, one must be proficient in more than one language, and this can be measured through one's ability to comprehend text in the languages, which is a skill that is gained through reading.

Reading comprehension and translanguaging

The primary step in determining reading comprehension in bilingual learners is the ability to identify facts which appear within and beyond a text (Sefotho, 2019). Sefotho (2019) further argues that reading comprehension encompasses the ability to derive meaning from what is being read (Piper et al., 2015) and being able to think beyond what is in a text. It is, therefore, considered to be a sign of proficiency in a language (Coyne et al., 2007) if one can have understanding that goes beyond the text. Translanguaging is in line with the component skill of reading comprehension to construct a better reading understanding. Nur et al. (2020) confirmed that this practice is a way to enhance reading comprehension and proficiency. It could, therefore, become an approach that could be adapted into teachers training to prepare them for teaching reading comprehension. Reading is an active and complex process that involves certain skills for one to comprehend text (Sefotho, 2019). It requires understanding written text, developing, and interpreting meaning, and using meaning as appropriate to understand the type of text, the purpose, and the situation (Chu, 2017). Reading further requires one to make use of the linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge to fully understand text (Sefotho, 2019). To determine reading proficiency in a language, there are three basic areas that must be considered, namely vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In terms of this paper, the focus will only be on reading comprehension which has been identified as an essential component of literacy (Chu, 2017), as it involves one's ability to interact with text and derive meaning from it (Piper et al., 2015). The meaning could be seen from the learners' lower level of thinking which encompasses literal and recall comprehension skills from the higher level of their thinking, which is inferential skills (Sefotho, 2019). Translanguaging intervention was used in making use of more than one language in developing reading comprehension.

Methodology

The study adapted a quasi-experimental design that applied the pre-test-post-test to a control and an experimental group from two bilingual public schools in a township in Johannesburg, South Africa. The participants were four Grade 5 teachers, two from each of the two bilingual public primary schools that were purposively selected based on meeting the requirements for the study. Grade 5 was chosen, because it is the level where learners are expected to have fully reached a certain level of proficiency in the two languages, in this case, Sesotho and English. This proficiency would then allow teachers to apply translanguaging approach in their teaching using the two languages. A battery of tests, which had two parts, one in Sesotho and another similar one in English, was used for a pre-test and post-test on reading comprehension. Learners from both the control and experimental schools were given a passage, first in English and another comparable one in Sesotho, to read with understanding and then answer the questions that followed. The questions incorporated the three categories of reading comprehension, namely literal, inferential, and retell. Questions on literal comprehension tested learners' cognitive ability at different levels and the ability to recall what they read. Inferential questions tested the learners' ability to think beyond what they have read. The last question tested their ability to retell what they have read, where the language of input was different from the language of output or vice versa. The structure of the questions was similar in both the pre-test and the post-test.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of translanguaging as a pedagogy that could be adopted by teachers in teaching bi/multilingual classroom contexts. This was done through offering translanguaging to an experimental group and comparing the performance of the learners from the selected school to that of learners from a control group. School A was subjected to a reading comprehension intervention during the four weeks gap between the pre-test and the post-test. School B, which was the control school was not subjected to an intervention. During the intervention, teachers from the experimental group were trained by the researcher to use the translanguaging pedagogy to enhance learners' reading comprehension skills. These participants made use of the learners' linguistic repertoires to make meaning of the comprehension texts that were part of their syllabus. Learners were allowed to engage their own languages in understanding the text and the output was in another language that was required during a specific lesson. Teachers from the control group, however, were restricted to using one language at a time, that is, using



only Sesotho during Sesotho lessons and only English during English lessons, which was the standard approach that they used prior to the research. The two approaches to teaching were used to test the efficacy of translanguaging in bilingual classroom contexts. Inferential statistics was used to analyse data. The results from the pre-test and post-test were compared on both the experimental and control groups and analysed statistically to identify the performance difference of the learners. For the purposes of the current study, an assessment was made on whether receiving the translanguaging intervention made any difference on the performance in the post-test (Sefotho, 2019). This was to determine the impact of the translanguaging treatment/intervention, versus where it was not applied. The performance of both the experimental and the control groups was compared to test the effectiveness of translanguaging. This was to enable teachers to assess the effectiveness of translanguaging in developing learners' reading comprehension skills. The study, therefore, was underpinned by the translanguaging framework as a pedagogy that allows learners to make use of their linguistic repertoires to enhance reading comprehension. The focus was on literal, inferential, and retell reading skills. These skills were assessed using both Sesotho and English as the two languages that were regarded as the languages of the schools where research was conducted.

Results and discussion

The results presented in this section include the pre-test and post-test percentages on the three categories of reading comprehension skills, namely; literal, inferential, and retell. These categories are considered as vital in testing reading proficiency in a language. It should be noted that in both schools the number of learners differ between the pre- and post-tests. School A, which is the experimental school, 32 learners took the pre-test, and 36 took the post-test. School B, which is the control school, 54 learners took the pre-test, but when the post-test was administered, there were 59 learners. This indicates that some learners were missing when the pre-test was administered. The difference in numbers was not a variable, was insignificant and did not have any effect on the results.

Table 1 below presents the results for the performance of the learners from the literal comprehension questions on both the pre-test and post-tests for both the experimental (School A) and the control (School B) groups. To determine the effectiveness of translanguaging intervention, comparison was made between the performance in the pre-test and the post-test from both the experimental and control

groups in their ability to answer literal comprehension questions in both English and Sesotho.

Table 1: School A (experimental) and School B (control) performance in pre- and post-tests on literal comprehension

School	Text Language	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	Sig. (2-tailed)
A	English	Pre-test	32	3.0313 [61%]	1.12119	0.196	0.000
		Post-test	36	4.4167 [88%]	0.93732		
	Sesotho	Pre-test	32	2.1250 [43%]	1.36192	0.027	0.001
		Post-test	36	3.3611 [67%]	1.69289		
English (t=-5.548; df=66; p<0.05) Sesotho (t=-3.333; df=65.4; p<0.05)							
B	English	Pre-test	54	3.1667 [63%]	1.32821	0.345	0.838
		Post-test	59	3.2203 [64%]	1.43920		
	Sesotho	Pre-test	54	2.5185 [50%]	1.07705	0.924	0.034
		Post-test	59	2.9831 [60%]	1.21046		
English (t=-0.205; df=111; p>0.05) Sesotho (t=-2.147; df=111; p<0.05)							

Source: Adapted from Sefotho (2019)

The results of the t-test (Table 1) indicate a statistically significant difference at an alpha value of 0.05 between the pre-test and post-test of school A, an experimental group. The performance of school A in the post-test exceeded the international minimum benchmark value of 75%. The results, therefore, show the translanguaging intervention has been useful to improve literal comprehension skills. This means, translanguaging could be a relevant approach that teachers could use in improving learners' reading comprehension and is, therefore, worth being included as a pedagogy of teaching in teachers' training institutions. The results also present translanguaging as an approach which develops literal comprehension among bilingual learners, especially in developing the second language, in this case, English (Sefotho, 2019).

Table 2 below represents the Inferential ability of the learners from both the experimental and control groups. The statistical analysis was done on the performance of the learners on both the English and Sesotho texts to determine and compare their inferential skills on both languages. The comparison was also made between the two schools to determine the effectiveness of translanguaging.

Table 2: School A (experimental) and School B (control) performance in pre- and post-tests on inferential comprehension

School	Text Language	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	Sig. (2-tailed)
A	English	Pre-test	32	1.2188 [61%]	0.75067	0.098	0.006
		Post-test	36	1.6944 [85%]	0.62425		
	Sesotho	Pre-test	32	1.1250 [56%]	0.79312	0.596	0.823
		Post-test	36	1.1667 [58%]	0.73679		
English (t=-2.852; df=66; p<0.05)				Sesotho (t=-0.225; df=66; p>0.05)			
B	English	Pre-test	54	0.8333 [42%]	0.77093	0.000	0.767
		Post-test	59	0.8814 [44%]	0.94841		
	Sesotho	Pre-test	54	0.5741 [29%]	0.81500	0.021	0.106
		Post-test	59	0.3390 [17%]	0.70979		
English (t=-0.296; df=110; p>0.05)				Sesotho (t=1.629; df=106; p>0.05)			

Source: Adapted from Sefotho, 2019

The results in Table 2 show the mean increase in the inferences ability of learners in school A, from the pre-test to the post-test. There is a mean increase of 24% from the pre-test to the post-test in English and a slight increase of 2% in the Sesotho test. This suggests that the translanguaging intervention has helped learners to gain a higher mean in the English language than in their Sesotho home language. Statistically, this means that the difference is significant at an alpha value of 0.05 ($t=-2.852$; $df=66$; $p<0.05$) in an English test, whereas the results from the Sesotho test are not statistically significant. The implication is that translanguaging has developed learners' inferential

skills more in the second language than in their first language. Sefotho (2019) refers to this as breaking the hegemony of English as the sole language of literacy.

When looking at the results from the control group, school B, there is a slight increase in the post-test performance from the pre-test, which is not statistically significant. This implies no difference between the initial pre-test and the post-test in this group. The Sesotho test performance was even better in the pre-test than in the post-test. The t-test results reveal that the differences are statistically not significant at an alpha value of 0.05 ($t=1.629$; $df=106$; $p>0.05$). This means learners did not perform well in both tests. Therefore, the results from both schools confirm translanguaging as a pedagogy that could be useful in developing inferential reading comprehension skills (Nur et al., 2020; Sefotho, 2019). Teachers could, therefore, benefit from using this approach in their teaching.

Table 3 below represents the results obtained from the learners' ability to retell a text from one language to another. Learners were given a text in English and requested to retell it in Sesotho and vice-versa. The results from both the experimental and control group are shown in comparison of the performance between the pre-test and post-test and between the two groups.

Table 3: School A (experimental) and School B (control) performance in pre- and post-tests on retell comprehension

School	Text Language	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	Sig. (2-tailed)
A	English text	Pre-test	32	0.8750 [44%]	0.90696	0.357	0.033
		Post-test	36	1.3333 [67%]	0.82808		
	Sesotho text	Pre-test	32	0.6250 [31%]	0.75134	0.841	0.000
		Post-test	36	1.4167 [71%]	0.73193		
English ($t=-2.178$; $df=66$; $p<0.05$)				Sesotho ($t=-4.397$; $df=66$; $p<0.05$)			

School	Text Language	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	Sig. (2-tailed)
B	English text	Pre-test	54	0.4815 [24%]	0.63664	0.000	0.000
		Post-test	59	1.0339 [52%]	0.90907		
	Sesotho text	Pre-test	54	0.5370 [27%]	0.63582	0.000	0.003
		Post-test	59	0.9831 [49%]	0.91899		
English text - (t=-3.766; df=104; p<0.05) Sesotho text - (t=-3.021; df=104; p> 0.05)							

Source: Adapted from Sefotho (2019)

The results from Table 3 portray an increase in the mean for post-test compared to the pre-test, when learners retell an English text in Sesotho. The difference is statistically significant at an alpha value of 0.05 ($t=-2.178$; $df=66$; $p<0.05$). The mean increase is even more prevalent when they retell a Sesotho text in English. The t-test results reveal that the differences are statistically significant at an alpha value of 0.05 ($t=-4.397$; $df=66$; $p<0.05$). This suggests that the group improved when retelling a text that was in their home language in English as a second language, because of the intervention. Learners could understand a text in one language and give an output in the other language at a relatively high level. The results prove that allowing learners to use their languages is an approach that could be adopted by teachers in their teaching of reading comprehension. It is, therefore, necessary to train teachers who would be in the position of making use of the languages that learners can speak, rather than using one language at a time. However, similar results appear even in school B between the pre-test and the post-test in both languages. Learners in this control group performed better in the post-test than in the pre-test. The results of the t-test, comparing the difference, show that the difference between the two groups in retelling an English text in Sesotho is statistically not significant at an alpha value of 0.05 ($t=1.610$; $df=93$; $p>0.05$). This insignificance does not, however, dispute the importance of the intervention, but shows the ability of learners to use both languages in understanding text. When retelling a Sesotho text in English, the experimental group outperformed the control group. This means, learners' understanding of a Sesotho text enabled them to retell the text in English. The t-test results reveal the difference to be statistically significant.

Table 4 below represents the overall percentage scores gained from the post-test in all the three areas of reading comprehension, literal, inferential and retell, in both groups. The comparison on the three variables, presented below, shows that the experimental group outperformed the control group in all the variables.

Table 4: Overall percentage scores

Text Language	School	Literal	Inferential	Retell
English text	School A	88%	85%	67%
	School B	64%	44%	52%
Sesotho text	School A	67%	58%	71%
	School B	60%	17%	49%

The overall percentage score, gained from School A in the English text literal comprehension questions, is 24% more than that of School B and only 7% in the Sesotho text. This implies that learners from both groups did not have difficulty in answering literal questions when the text was in Sesotho, but School B had difficulty in answering literal questions in English. The difference seems high in inferential questions regardless of the text language used. From both the English text and the Sesotho text, the difference performance is 41% between the two groups, which therefore, confirms the effectiveness of translanguaging as an inference-making strategy in both mother tongue and English (Nur et al., 2020). When retelling an English text in Sesotho, the percentage difference is 15% and when retelling a Sesotho text in English, the difference is 22%. This part also affirms the effectiveness of the translanguaging which enables learners to interact with text, derive meaning from it (Piper et al., 2015) and retell the text in another language. In general, the experimental group outperformed the control group in all the three areas of comprehension.

Conclusion

From the results, it is clear that the translanguaging intervention improved learners' different areas of reading comprehension. The practices that were applied during the intervention for the experimental group were 'translanguaging' approaches. Learners were allowed to discuss and respond to questions in any language that they were comfortable with. This was in line with what other researchers mention happens during the intervention. For example, Nur et al. (2020, p. 975) point out that:

The translanguaging process was used during the task given and presentation. The researchers found that students were independently easy to answer and understand the text well by using



translanguaging strategy, according to a significantly increasing task score. During the treatment, the experimental class could elaborate on their efforts more while doing the task given. Since the students did the tasks in a translanguaging strategy, they could actively share their understanding with other students.

Translanguaging pedagogy, therefore, could be adopted in teachers training to help them understand how to make use of learners' languages as a resource that can enhance learners' reading comprehension skills. It serves as a tool that helps learners make sense and meaning of what they had read (Wei, 2022). Reading comprehension requires the use of interrelated skills that develop over time, which involves language, understanding of content, and application of certain relevant strategies (Connors-Tadros, 2014). These could be achieved by equipping teachers with appropriate approaches that they could use in bi/multilingual classroom settings. They could benefit from making use of the 'language resources' that learners bring to the classroom. Nur et al. (2020) confirmed that a translanguaging practice is a way to enhance reading comprehension—to construct a better reading understanding and, therefore, an approach that could benefit teachers in their training to become effective in teaching reading comprehension. The results confirm that translanguaging enables learners to make use of the languages they know and promote their higher order thinking when their native language is involved in reading comprehension. Therefore, from the findings of the current study, a change from the old belief of using one language at a time to adopting relevant approaches of teaching comprehension to accommodate bi/multilingual classroom contexts, is recommended. Translanguaging is one of the pedagogies which does not only develop comprehension skills in a 'dominant' language, but in all languages and could be employed in bi/multilingual classroom settings as an appropriate model of teaching comprehension. It promotes a deeper understanding of the subject matter and helps learners recall what they have read (Hassan & Ahmed, 2015). Translanguaging also assists teachers in making use of the language resources that learners bring to the classroom. Therefore, it could be a useful pedagogy to be adopted by teachers in their teaching.

