NORRAG SPECIAL ISSUE 11

Multilingualism and Language Transition: Innovations and Possibilities

GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE
NORRAG GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTRE

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NORRAG Special issue (NSI) is an open-source periodical. It seeks to give prominence to authors from different countries and with diverse perspectives. Each issue is dedicated to a special topic of global education policy and international cooperation in education. NSI includes a number of concise articles from diverse perspectives and actors with the aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice as well as advocacy and policy in international education development. The content and perspectives presented in the articles are those of the individual authors and do not represent views of any of these organizations. In addition, note that throughout the issue, the style of English (British, American), may vary to respect the original language of the submitted articles.

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NORRAG is the Global Education Centre of the Geneva Graduate Institute and a global network of more than 5,800 members for international policies and cooperation in education and training. NORRAG is an offshoot of the Research, Review, and Advisory Group (RRAG) established in 1977 and at the time funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Swedish International Development Authority (Sida). It was charged with critically reviewing and disseminating education research related to the Global South. Since our move to Switzerland in 1992, NORRAG has been significantly supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, and, for a period, the Open Societies Foundation (OSF).

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Foreword

Multilingualism is simply a matter-of-fact in many nation-states. Multilingual societies require multilingual education if they are to provide accessible, quality and equitable education for all. Despite this need, the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report indicated that up to 40% of learners across the globe lacked access to education in a language they could comprehend or articulate. The need for multilingual learning is supported by research across various disciplines, demonstrating the cognitive benefits of acquiring literacy in a first language before learning a second language and the value of respecting the knowledge systems, culture and identities of minoritised peoples. Nevertheless, providing effective multilingual education is far from straightforward. *NSI 11: Multilingualism and Language Transition: Innovations and Possibilities* addresses the major challenges and opportunities inherent in implementing multilingual education in ways that respect learners' rights to education (UDHR §26; ICESCR, §13, 14; CRC § 28, 29), cultural expression (UDHR §27; ICESCR, §15) and livelihoods (UN 1948, UDHR §23; ICESCR, §6).

The guest editors of this NORRAG Special Issue have curated a selection of 24 articles from 58 contributors across four continents that explore the multifaceted challenges and opportunities of multilingual education in 21 diverse contexts, the majority of which are characterised by histories of colonial oppression that involved marginalising and minoritising autochthonous languages. The authors analyse how the effects of these colonial pasts persist in contemporary classrooms around the world and how they affect the learning opportunities of millions. They examine the impact of language policies on learning outcomes, inclusion of minorities, cultural rights, sustainability, life chances and livelihoods. The authors highlight the benefits of mother-tongue-based instruction—particularly in combination with other languages—while addressing the complexities involved in the politics, policy and practice of implementing multilingual education. The articles in this issue address the challenges involved in language transition, such as those involved in the shift in the language of instruction from a learner's first language to their second, and propose strategies to mitigate these challenges. Several case studies in this Special Issue illustrate successful ways of implementing multilingual education, emphasising the importance of culturally respectful pedagogy, translanguaging (or moving fluently between different languages) and appropriate paper-based or digital teaching materials.

The authors underline the need for pre- and in-service training for teachers to develop both the technical skills and normative orientations necessary for developing effective and inclusive curricula, pedagogies and assessments that support learning progress across all subjects and in all languages relevant to their students. Nevertheless, effective multilingual education cannot be achieved in the absence of sufficient resources. The authors advocate for policies and practices that recognise multilingualism as a lived reality in the Global South and North and also as an asset that must be promoted if equitable access to quality education is to be provided and to foster inclusion and social justice.

Overall, this collection of articles constitutes a valuable resource for researchers, policymakers and practitioners looking to fulfil the transformative potential of multilingual education. Part 1 explores the relationship between language practices in schools and the communities they serve, examining how multilingual education can create inclusive spaces. Part 2 focuses on first-language (or mother tongue)-based multilingual education programming in primary schools and emphasises literacy in children's first languages as a crucial starting point for a gradual transition for their learning of—or in—a second language. Part 3 unpacks the theories and practices of language transition in education systems in which the main language of learning and teaching is not the learner's first language and explores pedagogical innovations designed to support multilingual learners. Part 4 investigates multilingualism's potential to enhance inclusion in higher education and teacher professional learning, thereby contributing to more equitable societies. Part 5 examines the links between multilingual education policy, planning and curriculum implementation, discussing the systemic nature of multilingual education. By addressing both the theoretical and practical challenges of multilingual education, this volume contributes to the growing body of literature on how to create more just and equitable education systems for all learners.

We thank the editors, contributors and reviewers of this NORRAG Special Issue. Most of all, we thank you, the reader, for your interest and action in this critical topic.