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Challenges and Opportunities of Teaching in Multilingual and Multicultural Education Contexts in Namibia

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Abstract

This study investigated the challenges and benefits of teaching in Namibia's multilingual and multicultural educational contexts. A sample of 30 teachers was purposefully selected for the current study. The data were collected through focus group discussions and a self-administered questionnaire and analysed using a thematic data analysis method. The findings show that teachers have difficulties in serving learners from various cultures and languages, which creates challenges to inclusive learning settings. Although the teachers (participants) experienced difficulty in assessing learners' oral tasks, it emerged that their cultural awareness and language proficiency increased. The study emphasises the significance of a comprehensive training plan in multicultural learning programmes for developing cultural competency and preparing teachers for multilingual and multicultural settings.

Keywords: Distance learning; diverse cultures; inclusive education; Kunene region; learning environment; multicultural Language; multilingual.

Introduction

Namibia is known for its linguistic richness, with numerous languages spoken in each of its 14 regions. While estimates vary greatly, it is largely acknowledged that Namibia has approximately 30 different spoken languages. However, some of these languages are more widely spoken than others. Namibia's most common languages are Oshiwambo (which includes several dialects such as Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama), Afrikaans, Damara/Nama, Khoekhoegowab (Nama/Damara), English (the official language), Otjiherero, RuKwangali, Silozi, and Setswana (Lusakalalu, 2007, as cited in Norro, 2024; Namibia Statistics Agency, 2012). These languages fall into several linguistic families, including Bantu, Khoisan, and Germanic. Furthermore, English, Afrikaans, German, and Portuguese are extensively spoken in trade, education, and administration, reflecting Namibia's colonial past and ongoing globalisation. Teaching learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds can be challenging, especially if the teachers are not proficient in the learner's vernacular. Namibia's adoption of an inclusive education policy that emphasises cultural and linguistic diversity shows a commitment to ensure that all learners, regardless of background or ability, have fair access to quality education (Republic of Namibia: Ministry of Education, 2013). The importance of including cultural and linguistic diversity in the educational system is highlighted in the "Sector policy on inclusive education" (Republic of Namibia: Ministry of Education, 2013).

The terms "multilingual" and "multicultural" are commonly used to describe diverse educational contexts in schools (Lauridsen & Lillemose, 2015, p. 9). According to Lauridsen and Lillemose (2015), multilingualism describes settings in which teachers and learners speak different first languages, none of which must correspond with the language of instruction. They also write that, in addition to linguistic diversity, the term 'multicultural' refers to the presence of many ethnic backgrounds (cultures) among learners and teachers. While individuals' cultural heritage can impact their customs, beliefs, and habits, as well as their language, despite their differences, they both teach and study in an academic environment. Understandably, the traditional nomadic lifestyle of the Otjiherero and Themba-speaking people of the Kunene region, where this study was conducted, may create further impediments to education. Because of their lifestyle needs, nomadic people are known to prioritise subsistence activities such as farming and herding over formal education (Ninkova, 2020). Historically, nomadic societies may have placed less emphasis on formal education since they rely



on traditional knowledge and skills to survive. This can result in low enrolments, high dropout rates, and a lack of community support for educational programmes.

While the study region is primarily made up of Otjiherero and Themba-speaking communities, English is the official language of instruction in Namibia. Namibia's language policy for schools: 1992-1996 and beyond, has evolved to satisfy a wide range of educational needs and objectives (Republic of Namibia: Ministry of Education, 2003). According to the language policy, the mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction (MoI) from pre-kindergarten to Grade 3, followed by English from Grade 4 to Grade 12. This policy seeks to create a balance between the promotion of indigenous languages and the importance of English proficiency, which is essential for higher education and job opportunities. In other words, during the early years of school (pre-kindergarten through Grade 3), learners are taught in their mother tongue or dominant language. This approach is in line with the established understanding in the literature that children learn best when taught in a language they fluently understand (Benson, 2019; Ninkova, 2020). It also aims to preserve and promote indigenous languages. From Grade 4, English becomes the primary medium of teaching for most of the courses, although indigenous languages are frequently taught as topics rather than as media. This shift intends to prepare learners for higher education, where English fluency is commonly required, as well as to equip them with the linguistic skills needed to participate in a globalised world.

Additionally, the Kunene region has 69 schools to provide for the population's educational needs. Most of the schools are state-run, and only six (6) are private schools. There are 43 primary schools, including 38 state-run and five (5) private schools. Secondary education is offered at seven well-established schools. These schools are staffed by a group of 1 187 dedicated teachers. Most teachers (1 113) have formal teacher training; however, 74 teachers do not have formal teacher training, yet they contribute valuable real-world experiences to instruction. The Kunene region has 837 permanent classrooms, 43 prefabricated structures, 108 ordinary classrooms, and 30 rental facilities (Education Management Information System, 2022). The diverse facilities ensure that educational opportunities are offered to a wider range of learners.

Moreover, when the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture (MoEAC) appoint teachers to schools, it assures that teachers from any of the 14 regions in Namibia are qualified to work in any region or school, if they meet the recruitment criteria (Office of the Prime Minister, 2012). However, when teachers from different cultural

backgrounds are hired in areas where prominent languages differ from their own, they tend to encounter linguistic barriers that might impair the teaching and learning process. This language barrier may limit effective communication between teachers and learners, and result in lower educational attainment levels. According to Fielding and Harbon (2013), teachers play a significant role in deciding languages to be used in the classroom, which has a direct impact on the learning process, outcomes, and identity development. Furthermore, teachers' perspectives and practices of language instruction have a notable impact on the educational landscape, since they play a vital role in promoting linguistic diversity, enabling inclusive learning environments and ultimately, increasing educational outcomes for all learners. Garcia and Kleyn (2016) emphasise that teachers' abilities should advocate for and create space for a multilingual approach, even within a framework that officially favours monolingualism. Equally important, acknowledging and respecting different cultural norms and practices are essential for building an inclusive learning environment, and teachers need cultural sensitivity training to avoid misunderstandings or confrontations. However, preparing teachers to teach effectively in multilingual and multicultural settings requires specialised training. This includes language acquisition strategies, culturally appropriate instructional approaches, and intercultural communication skills. Furthermore, the cost of teacher training, which is usually out of reach for many Namibians, poses a significant obstacle for both individuals and the government (Norro, 2022).

A considerable body of literature has been written about multicultural education and its implications. Researchers identified several challenges to adopting intercultural education (Hays & Ninkova, 2018; Moland, 2019; Ninkova, 2020). Their findings highlight a critical issue: teachers' alleged inability to teach successfully in diverse classrooms. This could be due to a lack of experience or resources for integrating multicultural perspectives into the curriculum. Furthermore, some teachers may be hesitant to be involved in multicultural education, because they find discussions about sensitive topics such as culture and identity uncomfortable or irrelevant. This opposition may impede on efforts to fully adopt and implement intercultural education initiatives in educational institutions.

Naz et al. (2023) stated that a lack of awareness of learners' cultural backgrounds can result in teachers unknowingly reinforcing stereotypes and engaging in microaggressions. For example, assuming that a second-language English learner is less proficient or smart than a native speaker may have detrimental implications.



Such preconceived notions can lead to lower expectations for academic performance, reducing the learner's chances of success. When teachers harbour these biases, they may unintentionally create barriers to learning, limiting the learner's ability to reach their full potential. Norro (2022) found that teachers were unprepared to teach in diverse classrooms and lacked the necessary resources to effectively incorporate multicultural education. Norro (2022) argued that learners also claimed that intercultural education had overburdened information access and found it hard to comprehend. Some teachers regard intercultural education as ineffective and difficult, since it addresses sensitive topics such as culture and identity. Furthermore, Norro (2022) suggests that teachers require greater assistance and training to promote and implement intercultural education in classrooms and provide learners with relevant materials and advice. These challenges have prompted several inventive and locally doable practices (Lauridsen & Lillemose, 2015).

Scholars have demonstrated that exposure to diverse cultures enhances the educational experience of both learners and teachers (Banks, 2009; Lauridsen & Lillemose, 2015; Reid & Major, 2017). The findings of these studies show the potential benefits of multicultural education in terms of increasing cultural understanding, empathy, and respect among learners, leading to increased diversity in educational environments. The studies also support the view that multicultural education boosts critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities in the classroom, resulting in a more inclusive and intellectually challenging learning environment. Hence, exposing learners to diverse cultures and languages may allow them to challenge their assumptions and widen their viewpoints. This part of the educational process can lead to a greater awareness and appreciation for cultural differences as well as the ability to navigate and thrive in multicultural environments. In other words, multicultural classes present unique challenges and abundant opportunities for learning and intercultural competency. As such, both teachers and learners gain valuable skills, such as communication and autonomous learning, for personal and professional growth. Erling et al. (2017, as cited in Norro, 2022), stress that multilingual education strategies such as scaffolding and moulding improve learning and enable learners to maintain their multilingual identities, which is crucial in all postcolonial educational systems, including Namibia.

While there has been extensive research on multicultural origins in Western countries, Namibia has only conducted a few empirical investigations on the subject.

Ashikuti (2019) examined the implementation of Namibia's national language-in-education policy (LiEP) and found that the implementation of Namibia's LiEP in junior primary schools varies significantly between urban and rural settings, influenced by factors like linguistic variety, exposure to the MoI, and teaching resources. Basimike (2018) conducted a study on the use of the English language in multilingual communication and found that both individuals who exclusively interact in English and those who are bilingual in English and a local Namibian language continue to face challenges. Mensah (2015) examined the management of linguistic diversity in an international multilingual high school in Namibia. Mensah (2015) study proposed that, in subjects other than English, the use of languages other than the MoI should be promoted. This would help address the language and knowledge disparities among learners who have limited or no familiarity with the MoI.

The current study investigated the challenges and opportunities of teaching in Namibia's multicultural and multilingual educational context. The study seeks to attain the following research objectives:

- Identify the challenges that teachers experience when implementing multicultural and multilingual education in Namibian educational settings.
- Investigate the opportunities for teaching in multicultural and multilingual education in Namibian educational institutions.
- Recommend strategies for teachers to effectively implement multicultural and multilingual education in Namibian school environments

The study is organised as follows: first, the background and theoretical framework that support the study are presented. The next section explains the study's research methodologies and procedures. The results are then presented and the findings of the study are discussed. Finally, conclusions and future research directions are presented.

Theoretical framework

The current study used the sociocultural theory as its theoretical underpinning, which was developed by Lev Vygotsky in the 1930s (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012). This theory focuses on the importance of social contact and cultural context in cognitive growth and learning. In Namibia, where learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds come together in the classroom, this theory provides a complete framework for comprehending the complexity of teaching and learning. Language, according to the sociocultural theory, is not just a medium of communication, it is also



an instrument for thought and cultural mediation (Glăveanu, 2020). Understanding the relationship between language and cognition is especially important in a multilingual setting like Namibia, where learners may prefer to utilise their vernacular languages. In this way, teachers may have a better understanding of the significance of integrating learners' language and cultural backgrounds into the learning process and harnessing their prior knowledge and experiences to enable meaningful learning experiences.

The sociocultural theory emphasises the importance of social contact in learning (Glăveanu, 2020). Collaborative learning is vital in a multicultural classroom, as learners contribute different perspectives and cultural norms. Teachers can use peer contact to foster cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and cooperation, transforming cultural diversity issues into opportunities for richer educational experiences. Additionally, the sociocultural theory emphasises the teacher's function as a facilitator of learning within a sociocultural environment. Teachers are urged to use culturally responsive teaching approaches that acknowledge and value their learners' diverse backgrounds. Teachers can establish inclusive classrooms by supporting learning experiences that span learners' cultural and linguistic gaps. Finally, the sociocultural theory offers a comprehensive framework for studying the challenges and opportunities associated with teaching in Namibia's multilingual and multicultural educational system. Recognising the interdependence of language, culture, and learning enables teachers to manage the complexity of diverse classrooms and unlock the full potential of every learner.

Method

Approach and design

The current study used a qualitative research approach and case study research design, considering that the design offers numerous benefits for examining complicated phenomena such as multicultural education in remote regions like the Kunene region. The researchers could gain first-hand knowledge of how teachers in the Kunene region manage diverse classes and implement multicultural pedagogies within their contexts. That is, the researchers could explore the unique context of the Kunene region, resulting in thorough and contextually relevant data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This level of detail is critical for understanding the challenges, opportunities, and benefits of multicultural education, especially in remote areas like the Kunene

region where educational contexts significantly differ from those in urban settings; thus, it was designated as an information-rich site.

Population and sample

The current study's population comprised 1 187 teachers from schools in the Kunene region. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 30 teachers, which comprised 20 female and 10 male teachers. The criteria selection was at least four years of teaching experience, within the age range of 25 to 50, and having lived in the Kunene region for at least five years. According to Creswell and Parson-Clark (2018), the purposive sampling approach is a non-probability sampling methodology in which participants are selected based on their expertise and relevance to the study objectives. This tailored method guarantees that the data acquired is rich and directly relevant to the study's aims, resulting in more meaningful and focused findings. Therefore, teachers who teach Grades 0-9 in remote areas, such as the Kunene region, were regarded experienced enough to provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities that come with such a setting. Such teachers are proficient in the phonics technique and have expertise in delivering supplementary instruction and learning support to learners who need more assistance.

Data collection methods and instruments

Data were collected through focus group discussions and self-administered questionnaires. These methods were most fitting for the current study because of their ability to generate rich and informative data through group participation. To ensure a concentrated and uninterrupted environment, participant focus group discussions were held in the afternoon, once classes had ended. Due to the vastness and scattered nature of the area, focus groups were conducted with one group per day. However, measures were taken to ensure participant comfort and confidentiality. Participants were assured of anonymity, encouraged to be honest, and advised to share only their own knowledge and opinions.

To study the participants' explanations and experiences, focus group discussion protocols and a self-administered questionnaire with open-ended questions were used. A pre-planned schedule was used as a guide for the discussions, ensuring that the researchers remained focused on the relevant issues. According to Creswell and Parson-Clark (2018), open-ended questions encourage the flow of spontaneous comments



while suspending preconceived notions about standardised solutions, whereas focus group discussions are an effective way to gather detailed information in a short period, complementing other data collection approaches.

The questionnaire comprised three parts: Part A solicited the participants' personal information; Part B solicited the challenges and opportunities of teaching in multilingual and multicultural educational settings; and Part C focused on improvement strategies. One researcher conducted the focus group discussions and supervised the open-ended questionnaire to 30 teachers at the Teacher Resource Centre in the Opuwo area, which fulfilled numerous crucial tasks in the research process. By administering the questionnaires in person, the researcher ensured that all the participants understood the questions. Furthermore, this technique eliminated the likelihood of misinterpretation or confusion, which improved the data quality and trustworthiness.

Ethical consideration

Before collecting data, the authors requested and obtained permission to conduct research from the Kunene region Directorate of Education, Arts, and Culture. Permission was also granted by the principals of all the participating schools. Ethical issues were observed throughout the study. For example, prior to visiting the participating schools, the researchers contacted the school(s) to discuss the study's scope and objective, as well as the expected outcomes. Consent was also obtained from all the participants. They were notified that their responses would be kept anonymous. As a result, the researchers removed all identifiable information, including personal and school names. The participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary, that they may withdraw at any time, and that no one was forced to participate in the study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data for the current study. Transcriptions of focus group discussions and responses to open-ended questions were categorised and classified before being assessed for patterns that emerged as themes using Creswell's (2012) technique. This technique allowed the researchers to identify and explore patterns, themes, and trends in the data, yielding rich and meaningful results. Thematic analysis is effective for delving into the complexities of multicultural education, as

well as understanding the many viewpoints and experiences of teachers working in remote areas like the Kunene region.