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NORRAG SPECIAL ISSUE

NORRAG Special Issue (NSI) was launched in 2018 with the ambition to be an open-source periodical giving prominence to authors from various countries and with diverse perspectives. In line with NORRAG's strategy and seeking to bridge the gap between theory and practice, each issue focuses on the current debates that frame global education policy and international cooperation in education. The issues aim to stimulate discussion and present different viewpoints on a topic; therefore, they do not necessarily represent the views of NORRAG as an organization or the wider NORRAG membership.

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Introduction

Multilingualism is a central feature of diverse, mobile, and changing societies. Multilingual education (MLE) leverages multilingualism for classroom learning. It makes learning more inclusive, can improve school–community relations, and contributes to social cohesion. For these reasons and more, if formal education institutions are to help achieve SDG4, they must embrace the languages that learners are speaking outside their gates.

Global influencers and agencies are recognizing the value of multi-language learning in basic education (World Bank, 2019), especially for learning to read and write. Promising examples of MLE pedagogy and curricula are proliferating, as are theoretical insights into multi-language learning. This NORRAG Special Issue brings together theoretical debate on language in education, examples of innovative MLE programs and practices, and critical analysis of MLE policies and their implementation. All the contributions move beyond arguments defending MLE to address questions around how to design and implement MLE in ways that strengthen inclusivity and contribute to sustainable development and reparative futures.

Understandings of Multilingualism and MLE

For learners around the globe, multilingualism can be an enormous asset for learning. Multilingual practices can be found in all phases of education, from pre-school up to vocational and higher education, as the contributions to this Special Issue demonstrate. However, MLE can be understood in very different ways depending on one's underlying assumptions about language and multilingualism. Specifically, *monoglossic* and *transglossic* understandings of language and multilingualism have different implications for MLE (García, 2009).

The monoglossic perspective views languages in terms of standardized systems of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and orthography, each associated with one or more communities of speakers. This perspective sees languages as "naturally" distinct, with clear boundaries between them. In this perspective, monolingualism is the assumed norm; multilingualism is seen as an aberration, rather than a readily available resource for learning. Distinct languages should be kept separate in the education context. This perspective underpins transition MLE systems, where transition from a L1 to a less familiar L2 is subtractive, with learners "exiting" one language and "entering" another. The transition year, the first year of schooling in which L2 displaces L1, can be particularly challenging for teachers and learners.

Transglossic or functional perspectives on language are supported by psycho-linguistic research, which demonstrates that language is infused with affective and cognitive resources in the brain as part of a single, dynamic, and integrated system (Cook, 2012; Herdina & Jessner, 2002). Learners' familiar languages are seen as resources for learning additional languages and gaining subject

Box 1: A Few Notes on Terminology

A few key terms related to language and learning are found throughout this NORRAG Special Issue (NSI):

- The terms *familiar language, home language, first language, mother tongue/language*, and *L1* refer to the language that learners have learned outside of the school environment, including in the home context, and that they use regularly in those contexts.
- The terms *second language* and *L2* refer to a language that has been learned outside of the home context of the learner; this language is often the primary language of learning and teaching in school.
- The terms *language of teaching and learning* (LOLT), *language of instruction* (LoI), and m*edium of instruction* (MoI) all refer to the choice of language made for learning, teaching, and assessment.
- *Globally dominant languages* are the standard forms of major languages that are used widely across many countries as LOLT. These include the languages of former and current colonizing powers.
- *Nationally dominant languages* or *national languages* refer in this NSI to officially designated languages that are mandated as a LOLT in formal education.
- *Non-dominant* or *minoritized* languages are locally spoken languages that have little or no legal recognition in a nation state and are not typically permitted as LOLT in formal education.
- The terms *multilingual education* and *MLE* refer to education systems where the formal curriculum includes more than one language of instruction: typically, the official language of the nation as well as a regional or local language.
- In the typology of MLE:
  - *Transition MLE* refers to the initial use of a home language of the learner as LOLT, with a transition to a regional or official LOLT. When this takes place before or in grade 4, it is called *early-exit;* when it takes place closer to the end of primary school, it is termed *late-exit*. Transition MLE is a *subtractive* form of MLE, because at some point in the curriculum it removes the L1 and substitutes the L2 as LOLT.
  - *Maintenance MLE* or L*1-based MLE* refer to the use of the learner's home language as LOLT throughout primary school, with the addition of an official language of instruction in the later years. Maintenance MLE is an *additive* form of MLE, as it adds the L2 to the existing L1 medium of instruction.
- In many Bantu languages, a prefix is used to indicate 'language'. For example, the 'Ki-' prefix in Kiswahili and Kinyarwanda, 'Chi-' in Chibemba or 'Lu-' in Luganda. Different articles in this NSI follow different conventions when translating the names of Bantu languages into English. With respect to Kiswahili language, most articles, although not all, follow UNESCO (2021) in naming it Kiswahili.

competences, and language transition is seen as additive and flexible as learners' multilingual repertoires expand. This perspective underpins maintenance MLE systems, where the use of L1 is continued after an L2 has been introduced for learning and teaching.