Results

Table 1 below displays the biographical information of participants.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

	Demographic Characteristics		Total	%
1	Gender	Male	10	33.3%
		Female	20	66.6%
2	Age range	20-25	0	0%
		26-30	6	20%
		31-35	13	43.3%
		36-40	7	23.3%
		41-45	2	6.7%
		46-50	2	6.7%
		51-55	0	0%
		56-60	0	0%
3	Qualifications	Bachelor of Education [B.Ed. Hons]	15	50%
		Basic Education Teacher Diploma	10	33.3%
		Advanced Diploma in Education	4	13.3%
		Master's Degree in Education	1	3.3%
		PhD in Education	0	0%
4	Years of experience	1-5	8	26.7%
		6-10	11	36.7%
		11-15	5	16.7%
		16-20	1	3.3%
		21-25	3	10%
		26-30	2	6.7%
		31+	0	0%
5	Phase of teaching	Junior Primary	5	16.7%
		Senior Primary	9	30%
		Secondary	16	53.3%

$N=30$



Table 1 shows an overview of the biographical information of the participants. The analysis of 30 teachers reveals that male participation was prevalent (10 males, 20 Females), with the majority having experience clustered between 6-10 years (11 teachers) and 1-5 years (8 teachers) of service. Notably, most of the teachers work in the secondary phase (16), followed by senior primary (9), and junior primary (5 teachers). In addition, Table 1 displays a significant variation in teacher qualifications. While only four (4) teachers hold an Advanced Diploma or Master's Degree in Education, most have a Bachelor of Education (Honours) (15 teachers) or a Basic Education Teacher Diploma (10 teachers).

Several themes emerged from the analysis of data regarding the challenges and opportunities for multicultural and multilingual education approaches. The results are, therefore, presented based on the themes as follows.

Theme I: Challenges that teachers face

Regarding the question on the obstacles participants face in such an educational setting, one recurring issue that emerged was the learners' tendency to utilise their vernacular languages during lessons. This language propensity, while representing cultural pride and identity, is a significant hindrance to the pursuit of a collaborative learning experience. For instance, one participant remarked that:

Learners prefer to communicate in their native languages; during my lessons, I instructed learners who did not speak the same mother tongue to sit together. I reinforced the rule of communicating in English during lessons. (T1)

Learners showed greater regard for their languages. To promote variety in class presentation, I requested learners to interpret specific topics into their language. (T5)

Some learners from other backgrounds cannot express themselves well in English. (T8)

Furthermore, the results show that some learners' perceptions of cultural superiority are intricately related to their linguistic choices. That is, tensions arise in a culture of diverse cultural norms and values when some learners claim their background is superior to that of their peers. This disagreement not only undermines classroom cohesiveness, it also calls into question the very core of inclusive education. One participant shared a related experience that:

When learners arrived at my class one day, there were very few chairs, so I told the boys to give their chairs to the girls, explaining that women were our mothers and we should treat them with respect. And this irritated Otjiherero boys, who said that such behaviour was not customary in their culture. (T2)

Another challenge was related to the evaluation of oral work for learners who do not speak the dominant language of instruction, in this case the Otjiherero language. The inability to fully comprehend and evaluate these learners' oral contributions impedes their academic progress and undermines the concept of fair assessment. One participant commented that:

“Mmm...last year I had one learner who did not know Otjiherero and it was very difficult to do the oral assessment. This year I also have learners that do not know the language and I have no idea of how to go about it” (T7).

Another participant shared that:

“Learners preferred their home language, some viewed their culture as superior, and language barriers made participation and assessment complicated” (T23).

The results further show that there were some social dynamics that emerged from the analysis as learners from various cultural backgrounds interact in the classroom setting. It was noted that some learners are hesitant to participate in class activities or sit with peers from unknown ethnic backgrounds. This may impede the establishment of coherent learning groups and reinforce social differences in the classroom. One participant reported that:

Some learners prefer to sit in pairs or groups with those from their own culture group, rather than those from different cultural groups. As a teacher, um... I always addressed the subject of learning from one another and matched learners from diverse cultural groups to do so. (T9)

Participant T9 also mentioned that even when diverse groups are formed, the challenge persists, since certain learners are reserved and unwilling to participate in group discussions. This reluctance, possibly caused by cultural differences and linguistic barriers, can stifle the exchange of ideas and preclude collaborative learning experiences. Accordingly, some of participants responded that:

During group talks, learners from specific cultures may become more reserved and unwilling to speak up. As a result, I promoted individual reflection before group discussion so that they could organise their thoughts, as I employed smaller group conversations. (T10)

Group work was challenging due to learners being reserved in mixed groups and the slow pace of translation. (T15)

While conducting the current study also it was brought to light that participants regularly employed translation or requested some learners to translate for others to



ensure that everyone understood the learning content. This method, however, was not without its downsides. For instance, dependency on learner translators may result in incomplete or incorrect translations, lowering the clarity and efficacy of instruction.

Theme 2: Opportunities for teachers

Regarding the question of opportunities for teaching in a multicultural and multilingual education context, it emerged that the diversity of their classrooms has considerably aided participants in their professional development as teachers. Participants obtained essential experience while immersed in a multicultural and multilingual workplace, transforming them into more culturally sensitive and successful teachers. Some participants indicated that:

In a multicultural classroom, I was exposed to a variety of cultural perspectives, traditions, and values, and the interaction with learners from different cultures helped me gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for cultural differences and similarities. This experience helped me become a better educator. (T8)

I discovered that different cultures have different values and require different types of treatment. (T2)

The analysis shows that interacting with learners from various backgrounds fostered a deep appreciation for the world's different cultures, which has translated into a more sensitive and inclusive teaching practice. Participants also stated that being exposed to a variety of cultural perspectives, traditions, and values opened their eyes to the beauty of human differences. One participant responded that:

“Promoting cross-cultural understanding and adapting instructional strategies reinforced my commitment to culture inclusive learning environment, where all learners feel valued, supported and empowered to succeed” (T6).

The participants anonymously agreed that recognising the unique needs of each learner has become a cornerstone of their approach. Participants have learnt that different cultures hold different values and require diverse instructional styles. This realisation has spurred them to learn basic greetings and phrases in Otjijherero, while also encouraging learners to experiment with Portuguese. These small steps have fostered a sense of community and broken-down language barriers. For instance, one participant stated:

“Learning to take failure as motivation to work harder and to do better next time. Taking full accountability for my mistakes with the mindset to create room for improvement” (T6).

The commitment to cultural inclusivity ensures that all learners feel valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. The participants acknowledged that, in addition to language, they have worked to promote cross-cultural understanding by adapting their teaching strategies to resonate with diverse learning styles on an ongoing basis. One participant stated that:

Facing language difficulties and varied learning styles motivated me to investigate alternate teaching methodologies. For example, including visual arts, hands-on activities, and technology-based resources can help teachers adopt multiple teaching styles and suit varied learning preferences. By adjusting my teaching methods, I was able to effectively engage and support learners from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. (T8)

The results show that the participants learnt to communicate effectively using simple, straightforward words, gestures, and nonverbal cues. The emphasis on communication also led to improved active listening skills, which helped them understand their learners' needs and provide a more helpful learning environment. One participant explained that:

Communicating differently with learners who spoke a different language or dialect pushed me to develop my communication abilities. I'm learning how to transmit information using simplified language gestures and nonverbal clues. Furthermore, I improved my active listening abilities to better comprehend learners' wants and concerns, resulting in a more helpful learning environment. (T27)

Finally, the participants reported that teaching in a multicultural and multilingual setting has been a transformational experience. It has not only broadened their perspective of the world, it has also given the participants the tools they need to establish a truly inclusive classroom environment in which all learners can succeed.

Theme 3: Strategies for effective classroom

Regarding the question of the best strategies to use in a multicultural and multilingual classroom, the following strategies emerged from the analysis of data: effective communication, engaging activities, language development, and peer collaboration.

Effective communication

The participants emphasised the need to use clear and concise language, visual aids and examples, and active listening in a diverse classroom. They stated that employing simple terminology and sentence patterns helps all learners grasp concepts; however, visuals such as drawings, charts, and demonstrations can aid comprehension beyond



words. At the same time, paying close attention to learners' nonverbal cues and questions can help identify areas that require explanation. The participants reported that:

Navigating language barriers in the classroom requires a multifaceted approach to ensure effective communication with learners who may have varying proficiency levels in the language of instructions firstly, employing clear and concise language during instruction helps all learners understand the material better. (T3)

I teach English as a second language, and only English is spoken during lessons. I make every effort to include every learner in my class; but I do not have a precise technique. (T2)

Engaging activities

The analysis shows that the participants have recognised the importance of cooperative learning and social contact in learning by incorporating pair work, group work, and oral presentations. Participants stated that pairing strong and weak learners' enables collaboration and scaffolding. The participants agreed that grouping learners by skill level can give targeted exercises while also encouraging interaction. Furthermore, participants noted that oral presentations encouraged learners to communicate orally, hence, increasing confidence and speaking skills. One participant commented that:

I translate from English to another language so that they can understand better. Giving a couple of oral presentation tasks, pairing weak learners with strong learners, and having them do certain activities together. I divided them into groups based on their performance in my subject, and this Improved their reading skills (T1).

Language development

A participant mentioned that incorporating both comprehensive (read for pleasure) and rigorous (focused reading) exercises improves reading comprehension. The participant suggested that while translation for clarification might be beneficial, excessive use can impede English development. They emphasised the need to encourage learners to use English as their primary language in class to promote immersion and practice. They were, however, careful to do this with sensitivity and help for beginners. For example, one participant shared that:

"I teach English as a second language and only English is used in class. There is an English-only policy in the classroom, and any learner who uses his or her mother tongue was punished" (T4).

Another participant added that:

In a multilingual classroom, fostering inclusion and engagement for all learners, regardless of language background, is critical. Here are some techniques to accomplish this. Language support. Provide language support services such as language buddies or peer tutoring, in which certain learners who are fluent in a specific language can assist a peer who is studying that language. (T19)

The participants noted that effective strategies necessitate flexibility and adaptation to learners' demands. They also mentioned that providing a safe space for questions and mistakes increased engagement while encouraging the learners to learn from one another promotes collaboration and language practice. The participants shared that:

I try to involve other learners who may comprehend the language. I prepare thoroughly and try to incorporate the other language into the lesson. (T5)

During the lessons, learners are independently asking questions and no one is allowed to laugh when another person makes a mistake, so learners are motivated and they want to improve on their language skills. (T20)

I include everyone in the lessons; I usually call out their names and ask questions and I strictly use only English during my lessons so that everyone is included. (T28)

Discussions

The current study investigated the challenges and opportunities of teaching in multilingual and multicultural contexts in Namibia. Integrating the sociocultural theory into this study provides valuable insights into how social and cultural factors influence learning and instructional practices. The discussion of the findings of this study is presented under three key themes.

Theme I: Challenges that teachers face

The findings of this study reveal several significant challenges encountered by teachers in multicultural and multilingual classrooms. Firstly, the tendency of learners to revert to their vernacular languages during lessons poses a considerable obstacle to foster a cohesive learning environment. While this linguistic preference may signify cultural pride, it hampers the efficacy of instruction conducted in a common language, often English. The results have shown that language barriers often affect learning when learners prefer using their home languages; normally, it leads to communication difficulties and hinders a unified learning experience in the classroom. This language



barrier may not only impede on efficient communication between teachers and learners, it may also lead to low educational attainment levels. Vygotsky emphasised the significance of language in cognitive development, proposing that language not only reflects, but also shapes thought (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012). The difficulties associated with language barriers and the inclination towards using native languages by learners are consistent with Vygotsky's focus on the significance of language in facilitating learning. Teachers encountering these difficulties might utilise Vygotsky's concepts by acknowledging the importance of language in teaching and implementing techniques that support language growth while enhancing understanding and engagement. This finding corroborates with the ideas of Fielding and Harbon (2013), who commend that teachers play a critical role in selecting the languages used in classrooms, which has a direct impact on the learning process, outcomes, and the formation of learners' identities.

The emergence of tensions stemming from cultural superiority beliefs further complicates classroom dynamics, disrupting unity and inclusivity. In other words, the differences in cultural norms and values can cause tension, particularly regarding respect and gender roles. Vygotsky (1978) posited that learning is inherently social and takes place within distinct cultural contexts. This study highlights the impact of sociocultural influences on educational experiences by emphasising the tensions that arise from different cultural norms and values. Teachers can, therefore, implement Vygotsky's sociocultural theory by acknowledging and appreciating the variety of backgrounds and perspectives among their students, utilising cultural assets to enhance educational opportunities, and cultivating an inclusive atmosphere that promotes respect and worth for all learners.

Furthermore, this study found the difficulty of assessing oral work for learners who are not proficient in the language of instruction exacerbates disparities in academic evaluation. Garcia and Kleyn (2016) emphasise the ability of teachers to advocate for inclusive environment that values and promotes multilingualism. With reference to the sociocultural theory, the challenges in evaluating oral work for learners who are not skilled in the language of instruction emphasise the significance of comprehending each learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the range of tasks that a learner can do with the help of an adult or with the assistance of more skilled peers, as opposed to tasks that they can accomplish independently (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012). Teachers can utilise Vygotsky's framework to customise instruction based on learners' specific requirements, offering suitable assistance and direction to facilitate their advancement within their ZPD.

Theme 2: Opportunities for teachers

Despite the challenges mentioned in the first theme, teaching in a multicultural and multilingual context offers numerous opportunities for professional and personal growth. The teachers reported that gaining invaluable experience enhanced their cultural awareness and sensitivity. Exposure to diverse perspectives, traditions, and values enriched their understanding of human differences, fostering a more inclusive teaching practice. Scholars (Banks, 2009; Lauridsen & Lillemose, 2016; Naz et al., 2023, Reid & Major, 2017) have shown that exposure to different cultures improves the educational experience of both learners and teachers. Their findings highlight the potential benefits of multicultural education in promoting cultural awareness, empathy, and respect among learners, resulting in greater diversity in educational settings. Multicultural education has been shown to improve critical thinking, brainstorming, and problem-solving skills in the classroom, resulting in a more inclusive and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Exposing learners to different cultures and languages encourages them to question their assumptions and broaden their perspectives. This aspect of the educational process can result in a better understanding and appreciation for cultural differences, as well as the ability to navigate and thrive in multicultural settings. Erling et al. (2017, as cited in Norro, 2024) concur that multilingual education practices like scaffolding and moulding increase learning and help learners keep their multilingual identities, which is critical in all educational environments.

Theme 3: Strategies for effective classroom

In response to the identified challenges, the participants proposed strategies aimed at enhancing communication, engagement, language development, and peer collaboration. Effective communication involves the use of clear language, visual aids, and active listening to bridge language barriers and ensure comprehension. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the significance of social contact in the process of learning, proposing that engaging in collaborative activities facilitates the development of cognitive abilities. The strategies suggested by teachers in this study, such as group work and peer collaboration, are in line with Vygotsky's emphasis on fostering collaborative learning settings. Teachers can foster peer interaction and cooperative learning to provide learners with the chance to enhance their understanding by engaging with their peers who possess diverse language backgrounds or cultural



viewpoints. Norro (2024) also supports the use of visual support and peer translation strategies in multicultural education contexts. Norro (2024) found that group work offers a natural setting for peer assistance if using home languages was allowed, and using group work more often would gear instruction towards a more learner-centred approach. Engaging activities such as cooperative learning and oral presentations facilitate social interaction and language practice.

However, as Benson (2019) noted, equipping teachers to effectively teach in multilingual and multicultural settings necessitates specialised training. This may include language acquisition tactics, culturally relevant teaching methods, and intercultural communication skills. Furthermore, the cost of teacher training, which is frequently out of reach for many Namibians, presents a significant barrier for both individuals and the government. Language development strategies emphasise the balance between providing language support and fostering English language immersion, ensuring sensitivity to learners' proficiency levels. Flexibility and adaptability are key in implementing these strategies, creating a safe space for questions and mistakes to encourage participation and collaboration among learners.

Furthermore, Naz et al. (2023) acknowledged that some teachers may be resistant to advancing multicultural education, as they find conversations about sensitive themes like culture and identity uncomfortable or unimportant. This opposition may impede efforts to fully accept and implement intercultural education initiatives in educational institutions. Similarly, Naz et al. (2023) noted that a lack of awareness of learners' cultural backgrounds can lead to teachers unintentionally perpetuating prejudices and engaging in microaggressions.

In conclusion, the findings underscore the importance of addressing the challenges while capitalising on the opportunities presented by multicultural and multilingual education contexts. By employing effective strategies and fostering inclusive practices, teachers can create environments where all learners feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed.

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of the current study presented some challenges and opportunities for teaching in multilingual and multicultural contexts in Namibia. The study found that learners tend to utilise their vernacular languages during lessons. Tensions arise in a culture of diverse cultural norms and values when some learners claim their

background is superior to that of their peers. Adding to the problem is the challenge of evaluating oral work for learners who do not speak the dominant language of instruction, in this case, the Otjiherero language. The inability to fully comprehend and evaluate these learners' oral contributions impedes their academic progress and undermines the concept of fair assessment. Further, it was found that even when diverse groups are formed, the challenge persists, since certain learners are reserved and unwilling to participate in group discussions. This reluctance, which may be caused by cultural differences and linguistic barriers, stifles the exchange of ideas and precludes collaborative learning experiences.

On the other hand, the study found that multicultural and interlingual educational settings provide several opportunities for both teachers and learners to improve personally and professionally. Exposing teachers and learners to other cultural norms and values increases their knowledge and understanding of diversity. In a diverse country like Namibia, having educators and learners equipped with tolerance and accepting skills would not only provide a conducive learning atmosphere, it will also increase the spirit of "Ubuntu" ("a human is human through other human" or "I am because of you") (Mabovula, 2011). Cooperative learning allows learners to learn from one another by assisting less gifted learners, however, it also allows learners to socialise, because studying together is a social activity. The inclusion of multicultural and interlingual components in both pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes is critical for equipping educators with the skills they may need to navigate these complex educational settings. Namibian teachers may establish inclusive learning environments for all learners by addressing these issues and capitalising on the benefits provided by multicultural and multilingual classrooms. Ultimately, incorporating Vygotsky's sociocultural theory into the research, improved the researchers' comprehension of the intricate interactions occurring in multilingual and multicultural educational environments. Teachers can effectively handle obstacles, take advantage of opportunities, and establish inclusive learning environments that cater to the different needs of learners in Namibia and beyond by utilising principles such as language development, the ZPD, sociocultural learning, and collaborative engagement.

Limitations

The current study's limitations include the focus on one region and having a limited sample size. Hence, the findings cannot be generalised to other regions. However,



the results can serve as a benchmark for future scholars with research interests in multicultural and multicultural education.

Future Research

The study recommends that future research may explore the following areas:

- A larger, state-wide study to document the variety of teachers' experiences in Namibia's multicultural and interlingual education contexts.
- Incorporating learners' views to better understand their experiences in these settings.
- Investigating the efficacy of various strategies for facilitating successful integration in multicultural and multilingual contexts.

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Impact of In-Service Teacher Training (INSET) on Navigating Opportunities and Challenges in Contemporary Classrooms: A Systematic Literature Review

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Impact of In-Service Teacher Training (INSET) on Navigating Opportunities and Challenges in Contemporary Classrooms: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This systematic literature review addresses the pivotal role of in-service teacher training (INSET) in empowering educators to navigate the complexities of modern classrooms effectively. As educational landscapes continually evolve, teachers encounter diverse challenges necessitating ongoing professional development. The study aims to systematically analyse the existing literature to assess the efficacy of INSET programmes in equipping teachers with essential skills and strategies. By scrutinising a range of scholarly sources, including research articles and academic journals, the research synthesises insights into how INSET initiatives enhance teachers' pedagogical practice and their ability to address contemporary educational challenges. Notably, it examines factors such as technological advancements and diverse learner populations, underscoring the imperative for teachers to adapt continually. Through this review, the study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of both the strengths and limitations of current INSET practices. The findings hold potential implications for policymakers, educational institutions, and practitioners, informing the development of more tailored and effective INSET programmes. In conclusion, this systematic exploration seeks to elevate the quality of teacher training initiatives, thereby enriching students' educational experience in today's dynamic classrooms.

Keywords: Contemporary classrooms; educational challenges; In-service teacher training; inset programmes; pedagogical enhancement; policy implications; professional development; teacher adaptation.



Introduction

In contemporary education, in-service teacher training (INSET) has become increasingly vital in addressing the evolving needs of teachers and learners alike. As educational landscapes continue to shift, teachers face myriad challenges ranging from technological advancements to diverse learner populations (Govender et al., 2023). INSET programmes serve as a cornerstone for professional development, providing teachers with the tools, strategies, and support to navigate these challenges effectively (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Moreover, the significance of INSET extends beyond individual teacher growth; it directly impacts the quality of education and learner outcomes in contemporary classrooms (Mjobo et al., 2025). One prominent theme in the discourse on INSET is the concept of inclusive classrooms for epistemic access. Inclusive education aims to create learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of all learners, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities or learning styles. Epistemic access, in this context, refers to learners' ability to access and engage with knowledge in meaningful ways that empower them as learners (Ajani, 2020; Harris & Sass, 2011; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Therefore, exploring the intersection of INSET and inclusive classrooms is crucial for understanding how teacher training initiatives can promote equitable access to education and foster inclusive practices.

The current study aims to examine the impact of INSET on navigating opportunities and challenges in contemporary classrooms, with a specific focus on inclusive classrooms for epistemic access. By synthesising existing literature and drawing on empirical evidence, this study aims to shed light on the effectiveness of INSET programmes in addressing learners' diverse needs and promoting inclusive practices among teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Kyndt et al., 2016). Additionally, the current study aims to identify the critical challenges and barriers practitioners encounter when implementing inclusive pedagogies and to highlight opportunities to enhance INSET initiatives to better support inclusive education efforts. The problem statement underlying this study concerns the persistent gaps and disparities in educational access and outcomes experienced by marginalised learner populations, particularly in Africa and other developing regions (Ajani, 2023; Garet et al., 2001; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). Despite widespread recognition of the importance of inclusive education, many teachers need additional training, resources, and support to effectively implement inclusive practices in their classrooms. The current study seeks to address this gap by critically examining the role of INSET in promoting

inclusive classrooms for epistemic access and providing practical recommendations for enhancing teacher training programmes to better meet the needs of diverse learners.

Considering the outlined objectives, this study will systematically review existing literature on INSET and inclusive education, synthesising findings from empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and best practices in teacher training. By critically analysing the strengths and limitations of current INSET practices and identifying areas for improvement, this study aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to enhance the quality and inclusivity of education in contemporary classrooms. Ultimately, the insights gleaned from this study may inform the design and implementation of more effective INSET programmes tailored to the diverse needs of teachers and learners in Africa and other developing contexts.

Problem statement

Although it is generally implemented across the world as an in-service teacher-training programme, many educators, especially in Africa and other developing regions, remain ill-prepared to foster inclusive classrooms that guarantee epistemic access for all learners. Some challenges that warring teachers experience include insufficient training in inclusive pedagogies, limited resources, and inequalities that make supporting diverse learner populations exceedingly difficult (Ajani, 2020; Govender et al., 2023; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). Inclusive education involves teaching that is differentiated, culturally responsive, and flexible, with the use of technology (Gay, 2010; Makgato et al., 2020; Tomlinson, 2014), whereas INSET programmes rarely offer these multifaceted offerings and are largely content-driven (Fullan, 2007; Harris & Sass, 2011). The gap between policy aspirations and reality in the classroom perpetuates inequalities in educational access and outcomes, especially for marginalised learners (Chigona & Chigona, 2011). There is thus an urgent need to re-examine INSET to better support the teaching body in facing the realities of modern-day classrooms and nurturing order-inclusive learning environments (Ajani & Govender, 2025; Kyndt et al., 2016; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).



Research questions

The current study intends to resolve the problem through the investigation of the following research questions:

- How do current INSET programmes affect the ability of teachers to implement inclusive pedagogical practices within contemporary classrooms?
- What are the main opportunities and challenges teachers face in fostering an inclusive classroom for epistemic access through INSET?
- How can INSET programmes be restructured to better support teachers in delivering inclusive learning environments to the diverse needs of learners?

The evolution of INSET

The evolution of INSET reflects a dynamic response to the changing landscape of education, marked by shifting pedagogical paradigms, emerging technologies, and evolving learner demographics. Over the years, INSET programmes have undergone significant transformations in response to emerging challenges and opportunities in contemporary classrooms, mainly promoting inclusive epistemic access practices. Historically, INSET programmes were primarily focused on transmitting subject knowledge and basic pedagogical skills to teachers (Fullan, 2007). However, as educational research and policy frameworks evolved, there was a growing recognition of the need for INSET programmes to address broader pedagogical issues and challenges teachers face in diverse classroom contexts (Govender & Ajani, 2021; Harris & Sass, 2011). This shift towards a more comprehensive approach to teacher training laid the foundation for developing INSET initiatives that prioritise the acquisition of advanced pedagogical strategies, reflective practices, and culturally responsive teaching methods (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

The emergence of inclusive education as a guiding principle further influenced the evolution of INSET programmes, emphasising the need to cater to the diverse learning needs of all learners, including those with disabilities, language barriers, or socio-economic disadvantages (Adu & Zondo, 2024; Tomlinson, 2014). INSET initiatives began to incorporate modules and workshops to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to create inclusive classroom environments, differentiate instruction, and support diverse learners effectively (Gay, 2010). Technological advancements have played a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of INSET programmes, offering new

opportunities for personalised learning, collaboration, and professional development (Borko, 2004). Online platforms, virtual learning environments, and digital resources have become integral components of modern INSET initiatives, enabling teachers to access training materials, participate in collaborative learning communities, and engage in self-directed professional development activities (Artino, 2007; Bush, 2020).

Furthermore, the globalisation of education has contributed to the internationalisation of INSET programmes, with teachers increasingly seeking opportunities for cross-cultural exchange, collaboration, and professional networking (Khoza et al., 2025). International partnerships, exchange programmes, and collaborative research projects have become standard features of INSET initiatives, allowing teachers to gain insights into diverse educational systems, practices, and perspectives (Kim, 2025). Therefore, the evolution of INSET reflects a dynamic and multifaceted response to the changing demands and complexities of contemporary classrooms. By adapting to emerging pedagogical trends, technological innovations, and inclusive education principles, INSET programmes have evolved into comprehensive initiatives that prioritise teachers' continuous professional growth and development. Moving forward, it is essential for INSET programmes to continue evolving in response to new challenges and opportunities, ensuring that teachers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to navigate the diverse and ever-changing landscape of modern education (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The role of INSET in the South African education system

In the South African education system, INSET is pivotal for addressing the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in contemporary classrooms. South Africa's education landscape is characterised by diversity in learner demographics and socio-economic backgrounds, necessitating tailored approaches to teacher development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Makgato et al., 2020). INSET programmes equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, and strategies to navigate these complexities and promote inclusive practices that foster epistemic access for all learners. One of the primary roles of INSET in the South African context is to address historical inequalities and disparities in education by promoting equitable access to quality teaching and learning opportunities (Chigona & Chigona, 2011). Through targeted training initiatives, teachers can develop a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural context of education in South Africa and adopt pedagogical approaches responsive to diverse learners' needs (Khoza et al., 2025). INSET programmes focusing on culturally



relevant teaching practices and inclusive education principles contribute in creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments (Makgato et al., 2020).

Moreover, INSET plays a critical role in enhancing teachers' professional competencies and empowering them to address the unique challenges faced in South African classrooms (Khoza & Rikhotso, 2021). By providing opportunities for ongoing professional development, collaboration, and reflective practice, INSET programmes enable teachers to refine their instructional strategies, incorporate innovative teaching methods, and effectively utilise educational technology to enhance learner-learning outcomes (Sebolao & Makoelle, 2019). Furthermore, INSET initiatives in South Africa are instrumental in promoting learner-centred approaches to teaching and fostering active engagement in the learning process (Sithole & Nxumalo, 2018). By emphasising pedagogies that prioritise learner voice, agency, and participation, INSET programmes contribute in creating a more democratic and empowering educational environment where all learners can succeed (Kgobe & Maja, 2018).

In addition to enhancing classroom practice, INSET programmes in South Africa have broader implications for educational policy and systemic reform (Wium & Louw, 2018). By advocating for evidence-based practices and promoting collaboration between policymakers, teachers, and other stakeholders, INSET initiatives can drive positive changes in curriculum development, assessment practices, and teacher support systems (Bush, 2020). In conclusion, the role of INSET in the South African education system is multifaceted and critically important in addressing the challenges and opportunities present in contemporary classrooms. By focusing on equity, professional development, learner-centred pedagogies, and systemic reform (Ajani, 2023), INSET programmes create more inclusive and effective learning environments that enable all learners to thrive. However, continued investment in INSET, informed by research and best practices, is essential to ensure that South Africa's education system remains responsive to the evolving needs of teachers and learners.

Theoretical frameworks

The theoretical frameworks of social cognitive theory (SCT) and experiential theory offer valuable insights into INSET dynamics and their impact on promoting inclusive education in contemporary classrooms. SCT, developed by Bandura (1986), emphasises the reciprocal interaction between cognitive processes, environmental factors, and individual behaviour. According to SCT, individuals learn by observing others

(modelling), reflecting on their own experiences, and receiving feedback from their environment (Desimone, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000). Experiential theory, on the other hand, posits that learning is a continuous process of knowledge construction through active engagement with real-world experiences (Kolb, 1984). Both theories underscore the importance of experiential learning, self-reflection, and social interaction in shaping teachers' pedagogical practices and beliefs (Artino, 2007). The relevance of SCT and experiential theory lies in their applicability to understand the complex nature of teacher professional development and classroom practice. SCT provides a framework for examining how teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, and motivation influence their engagement in INSET activities and subsequent implementation of inclusive teaching strategies (Bandura, 1986). By fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages collaborative problem-solving and reflective practice, INSET programmes can enhance teachers' sense of efficacy and competence in addressing the diverse needs of learners (Artino, 2007). Experiential theory complements SCT by highlighting the role of active experimentation and reflection in deepening teachers' understanding of inclusive pedagogy (Kolb, 1984). Through hands-on experiences, peer collaboration, and action research projects, teachers can refine their instructional approaches and adapt them to meet the unique needs of their learners (Artino, 2007; Kolb, 1984).

These theories inform the discussion on INSET and inclusive classrooms by emphasising the importance of providing teachers with authentic learning experiences that bridge theory and practice (Kolb, 1984; Zimmerman, 2000). INSET programmes that integrate SCT and experiential learning principles offer opportunities for teachers to engage in meaningful professional development activities relevant to their instructional context (Artino, 2007; Bandura, 1986). By incorporating real-world examples, case studies and classroom simulations, INSET initiatives can help teachers better understand inclusive teaching principles and strategies (Zimmerman, 2000). Moreover, by fostering a supportive learning community where teachers can share best practices, seek feedback, and engage in reflective dialogue, INSET programmes can promote collective efficacy and collaboration among teachers (Bandura, 1986; Kolb, 1984). Therefore, SCT and experiential theory offer valuable frameworks for understanding the role of INSET in promoting inclusive education in contemporary classrooms. By emphasising the importance of social interaction, self-efficacy, and experiential learning, these theories offer insights into how INSET programmes can effectively support teachers' professional growth and help them navigate the



opportunities and challenges of inclusive teaching. Integrating SCT and experiential learning principles into INSET initiatives can help cultivate a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in teacher education, ultimately leading to more equitable and inclusive educational practices.