Multilingualism as an Asset for Learning

Multilingual Learning

The notion of multilingual learning aligns with the transglossic perspective. The recognition and leveraging of children's language fluencies for learning removes the either/or choice between learners' familiar languages and a nationally or internationally dominant language. It provides the rationale for moving education policy and practice beyond discrete "linguistic boxes" (Makalela, 2015) to enable learners to develop language skills for an expanding range of social, educational, and professional contexts.

Multilingual learning is supported by research from across the disciplines of cognitive psychology (e.g., Herdina & Jessner, 2022), sociolinguistics, and education (e.g., García & Wei, 2015). Meta-analyses of research evidence show that it is easier for children to acquire foundational literacy in an L2 if they have first achieved literacy in an L1 (Collier & Thomas, 2017; May, 2017). The same research also shows that the principle of cross-linguistic transfer also applies to advanced literacy practices, such as those associated with specific subject disciplines. This means that the continued use of L1 after the introduction of a nationally or globally dominant LOLT into secondary education and even post-basic education can strengthen learning of both languages and of non-language subjects. Learners' developing multilingualism is an asset for learning across the curriculum and across educational phases.

Translanguaging as a Multilingual Learning Resource

Translanguaging refers to "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages" (Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 281). This use of multiple languages simultaneously is heard on streets and homes across much of the Global South. As a pedagogy, translanguaging involves the intentional and strategic use of total linguistic resources of bi-/multilingual students in the classroom (García & Wei, 2014). Pedagogical translanguaging is distinguished from *code switching*, a term used by some education researchers to describe teachers' classroom talk that alternates between learners' L1 and L2 in an unplanned way (Clegg & Afitska, 2011).

Translanguaging transgresses the boundaries between named languages and allows both teachers and learners to utilize their total repertoires in learning both language and contents in multilingual classrooms (Heugh, 2015). Translanguaging creates an inclusive classroom space where students from all language backgrounds can make their languages and language practices visible without being judged. In facilitating students' use of diverse home or community language practices for learning purposes, teachers can create an environment of co-learning (Wei, 2024). Such an environment nullifies the question of which and whose languages should be used in the classroom and mitigates the prioritization of some languages over others. Phyak (2023) reports that translanguaging practices support Indigenous Nepalese learners to feel a sense of belonging in school. Heugh (2015) also observes that in South African schools, translanguaging pedagogy promotes inclusion by bridging the gap between home and school epistemologies.

The Realities of Education in Multilingual Environments

Multilingual Education and Global Education Practice

International organizations are increasingly supporting MLE programs that are focused on reading and writing in the early years. As the discourse of foundational learning has gained prominence (see NSI#09 on Foundational Learning), uptake of L1-based MLE programming has extended to accelerated learning programs for children who, for various reasons, have not achieved foundational literacy by the time they are old enough for upper primary or secondary school. These trends are emerging in a context where education outcomes, particularly in the Global South, are declining. A 2020 UNICEF report, Addressing the learning crisis, observes that "[a]lthough more children than ever before are enrolled in school, for too many, schooling does not equal learning" (p. 2); the report notes that in 2016, an estimated 600+ million children and adolescents were failing to reach minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. The Sustainable Development Goal for education (SDG4) was set to address this crisis in learning by 2030. However, according to the 2023 SDG4 Scorecard Progress Report, "only a minority of countries were making enough progress prior to the onset of COVID-19 to achieve their set targets" (p. 32), with less than 50% of countries likely to achieve SDG4 benchmarks by 2025. The COVID-19 pandemic presented a huge additional obstruction to global progress in education.

In response, a coalition of international education and development agencies initiated an effort to end "learning poverty" (World Bank, 2019) by increasing the proportion of children who are able to read a sentence with understanding. However, this definition of learning poverty begs the question of language, since reading with understanding assumes fluency in the language of the text and the classroom. Researchers are clear that using the learners' first or home language (L1) as language of instruction across the curriculum results in better learning outcomes. In a study of effective learning in Africa, Schroeder et al. (2021) examined more than 50 MLE programs; of the handful of programs that were producing the desired learning outcomes, all featured the use of the pupils' L1 as the LOLT across the curriculum and throughout the primary grades. Such research findings are leading global influencers and resourcing institutions, including the World Bank,[1] to advocate for multilingual learning.