Methodology

The research methodology employed to investigate the impact of INSET on navigating opportunities and challenges in contemporary classrooms, especially in promoting inclusive classrooms for epistemic access, was rigorous and systematic (Day et al., 2009; Donohoo, 2017). This methodology was essential for ensuring the reliability, validity and credibility of the findings.

A total of 212 publications were accessed from Scopus and Google Scholar databases, following the PRISMA review flow procedure (Page et al., 2021). These databases consist of scholarly publications that are robust for scholarship engagements like this study. These publications were further screened and reduced to 56 articles, focusing on those published in English and in peer-reviewed journals (as shown in Figure 1).

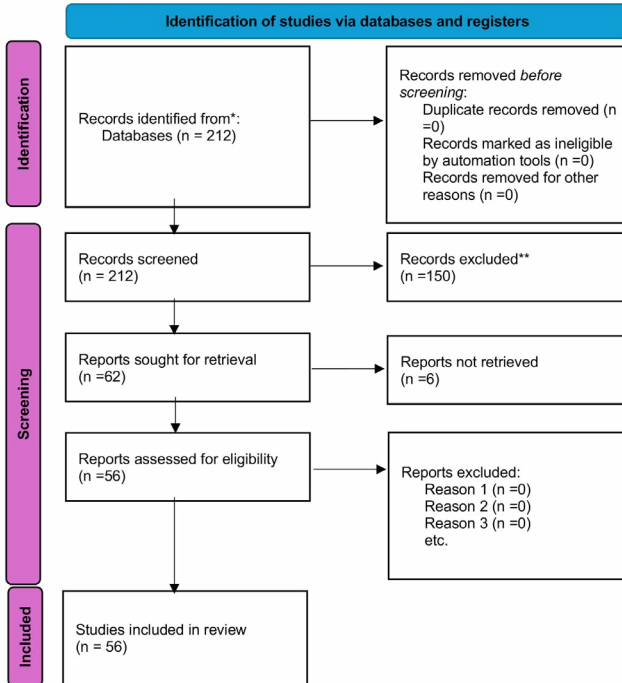


Figure 1: PRISMA flow of review

Source: Adopted from Page et al. (2021)

As illustrated in Figure 1, a systematic literature review approach was adopted to gather, analyse, and synthesise relevant literature. This approach involved formulating clear research questions and objectives to guide the review process, ensuring a focused and comprehensive exploration of the subject matter (Ferguson, 2011; Govender & Ajani, 2021; Grant & Booth, 2009; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012).

A comprehensive search strategy was developed to identify relevant literature from electronic databases, academic journals, conference proceedings and grey literature sources. Keywords and search terms related to INSET, inclusive education, pedagogical practices and contemporary classrooms were systematically applied to retrieve pertinent literature (Tranfield et al., 2003). The use of Boolean operators such as “AND”, “OR” and “NOT” facilitated the refinement of search queries, ensuring a thorough literature search (Zimmerman, 2000).



Screening criteria were established to select studies based on relevance, quality and alignment with the research objectives. Inclusion criteria encompassed studies published within the specified timeframe (2000–2025), peer-reviewed articles, empirical research studies and theoretical frameworks relevant to the study's focus areas (Higgins & Green, 2011)—exclusion criteria included non-peer-reviewed publications, dissertations, conference abstracts, and studies unrelated to the research topic. The screening process involved multiple stages, including title screening, abstract screening and full-text assessment, conducted independently by two reviewers to ensure consistency and reliability.

Once the final set of studies was identified, data extraction was performed to systematically collect and organise relevant information. A standardised data extraction form was developed to capture critical details, including study objectives, research methods, participant characteristics, key findings, and theoretical frameworks (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007).

The findings from the selected studies were analysed, interpreted and synthesised to identify common themes, patterns and trends across the literature. Thematic analysis techniques, such as coding, categorisation, and thematic mapping, were employed to distil key insights and generate new knowledge in the field (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The synthesised findings were then presented in a coherent, structured manner, supported by evidence from the reviewed literature, to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on the impact of INSET on inclusive classrooms that promote epistemic access.

Therefore, the research methodology employed in the current study was robust, transparent and systematic, ensuring the reliability, validity and credibility of the findings. By adhering to established guidelines and best practices in systematic review methodology, the research methodology facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the impact of INSET on navigating opportunities and challenges in contemporary classrooms, particularly in promoting inclusive classrooms for epistemic access (Gumede & Mkhize, 2020).

Results/findings

The research methodology adopted for the current study was meticulously designed to explore the impact of INSET on addressing opportunities and challenges within contemporary classrooms, with a specific focus on promoting inclusive classrooms for

epistemic access. Recognising the complexity and multifaceted nature of this topic, a systematic literature review was employed to ensure a comprehensive analysis of existing scholarly work. This methodological approach was chosen to guarantee the reliability, validity and credibility of the findings by adhering to rigorous screening and data extraction processes. By systematically reviewing 212 publications sourced from Scopus and Google Scholar and narrowing them down to 56 peer-reviewed articles published in English, thematic analysis was employed to synthesise diverse perspectives and empirical evidence (see Table 1)

Table 1: Summary of studies

Theme	Focus	Key Findings
INSET and Teachers' Pedagogical Practices	How in-service training shapes teaching practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhances lesson planning, content mastery, and classroom delivery (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Harris & Sass, 2011). Encourages reflective practice and collaborative learning (Desimone et al., 2002; Timperley et al., 2007). Aligns teaching with institutional and policy goals, especially in rural contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Builds teacher self-efficacy and confidence to innovate (Bandura, 1986). Sustained, context-specific INSET is more effective than short workshops.
Adoption of Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies	Use of proven pedagogical methods through training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INSET enables adoption of strategies with high learner impact, for example, feedback and formative assessment (Hattie, 2009). Promotes learner-centred and differentiated instruction (Ferguson, 2011; Tomlinson, 2014). Supports culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010). Encourages implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Tibane et al., 2024). Serves as a bridge between theoretical frameworks and classroom application.

Theme	Focus	Key Findings
Instructional Innovation and Flexibility	Teachers' willingness to experiment and adapt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowers teachers to trial new approaches like problem-based and digital learning (Haßler et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004). • Reduces resistance to change and builds a reform orientation (Fullan, 2007). • Strengthens capacity for ICT integration and digital innovation. • Enhances contextual adaptability of curricula (Makhmetova et al., 2025). • Innovation flourishes when institutional support structures are in place.
Creating Inclusive Classrooms for Epistemic Access	Role of INSET in supporting inclusion and equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves teachers' competence in inclusive education and differentiation (Kim, 2025). • Translates policy on inclusion into practice (UNESCO, 2017). • Strengthens culturally relevant pedagogy and humanising practices (Ajani, 2021, 2023; Khoza et al., 2025; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ajani, 2021, 2023). • Promotes equitable participation and epistemic access for all learners (Rouse & Florian, 2013; Tibane et al., 2024). • Inclusion emerges as a learned professional competence, not innate.

Theme	Focus	Key Findings
Opportunities and Challenges in INSET for Inclusivity	Balancing benefits and barriers in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative INSET fosters professional empathy and shared strategies (Boyle & Topping, 2012). • Supports professional learning communities (Khoza et al., 2025). • Barriers include attitudinal resistance and systemic resource constraints (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Sebolao & Makoelle, 2019). • Ongoing peer support reduces negative attitudes (Singh & Mukeredzi, 2024). • Without systemic reform, INSET alone cannot achieve full inclusivity.

The structured and transparent methodology facilitated the identification of relevant literature, the extraction of critical data, and the thematic analysis of key findings for this section, thereby providing a robust foundation for understanding the effectiveness of INSET in fostering inclusive educational environments.

Theme I: INSET and Teachers' Pedagogical Practices

It has been universally established that, through INSET, teacher pedagogy is improved in line with the highest expectations in content, theory and methodology. Guskey and Yoon (2009) found that INSET initiatives with a practical focus allow teachers to make alterations in lesson planning and classroom delivery to engage learners actively. Harris and Sass (2011) further corroborated these conclusions, showing through quantitative studies that teaching effectiveness improved when INSET was long-term and curriculum-related. This confirms that INSET cultivates both content mastery and pedagogical agility.

Other research highlights INSET's role in developing teachers' reflection (Ajani & Govender, 2025). Timperley et al. (2007) contended that effective INSET challenges teachers to examine their practices critically and to instil this mentality within their culture, thereby keeping them engaged in active, lifelong professional learning. Desimone et al. (2002) noted that reflection, coupled with collaborative learning, leads to long-lasting improvement in teaching practice. It is especially potent in resource-constrained environments, offering adaptive teaching options. Studies also find that teachers gain the most when INSET is structured within the context of their current



classroom practice (Mjobo et al., 2025). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) assert that context-specific INSET serves to build teachers' capabilities while aligning teachers' pedagogical practices with the practical intentions of institutions and policies. This is imperative in rural or low-resource schools, given that a disconnect between INSET content and classroom realities frequently undermines INSET's efficacy.

In other ways, professional learning opportunities enhance teachers' self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1986), when teachers believe they are given the tools and support needed to excel, they gain more confidence as they try new things. INSET instils such confidence by demonstrating effective teaching strategies, exemplifying them, and providing opportunities for guided practice. The findings thus far suggest some considerable and lasting effects that INSET has had on the teaching staff; however, over time, quality design and contextualised alignment, as well as sustained support, will carry the impact. Short, sporadic workshops may raise participants' awareness, yet participants rarely change their instructional pedagogy permanently.

Theme 2: Embracing Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies

Substantial evidence supports the role of INSET in enabling teachers to adopt evidence-based instructional strategies. Hattie (2009) concluded that meta-analytic evidence identified professional development as one of the most significant influences on student achievement, particularly when focused on strategies such as formative assessment and feedback. Therefore, INSET informs educators' implementation of such strategies. According to Ferguson (2011), participation in INSET led teachers to increase their use of learner-centred approaches such as cooperative learning and inquiry-based teaching, which engage students and foster achievement. Complementing this perspective, Tomlinson (2014) demonstrated that INSET directly enables teachers to differentiate instruction for learner diversity.

Further evidence indicates that INSET is an enabling facet of culturally relevant pedagogy. Gay (2010) noted that training enables teachers to incorporate learners' cultural backgrounds into instructional practices in an inclusive and relevant manner. This is especially pertinent in diverse contexts such as South Africa, where classrooms are multilingual and multicultural. The ability to operate within the UDL framework is another objective INSET aims for. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) noted that teachers introduced to UDL principles through training were empowered to establish flexible learning environments that benefited all students. Together, these findings

stress that evidence-based strategies do not, on their own, diffuse into practice, but require continued professional support. The role of INSET in bridging theoretical knowledge and classroom practice is crucial.

Theme 3: Instructional Innovation and Flexibility

INSET is said to promote instructional innovation and creativity. According to Leithwood et al. (2004), professional learning activations foster environments wherein teachers feel empowered to try out innovations in teaching, such as problem-based learning, technology integration, or project-based pedagogy. Fullan (2007) suggested that INSET is most important in cultivating orientation towards change amongst teachers, as professional development helps to lessen resistance by developing a shared understanding of how reforms should be implemented and why they are necessary. With sustained opportunities for professional development, teachers will become innovators by choice, not by force.

One recent development in the INSET landscape is digital innovation. Haßler et al. (2021) reported that digital-oriented INSET increased teachers' competencies in Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-empowered pedagogy, with flexibility and creativity at its core. This, in turn, equips learners for participation within a digitally oriented society. While innovation is context-specific, it is also a form of adaptation. Atienzo et al. (2018) suggested that teachers who participated in INSET were better able to modify curricula to suit local contexts, particularly in response to the diversity of learner needs. Such adaptability ensures that innovation is not imposed; instead, it is gradually embedded into the learning environment. These findings thus confirm the catalytic nature of INSET in creating teachers' disposition and ability to innovate. However, the picture of innovation will not be complete without institutional-level support packages that encourage risk-taking and experimentation.

Theme 4: Developing Inclusive Epistemic Classrooms

According to Mjobo et al. (2025), INSET has been found to fundamentally improve teachers' competencies in creating inclusive classrooms that ensure epistemic access. Ainscow et al., (2012) and Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) found that inclusion training heightened teachers' confidence in differentiating instruction and supporting learners with disabilities. Genuine inclusivity requires systems committed to teacher



training (UNESCO, 2017). INSET equips teachers with the translation of policy commitments into practice, so learners who would otherwise be marginalised gain full access to curriculum content.

Furthermore, these studies testify to a culturally responsive inclusion (Chabongwa, 2025). Ladson-Billings (1995) found that when teachers were trained in culturally relevant pedagogy, learners increased their engagement and achievement levels. Ajani (2021, 2023) likewise reveals that in-service programmes in African contexts improved teachers' awareness of socio-cultural diversity, thereby enabling the cultivation of humanising and equitable classroom environments. Studies further point to inclusion not only as a question of disability or culture, but also as equitable participation (Ajani & Ntombela, 2025; Rivera et al., 2025). Rouse and Florian (2013) state that INSET prepares teachers to develop learning experiences that encourage all learners to contribute, thereby challenging exclusionary practices.

The results cumulatively show that inclusion is a learned skill, not an inborn one. INSET represents the opportunity for teachers to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make epistemic access a reality for all learners.

Theme 5: Opportunities and Challenges in INSET for Inclusivity

Various studies emphasise the opportunities and challenges of INSET for inclusivity in dynamic classroom situations (Rivera et al., 2025). Mjobo et al. (2025) highlight both opportunities and obstacles to using INSET to promote inclusivity. On the upside, Boyle and Topping (2012) observed that collaborative INSET provided opportunities for teachers to share strategies and grow in empathy. Both factors are important for inclusion. Khoza et al. (2025) reinforced this by asserting that INSET fostered professional communities that supported teachers' inclusive endeavours over time.

However, challenges remain. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) and Tibane et al. (2024) brought forth an embedded attitude barrier among teachers who sometimes see inclusive practices as a burden. Sebolao and Makoelle (2019) argued that resource shortages and systemic inequities present in South Africa make even the best-crafted training programmes ineffective. More recent studies have proposed methods to overcome these barriers. Singh and Mukeredzi (2024) argued that the formation of continuous professional learning communities dismantled negative attitudes while fostering teacher confidence in inclusive practices. Rouse and Florian (2013) also

believed that prolonged engagement in reflection and peer support were critical in overcoming initial resistance. This somewhat paradoxical reality puts on display that, while INSET is a key opportunity for inclusive school-building processes, it faces obstacles in the form of underfunding, a lack of support structures, and ingrained attitudes. INSET cannot fulfil the promise of inclusion until these issues are tackled at the systemic level.

Implications for practice and policy

The implications derived from synthesising key findings and insights from the preceding study on the impact of INSET on navigating opportunities and challenges in contemporary classrooms, particularly within inclusive education, are profound. This section delves into the implications for practice and policy, elucidating the significance of these findings for teacher education programmes, professional development initiatives, and educational policy (Govender & Ajani, 2021). First and foremost, synthesising key findings underscores the pivotal role of INSET programmes in fostering inclusive classrooms for epistemic access. By equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills, and strategies to address learners' diverse needs, INSET initiatives hold immense potential to promote equitable access to quality education for all learners (Kim, 2025). The discussion on the implications for teacher education programmes highlights the need for curriculum reform and pedagogical approaches that prioritise inclusivity and diversity. Teacher education programmes must incorporate modules on inclusive education, cultural responsiveness, and differentiated instruction to prepare teachers for the complexities of contemporary classrooms (Govender et al., 2023; Tibane et al., 2024).

Moreover, professional development initiatives must be tailored to meet the specific needs of teachers working in diverse contexts and serving diverse learner populations. This necessitates ongoing support, mentorship opportunities, and collaborative learning experiences that effectively empower teachers to implement inclusive practices (UNESCO, 2017). Furthermore, educational policy must prioritise the development and implementation of evidence-based INSET programmes that align with the broader goals of educational equity and social justice (Ainscow et al., 2012). Policymakers must allocate resources and establish frameworks to support the design, delivery, and evaluation of INSET initiatives that promote inclusive classrooms for epistemic access (UNESCO, 2017). Considering these implications, recommendations for designing and implementing effective INSET programmes



that promote inclusive classrooms for epistemic access are paramount. INSET programmes should adopt a multifaceted approach that combines face-to-face training, online modules, peer collaboration, and reflective practice to cater for diverse learning preferences and professional needs. Additionally, INSET programmes should prioritise the development of teachers' cultural competence, pedagogical flexibility, and collaboration skills to foster inclusive classroom environments (Khoza et al., 2025). Furthermore, INSET initiatives should incorporate mechanisms for ongoing assessment and feedback to monitor the effectiveness of professional development efforts and inform continuous improvement (Kyndt et al., 2016).

The implications derived from synthesising key findings underscore the critical importance of INSET programmes in promoting inclusive classrooms for epistemic access. By addressing learners' diverse needs and equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills, INSET initiatives can transform educational practices and outcomes. Moving forward, stakeholders across the education sector must collaborate to design and implement effective INSET programmes that prioritise inclusivity and equity, ultimately advancing the goal of providing quality education for all.

Conclusion

The current study comprehensively explores the impact of INSET on navigating opportunities and challenges in contemporary classrooms, specifically on promoting inclusive education practices. Through synthesising key findings and insights, several important themes have emerged, shedding light on the crucial role of INSET in enhancing teacher effectiveness and promoting equitable learning opportunities for all learners. Throughout the study, the discussion has focused on how INSET programmes contribute to teachers' professional growth by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to address learners' diverse needs. By engaging in targeted professional development initiatives, teachers can enhance their pedagogical practices, promote inclusive teaching approaches, and create supportive learning environments that foster academic success and well-being for all learners.

Furthermore, the study has underscored the importance of aligning teacher education programmes, professional development initiatives, and educational policies with the principles of inclusivity. By prioritising inclusivity in teacher training and policy development, stakeholders can ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners and create inclusive classrooms where all learners

feel valued and supported. As one looks to the future, stakeholders across the education landscape must prioritise inclusivity to support teacher development and improve educational outcomes. By investing in high-quality INSET programmes that promote inclusive education practices, one can work towards creating learning environments that provide equitable opportunities for all learners to thrive. In the current study, the findings underscore the importance of INSET in fostering inclusive education practices and highlight the need for continued efforts to prioritise inclusivity in teacher training and educational policy. By working collaboratively to promote inclusive practices, more equitable and inclusive educational systems can be created that benefit all learners. Top of Form

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**Teachers' perspective on their readiness for
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Teachers' perspective on their readiness for experiences of overcrowded classrooms: Reflections from Kenya and South Africa

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Abstract

Governments in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have increasingly pushed for Education for All (EFA), however, with little effort to expand the necessary resources, which raises concerns over teachers' abilities to handle overcrowded classrooms. Through the perspectives of Africentric and resilience approaches, this paper explores teachers' perspectives on their training, readiness, and experiences of overcrowded learning environments. It is important to understand their experiences holistically and how teaching processes and learning outcomes are affected. Through a qualitative approach, this study sought teachers' views on their training and how prepared they were for their experiences in overcrowded learning spaces. A purposive sample of 11 foundation phase teachers (four from South Africa and seven from Kenya) were invited to participate in the current study. Thematic analysis was utilised to process the qualitative data collected through focus group discussions, observations, conversational and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that teachers perceived lack of acknowledgment to their 'plight' in handling many learners, contrary to official teacher-child ratio. Concerns on teacher training lacking in actual experiences of large classrooms that have diverse learners while using minimal infrastructural provisions emerged. However, teachers' perceptions that difficult circumstances were opportunities for better learning outcomes was indicative of their readiness, being creative in teaching and resilient, while those who perceived large class sizes as overwhelming and having lower learning outcomes were also resilient in their functions as teachers. This study makes suggestions for a holistic approach to addressing concerns of teachers in crowded classrooms which includes teacher training, upskilling, infrastructural development, updating policies in teacher recruitment and peer teaching, resource generation, and use of modern instructional approaches to teaching among others.

Keywords: Learning outcomes; overcrowded classrooms; teacher perceptions; teacher readiness; teacher resilience; Africentric perspectives.

Introduction

Globally, learners' enrolment in schools for basic education is increasing, and most of such enrolment is happening in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Antangana, 2022; Evans & Mendez Acosta, 2021; Fredriksen, 2023). Learners attend schools to gain better life opportunities and become productive humans in their respective countries. Rising from the Dakar Framework for Action of 2000 (Kuroda, 2024), together with the resolutions of the World Declaration on Education in Jomtien conference of 1990, which advocated for education for all (EFA) through increased enrolment, retention, and achievement, most SSA countries responded with an increased focus on learner access to education. There was an increased enrolment of learners from pre-primary to secondary schools, leading to the persistent challenge of overcrowding in classrooms at foundation levels (Fredriksen, 2023; Le Fanu et al., 2022). According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), public schools in rural and urban settings over the years have had a learner-teacher ratio surpassing 50:1 (UNESCO, 2024). This is because, the quest of most SSA countries is to increasingly have a literate, productive population to advance their countries' development through an educated resourceful human capital.

Classrooms are considered overcrowded when they have more learners than the stipulated numbers, depending on individual countries' specifications. Some countries have experienced much higher learner-teacher ratios of 92:1, 87:1, 100:1 and above, examples being Ethiopia, Congo, Chad, Kenya, Malawi, and South Africa (Graham, 2023; Nyathi, 2026; UNESCO, 2024). Although classroom crowdedness raised many concerns with a focus on learners' outcomes, teaching strategies, general learning environment, and policies that drive education, teachers' readiness to handle large crowds of learners (Cummins, 2023; UNESCO, 2024), and their views regarding their work environment challenges are often overlooked. It is quintessential to understand the holistic experiences of learners and their teachers' resilience in overcrowded classrooms, as this affects teaching processes and learning outcomes, especially in specific subject areas such as Mathematics, given their distinct attributes, as alluded to by Baloyi et al. (2023).

Facilitation of teaching and learning in overcrowded spaces have a likelihood of overstressing teachers. In a study conducted in Kenya by Otwate et al. (2025), in South Africa by Meier and West (2020), and Graham (2023), overstressing teachers in terms of classroom management, learner support, instructional processes and assessments



present several challenges ranging from poor school environment, insufficient infrastructure, accommodating a multitude of learners with diverse learning needs, to a general lack of learning and instructional materials leave teachers with little resources from which to fulfil their professional mandate. Consequently, the overstretched teachers develop a negative attitude and neglect their learners, leading to poor learning outcomes. Those whose learners have better learning outcomes are found to creatively reinvent themselves to succeed in strenuous learning environment (Muhati-Nyakundi, 2023). Based on a qualitative study conducted in Kenya and South Africa, this paper explores teachers' perceptions on their training, preparedness, experiences of handling overcrowded learning spaces and resilience through their subjective experiences of handling overcrowded classrooms.

Literature review

Classrooms are traditionally situated as learning environments where teachers and learners share their experiences, fostering knowledge and a sense of inclusion in the learning process. As much as teachers are responsible for holding facilitative roles in learning activities, overcrowded classrooms potentially hamper their effectiveness. Harlem and Mayer (2019) acknowledge that overcrowded classrooms are a worldwide challenge. However, in most schools within the larger SSA, such are viewed as the norm as the learner population increases yearly in response to high population density resulting from push and pull factors, especially towards urban and peri-urban settings. Nevertheless, the issue of teacher demand and supply is rarely given a focus. According to Madiba (2021) and Mashile (2008), there is a grave concern about the alignment of needs and the retention of teachers in the profession in many African countries. This is because, as the learner population increases, teachers of overcrowded classrooms find themselves teaching subjects in which they are not professionally specialised, leading to overworking, unhappiness, and high attrition from the profession.

Other reasons for overcrowding may include fewer schools serving large communities in sections of urban, peri-urban, and rural areas (Matshipi et al., 2017). Urban areas, being suction areas for migrants who search for better opportunities in life, are constantly under pressure due to the increase in population density, as they lack planning in social amenities that target children. These include healthcare, school expansion coupled with acute shortages of teachers supply both in poor urban and rural communities (Okeke et al., 2016), where politicians push for increases in enrolment in schools that have suboptimal infrastructure (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Although support

in acquiring better resources can be achieved through better policies, planning, better budgetary allocation, and proper utilization of funds at various levels of governance, political influences rarely fit into school funding frameworks, as corruption riddles some of the processes of achieving desired teaching successes.

According to Prew et. al. (2011), there are no accountability structures in place when it comes to political interference in teachers and schools through unfavourable policies such as Universal Primary Education (UPE) and EFA, percentages on transition rates and mismatch between availability of resources and growth demands, and policies related to teacher training, recruitment, placement, remuneration, retention, meeting learning needs of learners as is required by law and in a professional manner (International Task Force on Teacher Education 2030, 2021;, and South African Parliamentary Briefing 2025). For example, some African countries were found to have devolved the functions of financing schools and hiring teachers to local communities to provide free education (UNICEF, 2025). Although this approach could be seen as noble in attempts to involve community participation in teaching and learning of their children, there remains challenges in resource allocation, budget constraints, and poor planning. Consequently, this has led to over-enrolment, overcrowded classrooms, and poor remuneration as parents could not afford salaries for teachers and other staff members, leaving learners and the few available teachers vulnerable (Chumo, 2025).

Additionally, teachers of crowded classrooms require parental support by children learning through homework as learning is not only confined to the precincts of a classroom; however, this often fails. According to Seleka and Masoabi (2024) the reasons for such failure include parents' semi-illiteracy and/or being away for work purposes, lack of motivation due to changes in school curricula, insufficient financial resources to pay home tutors or teaching assistants in community libraries, or even sourcing for volunteers. These add to the burden of teachers not meeting learning outcomes at schools for their learners in overcrowded classrooms. Cross and Atinde (2015) opine that, poor human resources, over-crowdedness and poor learning outcomes for many sub-Saharan countries result partly from entrenched colonial and other historical legacies associated with education systems that marginalised and limited learners' access to education, right from lower levels to tertiary levels which leaves teachers and learners very vulnerable.



UNESCO (2017) acknowledges the existence of policies that support teachers in attaining equitable outcomes for learners who are vulnerable in various African countries. Nevertheless, the unending challenge of overcrowding resulting in massification to meet international and contextualised national policy provisions continues to thwart teachers' efforts on efficacy when faced with a large learner population with diverse learning needs. Massification, though primarily associated with higher education (Msiza et al., 2020), is missing in conversations at lower levels of learning and is rarely given prominence, in comparison to higher levels of education. Although high learner-teacher ratios at basic education levels have a significant impact on learning outcomes, with further implications on learning relationships, interactions, and collaboration for learner involvement, assessments, teacher preparations, among others (Osai et al, 2021; Wilson et al., 2007), it should matter that this issue should be given the attention it deserves. Ijaiya (1999) and Osai et. al. (2021) believe that classroom overcrowding diminishes the quality and quantity of teaching and planning for learner assessments and heightens stress among teachers. Additionally, large learner populations who only access fewer learning resources overuse or damage them as they scramble for access. In such cases, the implications for higher standards of learning outcomes from learners are unattainable and remain elusive in mass education at foundation levels.

Assessment of learning is a critical process in learners' progression from one stage to the next. However, this becomes difficult when there is massification at the basic levels of learning, where the ratio of learners to teachers is high. For example, assessment of learners in overcrowded classrooms in Tanzania found over 90 learners per one classroom teacher, significantly affecting both the teaching and learning processes, leading to deficient performance (Kadio, 2023, 2025; Likuru & Mwila, 2022). Furthermore, limited application and implementation of competence-based curriculum and supportive classroom management practices were found not to be easily used to aid the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes, which was minimized as teachers took on heavier workloads meant for two or more people. In such circumstances, teachers' pedagogical approaches are hampered, which contributed to poor learning outcomes in various subject areas, disadvantaging many learners greatly (Olubunmi, 2019).

Language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in multicultural overcrowded classrooms can present further challenges for teachers. According to Mphalele et al.

(2022), foundation phase teachers in South Africa experience difficulties in teaching mathematics due to the multilingual learners in their classrooms. The mismatch between LoLT and realities of learners' home languages is likely to exclude many in learning processes in overcrowded classrooms (Sibanda & Tshelha, 2025). In such cases, instead of a language being a resource tool in the transmission of language, it becomes a barrier, unless the teacher creatively exercises code switching to lend content to context specific to the practices of translanguaging. In countries that play hosts to refugees in their regions such as Kenya and South Africa, this can present another complexity to teachers' layered challenges of impossible classroom population. As young learners struggle to learn new languages of LoLT in their host countries to an extent of being semi-lingual, bilingual, and multilingual, they may face difficulties with cognitive academic proficiency and many other dilemmas as they try to adjust to styles of teaching (Cummins, 1979; Ndibalema, 2024). These too become teachers' problems if territorial learners are more, and from different countries with different languages. Worse still, if parental involvement is less in supporting learners experiencing difficulties in language transitions of LoLT because of migrating, teaching, and assessing such learners among others can be challenging. Although some may argue that assistive technologies have the potential to support teachers in mediating language barriers in learning and teaching processes in crowded classrooms, the digital divide remains across SSA (Adeniran et al., 2023; Mello, 2025).

Teachers training in SSA.

The demand for trained teachers for the ever-increasing needs of large classroom population across Africa is not in doubt, especially after the introduction of universal free primary education (UNESCO & Right to Education Initiative, 2019). However, it should be noted that the average proportion of qualified teachers in SSA has decreased as schools continue to recruit untrained teachers and volunteers to meet the learning needs of learners (Bennell, 2025; Schotgues, 2022). It is widely believed that the training of teachers ensures positive learning outcomes as they get equipped with professional knowledge in theoretical and philosophical foundations, varied pedagogical approaches to diverse social, cultural, and complex learning contexts, content knowledge, and curricula design that suit multiple learning situations, among others. Fehrler et al. (2019) believe that not all qualified teachers in SSA guarantee quality teaching and learning outcomes. Skills support and sound practices beyond qualifications are essential to ground teachers in their profession. Furthermore, studies



indicate that teachers in parts of SSA score poorly on their own learners' tests regardless of their training levels, which casts doubt on their mastery of both the content and pedagogical knowledge, let alone how to handle learners in diverse learning contexts including overcrowded classrooms (Bennell, 2025; Geduld, 2019). Therefore, as much as statistics may indicate a high teacher training in countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia and South Africa, the quality of training, placement and support while in-service session and continuing education as lifelong learners in a rapidly changing learning and teaching environment with swelling learner population is an area of growth for resilience in the profession (Muhati-Nyakundi, 2023).

Overcrowded classrooms in Kenya.

Like many other African countries, overcrowded classrooms in Kenya have been attributed to policies such as UPE and Free Primary Education (FPE), which do not extend the capacity to accommodate additional learners and teachers. In 2003, the government of Kenya introduced the FPE, where learners were not required to pay any school fees or extra levies. The push for increased enrolment came with an unprecedented level of over 1.3 million additional learners to the existing enrolment (Republic of Kenya, 2005). Learners' population was raised from 5.9 million children in 2002 to 7.2 million in 2003; by 2010, this figure had risen to 8.6 million (The Teacher Service Commission [TSC] 2015; 2019). This overflow of children in schools where there was a teacher-to-learner ratio of 1:92 was extended to the low private schools as well as those run by the community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations, and informal schools (Muhati-Nyakundi, 2023; Mutisya, 2020). As the enrolment increase was experienced, the number of teachers was not effectively increased to manage large numbers of learners. Consequently, no new classrooms that were the only learning spaces to accommodate learners were added, leading to overcrowding.