Even so, it is too easy to implement L1-medium literacy and/or numeracy programs, ignoring the critical importance of language of instruction choice through the entire curriculum. Despite research findings on the value of using the L1 for as long and as widely as possible (ibid), reading instruction-only models of multilingual learning are prevalent in education policy and practice. The "MLE" programs most often implemented by governments and their counterparts in international education today consist only of early-grade reading instruction. Such programs do not attend to other equally important components of effective multilingual learning: use of the L1 as the language of instruction across the curriculum, subject textbooks in the L1, teachers' oral and written fluency in both languages, the programmed acquisition of oral and written skills in the L2, and an extended process of transitioning from L1-medium to L2-medium teaching and learning.[2]

Reparative and Transformative Multilingual Education

This neglect of the range of components of MLE programming is based on the notion that foundational literacy is the most central feature of basic education; curricular content beyond foundational skills seems to be off the table where MLE is concerned. However, broader understandings of education and inclusion speak to an agenda for MLE that extends well beyond foundational learning. The recent UNESCO-led debate on the Futures of Education has highlighted how education that is epistemically inclusive contributes to

transformative and reparative futures. Epistemic inclusion refers to the recognition of the knowledge practices of diverse communities, including their language practices (Milligan, 2022). In education, epistemic inclusion also concerns learners' access to the curriculum. It has profound implications for language choices in the classroom.

Reparative education contributes to reconciliation by recognizing and addressing current and historic violence (Sriprakash, 2022). Milligan et al. (2024) argue that burdening learners with a LOLT that is not widely spoken in the community beyond the school gate is a form of cultural violence that can legitimate other forms of violence in schools (see also Isingoma et al. in this NSI). Hence, imposing monolingual education on multilingual learners is incompatible with reparative education. Proponents of transformative education focus on education's role in transforming social and ecological norms in order to live sustainably on this planet. Mbembe (2023), in his working paper Pathways of Tomorrow, argues that the use of a small number of "global" languages in education is inadequate to address issues such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity—issues that are often more immediately experienced as life-changing by marginalized speakers of non-dominant languages. Transformation, thus conceived, must involve minoritized Indigenous peoples and must honor, develop, and use their languages in collaborative and multilingual ways. Cultural violence, direct violence, and environmental violence are complexly intertwined with epistemic exclusion. Hence, embracing multilingualism within education is a step toward creating education systems that are both reparative and transformative. The contributions to this NSI demonstrate that it is a step that many learners, educators, and education programmers are ready to take.

Ongoing Challenges in MLE Programming

As the papers in this volume demonstrate, a number of enduring challenges confront MLE programming. Some of these challenges are pedagogical in nature, others are more linguistic, and still others have to do with political will and prioritization. Some examples of such challenges are described below.

Policy-Related Challenges

- The rationale for a multi-language education policy: Inclusive language in education policy may be built on fundamental national beliefs about language and the nation (e.g., Ethiopia and South Africa); such policy may also be made largely in response to advocacy from international allies or national stakeholders for more inclusive education. The degree of state commitment to such policy varies widely and can be readily diminished, particularly when the drivers of that commitment are not founded in long-term goals related to national identity and aspiration.

- Stakeholders who are invested in existing education structures and the knowledge hierarchy that they sustain: Invariably, any move toward significant MLE policy implementation will confront those whose interests in the educational status quo are threatened by the promise of sociopolitical equity and the pedagogical potential that MLE represents. Such opponents of the potential educational equity that MLE brings may be influential at national levels. For example, in countries where the number of young people of secondary school age far outstrips the availability of school places, policymakers may be reluctant to make secondary education inclusive for learners from a wider cross-section of society.

- Choice of language(s) to be included in the MLE policy: The principle of educational inclusion mandates that most or all community languages in a country should be part of an MLE policy. Yet the challenges of implementing MLE in large numbers of languages across a nation are significant and daunting (Zeme, 2020) and can be aggravated by a linguistic perspective that necessitates a choice between languages. Responding to those challenges, policymakers may choose one or a few favored regional or local languages, they may decide on an open door for any national language, or they may avoid the decision altogether and choose any "language of the immediate environment" or "language of the community" (Trudell, 2024).

Implementation-Related Challenges

- Incorporating and balancing stakeholders' policy priorities: Successful MLE policy implementation is notoriously complex and difficult, and the perspectives of local, national, and international stakeholders in the process are likely to vary widely (Trudell, 2024).

- Language development: Where education is to be offered in languages other than those with a long history of being written, their development as written languages is necessary. Standardized writing systems, representation of any varieties of the language in accepted spellings, development of written materials, and more linguistic and sociolinguistic issues arise.

- Developing academic registers for pedagogical materials: Academic registers needed for learning non-language subjects at the lower secondary level may not have been developed in non-dominant languages, or agreed technical vocabulary may not have been established or communicated to teachers.

- Development and provision of teaching and learning materials for the indicated languages of instruction: This requires both linguistic and pedagogical expertise, particularly for reading instruction and mathematics instruction in local languages. Maintaining an adequate inventory of these teaching and learning materials over the years, beyond initial print runs, requires sustainable processes and facilities for stocking, distributing, and storing.

Finance-Related Challenges

- Sustained financing for sustained MLE programming: Given its systemic nature, MLE programming may require substantial and sustained funding. For example, designing, publishing, and distributing textbooks designed for multilingual learners is expensive and takes time. Most international and national donors, even when they are strongly supportive, are often unready to commit to the long-term financial support needed for the establishment of effective MLE programming.

These specifically language-related challenges may exacerbate other, enduring challenges in education, such as limited teacher agency for adapting practices to be inclusive of learners, unjust educational structures that ensure that children from more privileged families benefit the most from formal education, competition for resources in under-resourced education systems, and the significant influence of donors on educational agendas. Creating space for multilingualism in education is a step toward meeting at least some of these enduring challenges. Contributions to this NSI demonstrate that our shared knowledge on how to design and implement MLE is both expansive and expanding.

Organization of the SI

The papers that are included in this volume document the challenges described above and more, as well as efforts to overcome them. A range of contexts and programming features are the setting for the many programs and issues described in this volume.

The contributions to this Special Issue have been organized into five parts:

- Part 1: School-community boundaries sets the scene by comparing language practices in schools with those of the communities they serve. Some articles discuss examples of schools and systems where a LOLT rarely used outside of school dominates within school. Others demonstrate the transformative benefits for learners and communities realized when schools embrace multilingualism.

- Part 2: MLE for foundational learning focuses on L1-based MLE programming. Articles refer to specific programs that are delivered through primary schools and that target literacy in children's L1 as the starting point for a gradual transition to a widely spoken L2. Each focuses on a different implementation challenge.

- Part 3: Language transition and multilingual pedagogies unpacks theory and practices in basic education systems, where the main LOLT is unfamiliar to some or all learners. Taken together, the articles give insights into the implications of language transition for learning across the curriculum and provide examples of pedagogic innovations designed for multilingual learners.

- Part 4: Multilingualism in adult learning explores the potential of multilingualism to strengthen inclusion in higher education and to transform teacher professional learning and how, in both settings, MLE can contribute to more just and equitable societies.

- Part 5: Policy and planning for MLE examines the links between MLE policy, planning, and curriculum implementation. Articles in this section critically discuss the challenges posed by system-level changes to language-in-education policy and make recommendations for the sustained implementation of MLE.

Together, the papers presented here contribute a range of contexts and perspectives related to the opportunities and challenges involved in developing and implementing MLE.

Endnotes

1. Illustrated by the World Bank's (2021) report, Loud and clear: Effective language of instruction policies for learning. Retrieved from https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/517851626203470278/pdf/Effective-Language-of-Instruction-Policies-for-Learning.pdf.
2. For a fuller discussion, see Trudell's (2023) background paper for International Mother Language Day 2023: Early-exit language transitioning programming. Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384816.

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Part 1

School Community

Multilingual education plays a significant role in connecting school with community. By considering the relationship between language practices within school and beyond the school gates, articles in this part offer critical insights into how multilingual education creates a safe, inclusive, and reparative space for all children. Westbrook et al. outline the sharp contradictions between the monolingual language in education policy in Rwanda and the fluid multilingual language practices in a border town. Mugrabi et al. discuss two approaches to multilingual education, implemented in Chad, that aim to strengthen children's cultural and linguistic connection to their communities, whilst broadening their worldview. Reilly et al. draw on research from across three African countries to argue for translanguaging pedagogies that draw on language practices outside of school to improve learning. Isingoma et al. use the concept of cultural violence to explain how monolingual school policies in Northern Uganda contribute toward other forms of violence within schools. In the last article of Part One, Cijveschi et al. report on an international network that is supporting schools to welcome all the languages spoken in their community.

Navigating Language Barriers Between Formal Education and Community at the Rwanda-DRC Border

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Summary
At the Rwandan-DR Congo border, multilingualism flourishes. Little English is spoken, despite its adoption as the medium of instruction in schools in 2009, and in 2019 from Primary 1. Multilingual education is discouraged, yet English has an uncertain status and Kinyarwanda is nurtured. Students are "a lost generation," acquiring neither sufficient Kinyarwanda nor English. Legitimizing translanguaging would ease the transition to English.

Keywords
Language barriers
Language transition
English as medium of instruction
Kinyarwanda
Secondary school
Inequality

Rwanda's Multilingual Border Community with the DRC

Within towns along the borders between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), multilingualism flourishes. This facilitates the daily, dynamic trade taking place across the short border bridge at the southern end of Lake Kivu. Congolese traders cross to buy pork from young men cycling down the steep hills that link the town of Kamembe with Rusizi port, a live pig strapped to the back of their bike, destined for the lakeside meat processing plant. In turn, Congolese traders sell brightly colored "*igitenge*"—cloth—and music to Rwandans. Living near a border is economically advantageous, with one Rwandan woman teacher doing a good side business with the DRC. Intercultural influences are the norm here, as a male sector education inspector from Rusizi District explained: "People here often reflect elements of Congolese culture due to their frequent interactions across the border." This is despite occasional incursions by paramilitary groups from the DRC into the forested border area of Rwanda, patrolled by armed Rwandan soldiers to assuage the nerves of those travelling through.