In addition, the cessation of employing teachers with claims of low government budgetary allocation, closure of schools due to insecurities such as the al-Shabaab insurgency in some areas, together with complexities that emanated from unprecedented policies such as delocalisation of teachers which ensures that senior teachers worked away from their immediate home environment (Okutu, 2022), left many learners without teachers due to understaffing. Consequently, this forced the merging of schools and learners into a few classrooms, contributing to large class sizes with fewer teachers. Mugo et al. (2011) reported that the average classrooms had a

teacher-to-learner ratio above 1:65, and Mutisya (2020) further reported an increase to 1:92 due to teacher shortage. Although the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) data (TSC, 2017) projected recruitment of more teachers to 99 045 against an existing number of 56 928, little effort had been made by the year 2023, as there were over 300, 000 registered teachers who were still unemployed, with annual learner enrolment increase exponentially (Nation Newspaper, June 2022). As a result, overcrowded classrooms with very few teachers were directly related to insufficient resources experienced, with poor learning outcomes due to the inability to acquire requisite competencies for progression (Chepkonga, 2017). Additionally, in circumstances where a 100 percent transition policy was applied in schools from one grade to the next, added to the challenges of overcrowding, raising more complex stress experiences for teachers' abilities to achieve the desired learning outcomes effectively. All the above presented both real and potential negative impacts on teachers' wellbeing (Muhati-Nyakundi, 2023).

Overcrowded classrooms in South Africa.

Classrooms in South Africa are considered overcrowded when the learner-teacher ratio exceeded, which is 40:1 in primary schools and 35:1 in secondary schools (Marais, 2016). According to Venketsamy (2023), overcrowding in classrooms is a reality as there are cases where the learner-teacher ratio goes to as high as 70:1. Although The Centre for Development and Enterprise (2015) prediction was to have 456, 000 teachers by 2023 in order to have a learner-teacher ratio of 31:1 for primary schools and 26:1 for secondary schools, it was evident in 2024 that this was not achieved. Policies such as the Universal Free Primary Education, democratisation of schools, and high repetition rates in Grades 1-3 were cited as responsible for overcrowded classrooms at the foundation phase levels (Department of Education, 2008). In addition, Marais (2016) noted that some classrooms were too small to oversee large learner class sizes, where sound learning initiatives could be experienced. This places extremely high demands on the teachers. Additionally, high repetition rate for struggling learners and new admission of learners in the smaller foundation phase classrooms were found to cause overuse of schools' spaces, overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, lack of resources including teachers (in-school factors) and other social factors such as: poverty; lack of parental involvement; health and protective concerns; insecurity in communities resulting from service delivery protests and gang violence and recruitment into militia groups which adversely affect teaching and learning experiences (out-of-school



factors) (Department of Education, 2014; Maringa et al., 2025; Ngidi & Ntinga, 2025). Consequently, teachers were predisposed to exceedingly high stress levels.

Stresses associated with overcrowded classrooms have been cited as one of the many reasons teachers are leaving the teaching profession in South Africa for greener pastures. This is because there are few interventions targeting retention of teachers, a situation that has seen as many as 18 000 to 22 000 teachers leaving the profession against 15 000 graduating teachers every year (Simkins, 2015). Bennell (2025), Biyela (2019), and Nyathi (2026) note that high stress levels resulting from overcrowded classrooms are a contributing factor to severe cases of absenteeism, high resignations, psychosomatic illnesses, and other unbecoming behaviours. Such a situation makes the teaching profession unattractive, leading to higher attrition rates, especially for younger professional teachers (Pitsoe, 2013). Shibiti (2020) believes schools have large teacher deficits and a higher learner population that accounts for indiscipline in lower grades. Indiscipline finds its way into higher grades, where learners initiate violence and aggression towards the few teachers available to teach them. Singh (2024) is of the view that under-identification of learners with poly-victimization, a common trend in overcrowded classrooms in primary schools, is part of the complex structural and cultural factors that contribute to learner aggression towards teachers, as there are poor psychosocial support systems, and disregard for effective interventions.

Theoretical perspectives

An integration of Africentric perspectives of social ontogeny, wellbeing, resilience, and constructivism were lenses used in the current study. According to Nsamenang's African social ontogeny, human development is seen in the context of their eco-cultural environment through stratified age cohorts (Nsamenang, 2006). Furthermore, children are expected to be socialised into responsible, intelligent members of their society through a curriculum of personhood facilitated by older siblings, peers, and elders (who include teachers). The curriculum utilised consists of daily tasks that must be accomplished, whether cultural, social, economic, or otherwise, with everyone doing their part, which ensures inclusivity, a sense of community, responsibility, belongingness, and success. This view, according to Chawane (2016) and Tchombe (2019), adds to the overall advancement of the African society, where everyone is viewed as important and has the potential to participate in the flourishing of their people. However, individuals must first acknowledge their roots and be actively engaged in their communities' overall development through their roles. Given the

dynamism of social ontogeny in Africa and the need for children to flourish in society, for the purpose of the current study teachers were considered, in this context, as integral contributing agent to the advancement of their society through socialising and educating children successfully.

Deci and Ryan (2008) view wellbeing subjectively in terms of quality of life, while Ungar (2018), Masten et al. (2022), and Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) view resilience as a process that includes an individual's contextual (both promotive and protective) resources that enable them to navigate challenging life circumstances. Teachers' resilience and wellbeing can be associated with their psychological state that keeps them motivated in challenging circumstances, with a balance between work enthusiasm and work exhaustion (Aldrup et al., 2018). This means that teachers experience negative and positive emotions in their professional lives. Day and Gu (2013) also posit teachers' resilience as maintaining a balance between agency and a sense of commitment in a teacher's daily life as they have exposure to a barrage of challenges in their profession. For them to perform according to expectations of their profession, teachers are required to adapt and resiliently cope with stressors (Boatsi & Van De Merwe, 2024). Some are prone to giving up as others continue extending their services to learners despite the odds against them, which sometimes surpass their negative experiences (Muhati-Nyakundi, 2023). Bradley et al. (2018) and Harcher and colleagues (2021) also believed that teachers' professional work requires constant reflection and adjustments to their competencies despite the challenges they face, and they experience significant positive imbalances where positive and negative emotions co-exist.

Constructivism, which has its origins in Bruner (1961), Piaget (1970), and Vygotsky (1962) perspectives, advocates for learning processes that are actively engaging with teachers as facilitators in stimulating processes that provide experiences that promote knowledge co-construction, collaboration, sharing, and learners working in small groups for better learning outcomes. The experiences teachers facilitate should encourage authentic and multiple perspectives where learners can collaborate and own the knowledge they construct and share with reflexivity (Tam, 2010).

For the purposes of this current study, the teachers' role in their eco-cultural environment as facilitators who are doing their part in laying the foundation of the future of their society through co-constructing knowledge in overcrowded was focused on. The following questions guided this study: a) How did the teachers'



training prepare them to adequately oversee overcrowded classrooms? b) How are teachers experiencing their overcrowded classrooms, and what other training have they received to do so? and c) What keeps them in their day-to-day work of handling the overcrowded learners?

Methodology

This contextual and exploratory qualitative study sought, in part, the phenomenological experiences of teachers in foundation phase overcrowded classrooms in Kenya and South Africa. This was for the purpose of understanding their lived experiences as they manage the most crucial phases of learning in schooling systems. The participants, who were foundation phase teachers, were purposively sampled from three schools in peri-urban areas of Nairobi, Kenya, and two schools in Johannesburg, South Africa. The peri-urban areas are often associated with large population densities as they are suction zones for migrants from rural areas, often characterised by overcrowded, unplanned informal settlements, that host people of exceptionally low economic statuses and with diverse cultural backgrounds. These areas are not recognised by urban planners, which is also reflected in informal school establishments and in enrolments. The targeted teachers included those teaching pre-primary (PP2) to Grade 3 in Kenyan schools and those from Grade R to grade 3 in South African schools. Eleven teachers participated in the current study, seven from Kenya and four from South Africa. The researcher adhered to ethical considerations. Informed consent was obtained from the participating teachers, who were informed of their right to withdraw from participation without negative consequences. Contact numbers were provided for additional or extended support should any participant require them.

Data was collected through conversational interviews in classrooms during breaks when teachers had time in their busy schedules to participate in the study and observations. According to Swain and King (2022), conversational interviews create a greater ease of communication and often yield more naturalistic data. The researcher observed and took notes on specific aspects such as teacher-learner relationships, management of classroom learning processes, pedagogies used, and teachers' experiences while teaching the overcrowded classrooms. Lingua of *Sheng* (a mixture of English and Kiswahili languages) was used in Kenya, while urban isiZulu was used in South Africa to encourage free expression during conversations with teachers. This was advantageous as it helped in breaking down communication barriers that often lead to loss of information in translation when English is used.

Where translations were required for clarity, especially in Johannesburg where the researcher who was proficient in the said spoken languages, a research assistant who was proficient translated the conversations. Collected data were first transcribed, thereafter the researcher familiarized themselves with the contents, followed with coding and identification of themes guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic content analysis. This was collated with the observation notes.

Findings

Teachers' information

As this was an exploratory qualitative study, the findings were not for comparison but to provide insights into teachers' experiences of overcrowded classrooms. The ages of participants in South Africa ranged from 20 to 45 years. This had an impact on teachers' qualifications as they were exposed to different National Qualifications Framework levels at various stages of training. The qualifications ranged from a higher postgraduate certificate in education and one teacher having in-service training in South Africa. The ages of the in Kenyan participants ranged from 25 to 55 years with qualifications including Primary Teacher certificates (P1), Bachelor of Education (BEd) in Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE), to Master of Education (MED), as indicated in Table 1 below. Pseudonyms were used to report the findings and anonymise the participants in compliance with ethical considerations.

Table 1. Biographic information of teachers.

Teacher 'Name'	Gender	Age	Grades	Teacher Training
Teacher 1 (SA)	F	20-25	Grade 1	BEd Foundation phase.
Teacher 2 (SA)	F	40-45	Grade 1	Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)
Teacher 3 (SA)	F	30-35	Grade 3	Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)
Teacher 4 (SA)	F	20-25	Grade 2	
Teacher 5 (KE)	F	50-55	Grade 1	P1 Certificate
Teacher 6 (KE)	F	25-30	Grade 3	P1 & BEd



Teacher 'Name'	Gender	Age	Grades	Teacher Training
Teacher 7 (KE)	F	45-50	Grade 2	P1 & Higher Diploma
Teacher 8 (KE)	F	45-50	Grade 1	P1 certificate
Teacher 9 (KE)	F	30-35	Grade 2	P1, BEd & MEd (Incomplete)
Teacher10 (KE)	F	25-30	Grade 3	BEd (ECDE)
Teacher 11 (KE)	F	40-45	PP2 (Deputy Headmistress)	BEd (ECDE)

All the teacher participants in the sample were females, and as observed, male teachers were nonexistent at the foundation phase levels where most classrooms were overcrowded. Table 1 above indicates the age ranges and the professional qualification teachers held.

Classroom learner enrolment as observed in registers and displayed on schools administration buildings ranged between 40 -130 pupils in Kenya, and 21 - 78 in South Africa, against few teachers as indicated in two sample images below from two Kenyan Schools. In Kenyan preprimary (PP2) and primary schools (PS), it is mandatory to display lists of learners' and sometimes staff population. This is not expected of the South African Schools who use registers only.

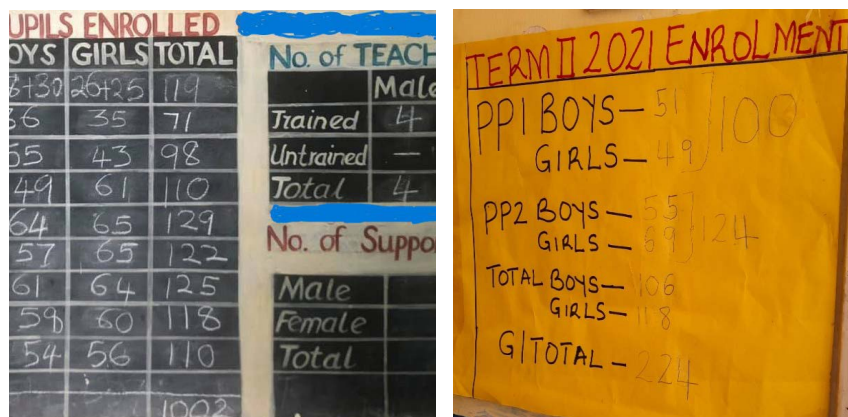


Figure 1: Two examples of teacher-learner classroom population

The training and preparation for overcrowded spaces.

Training is important for a profession such as teaching as it equips teachers with requisite skills in handling tasks professionally in their work environment. There was an indication that some teachers were happy to have received training for reasons ranging from being inspired by parents who were teachers, to having role models in their teachers whom they admired.

Teacher 2 (SA):

... my father was a principal. He is very much part of who I am now. Then, I loved how Teacher Elizabeth taught us and really wanted to be like her. I trained as a teacher and am naturally happy working with many pupils...

However, some reported that the training did not offer adequate preparation to experience a large learner population in classrooms.

Teacher 6 (KE):

I knew when I was on teaching practice, there were some schools with many kids. I just wanted to pass with good grades, get employed and earn money. ... It was a shocker when I came to this Kijiji (poor peri-urban area). Reality hit me. These children are way too many to for me (gesturing) one teacher to handle.

The above sentiments indicate in part a range of experiences and although the teacher was trained, the reality of an overcrowded classrooms was unexpected.

As observed, there was barely any room for teachers to move around and check on learners as they were huddled together in small classrooms. In one case, Grade 1 and Grade 3 learners were in one classroom managed by one teacher, who taught each set of learners in turns. This was disturbing and added to the confusion of learning and class management.

Teacher 1 (SA):

I have these two grades in here... yho! Only someone like me can survive this madness. ... there is no space, they can real stress. I did not expect this will be what I will deal with, but what to do?

It also emerged learners from neighbouring counties or countries contributed to the challenges of overcrowding in classrooms



Teacher 3 (SA):

They are not from here. But they keep coming and we just welcome them, because we love kids. Some are from another country, the home language is not easy for them to learn in, we struggle with them until they read, write and speak.

Teacher 10 (KE):

I think we are an international school. There are many others from our neighbouring countries. Anytime one is brought it is like starting all over again...

A comparison between training and practice on the job suggested some gaps in preparing teachers fully for overcrowded classrooms.

Teacher 10 (KE):

... there is little to no comparison... I thought I had all skills. ... but for this it is different.

Teachers who had long service reported having started their profession with small numbers of learners and kept adjusting to the numbers.

Teacher 4 (SA):

... I decided this is my job. I love what I do. Numbers mmmmmh (sighs) I evolved, adjusting here and there. Now I am good, and I manage better.

Teacher 7(KE):

... in my first posting here, I had a class of 24 pupils... I knew every child by name... things changed over the years. I can't know all these kids by name. I never prepared to teach this number... This has nothing to do with how I trained.

Teacher 2 (SA):

This community had less kids at the time I come here... I felt lekker... the kids are many now. ... DSD and DBE used to give us workshops, but not anymore.

Management of classrooms and teacher- learner relationships.

From observations made, it was apparent that teachers had a difficulty maintaining what was considered good classroom control, sustaining the attention of many students especially after taking break-time snacks, and meaningfully engaging learners in learning activities leading up to lunch hour. There was a challenge in communication, and some teachers had to shout to quieten learners. In other circumstances, they used songs related to what was being taught to help learners follow what the teacher

was communicating. Children danced, others had percussion instruments, such as drumming desks, for a few minutes to gain control of their lessons. This brought some semblance of order and fun to the teaching and learning process for a short while.