Along this border, Kinyarwanda, spoken by all Rwandans, is sometimes mixed as a pidgin language with regional dialects of Lingala and Kiswahili, which are seen, as a local male headteacher said, as "a foreign language. But we speak it as we have borrowed it." Amashi, a local language that blends Kinyarwanda with phrases from Eastern Congo, has

historically been located around Bukavu, the bustling city on the Congolese side of Lake Kivu that borders Rusizi District. It is also spoken by the inhabitants of Rwanda's Nkombo Island and sung on the lake by fishermen from both sides of the border. French remains widely heard in the DRC, Burundi, and this part of Rwanda. People in Rusizi District are said to be "direct" in their speech, pushing pleasantries aside to get to the point amidst a mobile and diverse population. In the recent past, this proximity also created employment opportunities in the border districts for both French-speaking DRC and Burundian teachers, who were well-educated and filled teacher shortages post-genocide.

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsis, where over 1 million people were killed in 100 days, defines the country. Two-thirds of the population fled across borders to Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, and the DRC, returning only slowly to a country reconstructing itself. Rwanda is also a refuge for others, with 135,000 refugees from the DRC, Burundi, and across Africa, including around 2,500 evacuated from Libya, transferred to Rwandan transit camps.

Abrupt Changes to the Medium of Instruction

At this border with the DRC, little English is heard, despite its adoption as the medium of instruction (MOI) by the Ministry of Education in 2008 from Primary 4 onwards, with Kinyarwanda as MOI from Primary 1 to Primary 3. This was a politically astute economic move for a government "with many partners," many of whom are English-speaking donors, as one sector education inspector told us (Rosendal & Ngabonziza, 2023). It signified a shift away from the language of the Belgian colonizers associated with the creation of hierarchical ethnic grouping that led to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis. But it also meant a turn away from some neighboring countries, as this long-serving woman teacher from a border town explained:

> *"Amashi, Kiswahili, and French are spoken; and Burundi, where people use Kirundi,[2] despite its similarities with Kinyarwanda, and French. Then you use English, which is different from the language used in a neighboring region across the border."*

To implement this major language change, there was great investment in lower primary level textbooks in Kinyarwanda, and English language proficiency training for upper primary teachers. However, much like the winding roads that switchback down the thousand hills that make up Rwanda, almost "overnight" in 2019 the government changed language policy again and instituted English as MOI from Primary 1. They argued that English had to be learnt more rapidly as part of the economic development of Rwanda—and to compete with its East African neighbors. The P1–P3 textbooks in Kinyarwanda became redundant overnight, and borders became more tightly differentiated. Many teachers from the DRC and Burundi have gone home, finding less employment as teachers of French, or have "adapted" themselves to teaching in English.

These abrupt policy changes are slow to embed outside Kigali. Outside the capital, Kinyarwanda continues to flourish, nurtured as a protected national language spoken by all, including in local government offices, and used in official documentation. As such, it plays a major role in contributing toward social cohesion and reparative justice. Kinyarwanda remains the de facto MOI in school, cultivated in primary schools through eight hours of instruction a week in P1 to P3 and termly exams to assess students' comprehension: "We love Kinyarwanda, it's true" said a woman school leader in the northern province.

Challenges in the Transition to English as LOLT

Despite official policy, English has an uncertain status. Primary school teachers' English is not fluent, as one district education officer pointed out: "… because we all speak the same language this does not motivate people to learn other languages." English is copied from the textbook onto the board and into students' notebooks, and used in examinations, but teachers often use Kinyarwanda to instruct, explain, and teach. Consequently, as one primary head teacher said, looking across Lake Kivu to Bukavu in the DRC, his students are "a lost generation," acquiring neither sufficient Kinyarwanda nor English in school to learn much, amounting to cognitive wastage (Alidou et al., 2006).

The 2021 Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools (LARS) assessment revealed "epistemic exclusion," as used by Milligan (2020) to describe the way in which students are excluded from gaining knowledge in the classroom when this is mediated through an unfamiliar MOI. There are significant gender and geographic differences in performance in Rwanda, with girls scoring much lower than boys in all subjects and at all levels (P3, P6, and S3). Students from districts outside Kigali, such as Rusizi, perform worse in most subjects. Girls fear shame and ridicule in their use of English due to their lack of exposure to the language, as do women teachers (Uworwabayeho et al., 2021; Kuchah et al., 2022; Milligan et al., 2023). The Competency Based Curriculum of 2015 promotes learner-centered education but assumes teachers and students have sufficient knowledge of English for interactive teaching (Van de Kuilen et al., 2020). In a post-conflict and post-colonial context, such inequalities may exacerbate social tensions.

The picture alters slightly at secondary school, with teachers who have better levels of English proficiency, but this remains uneven and gendered: secondary school male teachers outnumber women by more than two to one and

have higher qualifications and better access to training opportunities. Female students have fewer female role models to teach them—and fewer girls transition to upper secondary (MINEDUC, 2022). In response, there is a concerted effort by the Ministry of Education to ensure all secondary school teachers rapidly improve their levels of spoken English. Our process evaluation of a large-scale English language improvement program for 6,000 secondary school teachers, the Secondary Teachers English Language Rwanda Improvement Rwanda (STELIR), explores how women teachers and teachers with disabilities in rural and border districts access and benefit from this program. Data cited here come from emerging findings from the first three phases of our ongoing research.

Languages of the Research

Those of us on this research project who were "native English speakers," without adequate understanding of Kinyarwanda, necessarily became associated with, and even advocates of, the government's language choice. The expressed wish, however, of most participants in the border districts to use Kinyarwanda in interviews at system, district, and school levels meant that two of us were kept at bay, hovering around the research, just as English uncertainly hovers around, yet to properly land in schools. Our participants expressed gratitude and relief, but some embarrassment at not having sufficient English, even in more populated areas: "The fact that you respected time and allowed us to use Kinyarwanda, we wouldn't be able to fully express our views in English during all these hours of interview. Of course, we know English, but it's not perfect" [Senior woman teacher, northern province]. Research must respect the language preference of its participants even if the education policy does not.

Language "Slippage" Between Kinyarwanda and English

In secondary schools in Rusizi District, as in other border districts in the research, English is used in written forms in exams, textbooks, and on chalkboards but, like the landslides that block the main roads following heavy rains, there is much "slippage" or translanguaging to and from Kinyarwanda when teachers are unsure of English vocabulary or pronunciation and when students complain, "No, we're not catching anything," as a male teacher in Rusizi District put it. A woman teacher in a mountainous area explained that:

> *"As English is not our native language, our pupils sometimes get lost when we are explaining the content to them. In this case, we use a little Kinyarwanda to give them clearer explanation."*

Despite the reality of this slippage, and where students and teachers do not use English at home, neither multilingualism nor translanguaging in the classroom are permitted (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Sector education inspectors regulate single language use, inculcating concern amidst those teachers whose English proficiency remains low:

> *"We also need to be able to use English as we check if teachers are using English in class without code-mixing, as this is bad. And since most of the new teachers have been educated in English, there is some improvement, unlike before"'* (male sector education inspector, Rusizi District).

Such surveillance, when English is as yet still a foreign language in many ways, reflects government imperatives for English-only classrooms, but is not unique to Rwanda (e.g., Uganda; see Westbrook et al., 2022). English is used much more confidently by younger male teachers, those emerging from initial teacher education, and by younger secondary school students who have benefitted from a previous project, Building Learning Foundations, which focused on primary English language and math.

However, secondary school women teachers remain disadvantaged, despite child-friendly adaptations put in place by the English language program, such as creches for residential training and flexible online learning, innovations that tend to confirm rather than challenge gender norms (Rubagiza et al., 2022). The materials used by STELIR focus on spoken English proficiency, but as modeled by international experts who are "native speakers," further raising the benchmark for what counts as "proficiency": "This is one of the solutions … to have access to native speakers, this is what helps the most" [training college spokesperson]. Framed within this standardized form, native-speaker English becomes almost unattainable. And yet, women teachers in our research strove to participate in the program to reap what they knew were tangible benefits—and requirements—for their own English, their own practice, and for their careers. This is despite having to make many sacrifices to do so, including traveling across the country with small children to attend training and rearranging their domestic, social, and religious responsibilities—even giving up their cross-border businesses! Learning another language that is not part of the linguistic ecology, such as in Rusizi District, takes hard work.

Conclusion

At a time of language transition, it may be politically wise for a further switchback and return to Kinyarwanda as MOI for the youngest children, and within such a rich linguistic ecology, legitimize translanguaging in the classroom even at secondary school to bridge the inevitable transition to English as MOI. However, it may take at least another 15 years or so for English to become more embedded as a second—or third—borrowed language.

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Endnotes

1. The language Kiswahili is also known as Swahili. Throughout this article the 'Ki-' prefix indicates the name of language.
2. Kirundi is the national language of Burundi. It is a dialect of the Rwanda-Rundi dialect continuum closely related to and mutually intelligible with Kinyarwanda to a large degree. It is also spoken in Rwanda and adjacent parts of Tanzania, DRC, Uganda, and Kenya.