Teacher 2 (SA):

Settling many of these kids in the class needs one who understands how to manage them. Before I start, we do Mickey Mouse things...dance round and round, stand like a banana, chill like a cucumber ... things like that to put them in the mood (of learning). ... they drop from taxis with music in their heads ...this is a problem... we have to make them dance a bit (laughs).

Teacher 11(KE):

sometimes it can be trouble ... you get kids scratching each other, fighting, screaming... you solve case upon case wasting teaching time... I have to look for some fun things like singing to break this....

Other teachers resigned to classroom noises and chose to only contain learners who in most cases were engaged in uncoordinated activities inside the classroom, as they continued to mark their workbooks.

Teacher 5 (KE):

...I just let them be as I do other things. At least marking is one task done. You shut out noises but still have to be in the middle of it to function... You can't do much.

It was obvious that, teachers' ability to personalise interactions with learners as they managed learning was hampered by their classroom circumstances. This potentially placed some learners at risk of neglect especially those with learning difficulties. As one teacher expressed:

Teacher11(KE):

... to be honest, there is no one-on-one... no time, no space to do what I want to do as a teacher or could wish to do with pupils. But we try. I cannot easily know who is weak, who needs help, but again how many can you help ... may be in tests... that's when you know the weak ones, but again for some it can be already late ...

Pedagogies used in teaching and learning in overcrowded classrooms.

From observations made, the overcrowded classrooms left few options for teachers to be creative around their teaching and learning approaches, as resources and spaces were limited. Most teachers used recitals, chorales, and memorisation with little



attention to individual learners. The styles of teaching varied from one overcrowded learning environment to another. It was worse where two or more grades were held together in a classroom as one teacher expressed:

Teacher 1 (SA):

Experience has shown me... I plan my lessons, I have the workbooks, ideas on class activities... something happens with one kid in this section or the other... or several kids, and you are forced to go with what works. Things like groups can't work for some young ones... they lose focus quickly.

With massification of learning happening in overcrowded classrooms and the pressure of having learners qualify for the next grade level frustrate teachers in using sound pedagogical approaches such as critical thinking, group or pair work and other sound teaching practices especially with the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which are also unavailable in under-resourced schools.

Teacher 6 (KE):

... some of the learners need to be given exercises that challenge them. But how do you practice with groups, pair reading, debates, role play, some leading others with so many of them? When will you check each one of them, or each group? ... we don't have fancy equipments like the private schools ...

Assessing learning is a pedagogical approach. A teachers reported using assessments that disadvantage many learners, which was indicative of how children were not encouraged to operate in higher cognitive functions as this was very demanding on the teachers.

Teacher 7 (KE):

Tests must be standard; you can have one or two hard questions. ... only the bright learners require that. So, you are forced to think, give easier test and not disadvantage the majority, but again you end up disadvantaging the bright ones.

Overcrowded classrooms as the available workstations.

A crowded classroom may not be appealing to teachers, however, one participant viewed a workstation as an area where teachers meet their 'clients', as they have very few other choices. It was observed that, foundation phase teachers, in both countries, had to stay in their classrooms unlike the intermediate phases or primary sections

where teachers came into and out of classrooms. Such teachers even shared staff rooms which were located away from their classrooms. For foundation phase teachers to stay in their workstations/classrooms was a means to ensure they keenly monitored children's activities, including their safety and wellbeing during interactions with one another, and during feeding times. Teacher 6 termed this as *"stressful...we work like horses to make it happen, sometimes on a daily basis,... when can you be ready... how can you be ready...all eyes must be out... any naughty kid, any accidents, fighting at food time, any injuries, and parents can sue ... it will be like my name is spoilt, if anything. I answer the queries, not the principal to answer-[able to]... I must be watchful all the time. This is my office where I work, and I am alone"*.

Teacher 3 expressed feeling a sense of duty to the many children she handled and looked forward to interacting with them every day of the week despite tough times. "This is where I work... but some of the things we go through we can't say ... there is this song we sing... "my mother was a domestic worker, my father was a garden boy, that's why I am an educator because education changes the world. So, I ready for them every day here and do it to change their world." Teacher 3 felt she could help change the future of learners by being steadfast in her work. This is because her parents did not have the same opportunity to achieve what she did.

In the same vein, Teacher 3 felt she was teaching the learners for future generation.

"... I think I am a parent; I think of my sister and brother's kids I think of my own child, grandchild and that someone is not giving up on them because I cannot do it myself. We don't have much. All these things make me get up to come to school... to this classroom for these kids."

Teacher 9 also expressed

"... I can't abandon them, if I do not care who will take care of them? I have made peace with the circumstances..."

This sentiment indicates a redefinition of teachers' role in a subjective reflection expressed in the way they experienced their learners in overcrowded workstations and the motivation in a continued effort to offer services despite the challenging work environment.



Experiences of stress and the trickle-down effects on learners.

It emerged from interactions that some teachers struggled with work stresses and mental health. This was attributed to the heavy workload, lack of support from principals and headteachers, inability to get adequate resources, blame games for things gone wrong on learners such as small accidents, and their inability to meet learning targets and datelines especially during assessment time. As one explained, it was difficult to remain in the profession for life, while it was revealed that others found a way around or out of it.

Teacher 3 (SA):

I have seen the way newly recruited teachers with degrees work with these kids. They are not tough like some of us (who are) veterans. These pupils scare them, ...exam time is demanding, ... if kids fail, they are to answer for it... They just stay a term or two and leave, others abscond, It affects learners, and we are left to pick up the pieces ... I keep trying I can't give up on them easily.

Teacher 9 (KE):

I never imagined ... that I will teach such for the rest of my life ... no! no! I went back for part-time studies to improve my chances It was an exit plan; to at least end up teaching another level... or maybe I combine with other things on the side... because I just feel teachers are not taken seriously. How relevant is it for me doing all this (over working)? ... how motivated can you be?

Pursuit for personal development seemingly had to do with increased opportunities for a better remuneration, which raises concerns on teacher retention and experiences of neglect despite heavy workload handled in overcrowded classrooms.

Teacher4 (SA):

The salary makes me feel miserable... It is not salary that makes me teach them but why do people work anyway? ... I have to be strategic, build a name, have something on my cv. Then ... (shrugs). You never know, tomorrow I may be a CEO of my own company, NGO or get a better job. Who overworks for peanuts? ...

One teacher revealed that male teachers could not handle crowded learners, being overwork and survive on the salaries offered especially in urban settings as it was insufficient to cater for their needs and live a dignified life.

Teacher 2 (SA):

Unless they have a side gig, the men, shame... this salary alone affects their social life ... it extends to them having funny behaviours ... they avoid families, they are embarrassed, and it affects their conduct. They just quit.

Teacher 8 (KE):

We have had strikes for years and nothing much changes in our pockets. ... Teachers owe people... they have loans upon loans... some think they would rather abandon learners, operate bodaboda or go to building sites to hustle around instead of spending so much energy with heavy works to earn abusive salaries ... but again what can you do? Jobs are scarce.

The above sentiments are indicative of challenges and dilemmas teachers deal with, whether to make decisions based on their continuous experiences of teaching many learners in a crowded environment, to abandon them or to juggle between the two. This can have a direct impact on how they teach the learners.

Teachers' resilience and wellbeing.

Teachers teaching in overcrowded classrooms are predisposed to experience a poor state of mental health for they are unlikely to enjoy their work experiences. A teacher's mental health can have dire effects on learners' outcomes. However, it emerged that although some felt heightened stress levels, they managed it by looking at the bigger picture of what they do with learners.

Teacher 4 (SA):

At least I have a job ... if I choose to be depressed because of them (learners) they cannot be well taken care of. So, I have to be intentional in my work by arriving in school.

Teacher 11 (KE):

Growing up I saw teachers as very important people...I believe I am important doing an important job... I am sure the pupils see me as important. I see doctors, lawyers, engineers, farmers, teachers like me in that crowd of learners. That is something to hold on to and I am satisfied.



Discussions

Tapping into the social ontogeny perspective, teachers emerged as socialising agents who facilitated learning (apprenticeship) through their daily engagements with learners in difficult contexts. They also appeared agentic in looking for ways to keep themselves motivated. Teacher training not only lacked preparation in actual experiences of overcrowded classrooms, it also heightened their work expectations upon assuming professional duties, in relation to their actual experiences are. Teachers' job readiness notwithstanding, handling overcrowded classrooms has more to do with numerous extraneous factors beyond their control which requires a balance of their resilience and wellbeing.

Teachers 3,4,7 9 and 11 showed a degree of stealth, creatively constructing their teaching and learning activities as sense of duty (in eco-cultural setting of belonging) for their learners' future, those unable to cope left the profession as indicated by Teacher 3. Hence, the need for support and continuous upskilling of teachers adjustments after assuming their professional duties as they experience transitions in expectations of their ideal profession, contextual realities of crowded classrooms and in their teaching processes is not in doubt.

Work pressures exist as there is a lack of teachers with adequate skill sets that supports their learners' access to quality education at the foundation phase levels in crowded classrooms both in Kenya and South Africa. Although teachers' readiness through training requires that schools should be prepared for them in terms of infrastructural support, there is need to retain teachers and their learners in favourable working conditions. West and Meier (2020) opine that overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortage, and resources must be reimagined as they are not a phenomenon that will easily be wished away. The possibility of neglecting learners with an under-established teacher-learner relationship cannot be easily sustained, as this predisposes learners to school dropout, petty-to-serious social vices associated with peri-urban settlements which is mostly blamed on teachers ineptitude (Muhati-Nyakundi, 2017, 2019). According to Anderson (2023), addressing teachers concerns of overcrowded classrooms requires a holistic approach in their broader education system, its policies, and how they are directly affected in their teacher training and preparation for their professional functions, contexts, and diverse learner population.

Sound communication with cross-territorial learners in LoLT, both in South Africa and Kenya, adds to layered complexities of overcrowded classrooms. Although

this is rarely thought about, it presents heavy challenges for teachers and learners. For example, the home languages used in South Africa as LoLT and language of conversation and competencies (LoCC) at foundation phase level, and also the official language Kenya which is English and LoCC which is Kiswahili poses a significant challenge on academic proficiency. Policy in both countries suggest that learners be provided with access to education without discrimination (Engelbretcht, 2020; Skelton & Mutu, 2024). However, the language becomes a barrier and teachers who may not mediate French or Arabic language speaking children, as in the case for some schools in Kenya, or Portuguese language speaking children, as in the case of South African schools become frustrated. Consequently, learners experiencing barriers learning in an unfamiliar media of instruction in multicultural, overcrowded classrooms may not be easily identified. This is likely as a result from limited interactions that do not foster robust stimulating activities that call for critical language engagement. As Prayitno (2023) opines, communication and engagement between learners and their educators are impeded more when language is the problem. A careful navigation is usually required, especially if teachers are not equally conversant in their learners' languages. Additionally, sound and modern pedagogical approaches using technology cannot easily be explored in crowded classrooms, as teachers resort to 'standardised' approaches for all children, especially now that there is a push for inclusive crowded classrooms. This to a great extent, compromises the quality of teaching and learning outcomes.

Young, newly employed teachers leaving the profession signals a worrying trend of not producing enough teachers for the foundation phase level in the two countries. Additionally, the absence of male teachers in overcrowded classrooms denies learners specific social skills and the construction of certain knowledge related to males. The teacher attrition rates mean that younger teachers miss out on critical skill sets from older colleagues who have maturer wealth of experience in the profession. Gaps in mentorship and modelling as a natural apprenticeship (Nsamenang, 2006), needs reimagination and must be bridged to save the profession, and sound learning at foundation levels. This is likely to help in learners' personhood and for teachers to play their part in their eco-cultural environment ensuring the co-construction of knowledge is uninterrupted. In the same vein, issues of disruptive, chaotic, and indisciplined learners, safety concerns, feelings of inadequacy, and work-related stress may be well managed with some help for teachers to feel valued by the community or society they serve (Muhati-Nyakundi, 2023). The current study therefore, suggests



that, supporting new teachers by pairing them in peer/co-teaching activities with long serving colleagues, together with the support of sound instructional materials through the school management teams as is the case in South Africa, and board of governors as is the case in Kenya, can boost their confidence, self-worth, sense of belonging and resilience to have a longer service period in the profession. In this regard, newly recruited teachers may likely feel better accommodated when presented with overcrowded classrooms, which may not necessarily be stressful.

As challenges of demand, supply and retention of graduate teachers seem to persist, the burden borne heavily by teachers who remain in the profession should be re-imagined. Governments must have sustainable solutions that are attractive and incentivising to step up to the demands of teaching services. The improvement of learning environment, progressive trends in teacher-learner-parent relationships, budgetary matters, security, and infrastructural adjustments, such as adopting open classrooms instead of small, four-walled, overcrowded rooms, can contribute to better experiences of knowledge sharing, co-construction and in teaching and learning for large class populations. Modern assistive digital technologies can provide a much-needed creative pedagogical introduction to stimulate learners, as it keeps teachers motivated and opens new horizons in learning processes for those who are trained and ready for such. Furthermore, there are very few home languages in Africa that have a digital presence for utilisation in overcrowded learning environments. This is an opportunity that can be tapped into and not be a challenge.

Teachers who have handled heavier workloads, and for many years have shown unique tendencies of resilience, defy the odds as a show of contributing to societal advancement. An understanding of such a more profound sense of professionalism akin to a 'calling', together with their feelings of a sense of responsibility and finding meaningfulness in what they do, is an important area for further exploration in research. The participants' belief that, the future of children in Kenya's and South African was a shared responsibility of communities with teachers doing their part as others did theirs is an explanation of their determination and possessing good abilities to exercise perseverance despite apparent threats to their wellbeing. Makoella (2021) and Muhati-Nyakundi (2023) believe that more research is needed to reveal other gaps that exist in supporting teachers who face challenges in overcrowded inclusive classrooms for positive learning and teaching experiences. Without research evidence from wider empirical data, important issues affecting teachers' training, readiness to

handle crowded learners at lower levels including preschools are likely to lead to higher teacher attrition in the larger SSA as they encounter negative experiences (Unguanyi, et al., 2021). Additionally, sustaining teachers throughout professional practices, whether in classrooms with a low or higher learner-educator ratio, is important and should not be ignored, as schools remain crucial learners' knowledge co-construction, developmental and nurturing sites.

Limitations and suggestions.

The current study was not intended for generalisation as the sample was limited in number, consisted of two geographical areas, and the findings were based on subjective data. Due to logistical constraints, multiple data which could have been used to triangulate and enrich the study outcomes were not collected. However, it is insightful and can be used to spur future expanded studies. Teachers' training notwithstanding, does not guarantee the necessary competencies for overcrowded classrooms, job satisfaction, and quality skilled practices, since working in overcrowded classroom environments requires more deliberate investment in upskilling and continuous on-the-job training for more progressive pedagogical approaches that foster better learner co-constructive engagements. Additionally, having assistant teachers to pair up in class management, interactive instructional materials, and more improved physical infrastructure, among other improvements, support optimal teaching and learning processes. This can also help teachers be more resilient and feel cushioned against work-stress-related challenges that compromise their wellbeing. However, a focus on policies of training, recruitment and retention of teachers, those that prioritise enrolment and maintenance of infrastructure, support for school management boards, and engagement with all stakeholders are required to enable teachers to have positive experiences and offer their best services in overcrowded classrooms. Overcrowded classrooms should not only just be viewed negatively and associated with negative experiences. Instead, the opportunities they present can be explored as this phenomenon is unlikely to be erased in Kenya and South Africa, and the larger SSA. Otherwise, such classrooms, particularly at the foundation phase levels may remain unattractive for younger teachers in the profession, and unmanageable for the long-serving ones.



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