Let's Make Way for African Languages and Culture at School

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Summary
This article examines the impact of the plurilingual approaches of the Basic education quality program (Programme pour la qualité de l'education de base – ProQEB) in Chad – bilingual education in national languages and openness to languages – compared with a monolingual approach. These approaches strengthen pupils' cultural identity, improve their academic results, and offer an education that is better adapted to their multilingual reality.

Keywords
Bi-plurilingual education
Culture
Inclusive education
Identity

Introduction

In African society, children are deeply anchored in their culture thanks to rituals and practices where words, objects and actions play a fundamental role. The 'Mân dee' ritual, described in the first section, illustrates how the identity of the child is built through interactions, helping them find their place in society. However, their first steps at school often create a rupture with the initial identity: monolingualism, often imposed in a foreign language, distances the child from their linguistic and cultural reference points, compromising their success in learning. This gap leads to serious consequences, such as failing their classes, high drop-out rates and a feeling of marginalisation among pupils (World Bank, 2021). High failure rates in end-of-cycle exams, particularly in languages of instruction and in mathematics (Noyau, 2006; Noyau, 2014), show the limits of this monolingual approach to education. The examinations were even described by the Deputy Minister for Higher Education as 'weapons of mass destruction' aimed at African youth (Dakaractu, 2019).

Faced with this situation, it is essential to redefine the role of the school, not only as a place to disseminate knowledge, but also as a place to express a plural identity. Plurilingual approaches offer a promising alternative, allowing the child to maintain a link with their native culture while opening to other horizons, for a more inclusive and meaningful education.

This article explores two plurilingual approaches of the Basic education quality program (Programme pour la qualité de l'education de base – ProQEB) in Chad, implemented by Enfants du Monde, with the support of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the French Development Agency: Instruction in a National Language (ILN) and an open approach to languages, multilingual education (MLE). The ILN approach proposes bilingual learning, whereas the MLE approach sensitizes students to plurilingualism while conserving the official language of the nation as the main language of instruction. Although their impacts on educational results differ, these two approaches aim to reinforce the connection between the child and their cultural and linguistic roots, all while widening their world view.

Education and Cultural Heritage: Reinventing School

In Chad, where over one hundred languages and cultures co-exist, linguistic and cultural integration in education are essential. Children are seen as a great family asset. In the Mbaye culture, for example, the 'Mân dee' ritual honours a deceased ancestor to ensure the survival and protection of newborn babies.

The ritual consists of offering the newborn baby symbolic objects linked to the tastes of the ancestor, such as special clothing, bracelets, a walking stick, or mats made of reeds. These carefully chosen objects are presented to the child during a sacred ceremony where the grandfather, or the paternal aunt or uncle invokes the protection of the ancestor. The designated person takes the child in their arms, says the name of the ancestor, and presents each object while singing their praises and recounting their exploits. These incantations reinforce the spiritual link between the child and their lineage, symbolised by the wearing of these objects for three days for boys and four for girls.

Deeply rooted in the Mbaye culture, the 'Mân dee' illustrates how Chadian communities anchor the cultural and spiritual identity of the child from birth. Through rituals such as this, the childing is solidly linked to their ancestors and endowed with an identity that puts their roots first.

How could schooling take inspiration from this model by integrating local cultural languages and practices into teaching? ProQEB strives to meet this challenge in two ways: 1) by integrating the languages of the students into learning; 2) by contextualising school knowledge within local knowledge and everyday practices.

Two Languages are Better than One when it comes to Learning at School

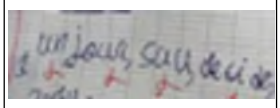
In Chad, learning to read and write in primary schools is often based on memorising letters and mastering their writing, repetitive and mechanical activities that are disconnected from their real meaning. This approach focused on the alphabet and grammar, to the detriment of communication and the production of varied texts, limits pupils' understanding, not only of language, but also of other subjects such as mathematics.

In schools in the provinces participating in ProQEB, reading and writing take on a more significant dimension. Here, students explore the production of a variety of texts, giving real meaning to their learning. They are encouraged to produce written material based on their everyday lives, thereby reinforcing the complementary nature of reading and writing from the start of their schooling.

The LOLT approach promotes biliteracy by integrating the two languages into all subjects. Pupils learn to read and write simultaneously in Sar (national language) and French (official language) from the first year, gradually discovering the two writing systems through the study of traditional Chadian tales available in both languages. The study by Ndoubalo (2019) shows how this approach enables pupils to compose words, write their names and create short texts using both languages. Analyses of their writing reveal linguistic transfers, such as the use of Sar letters or sounds in French words, demonstrating that bilingual pupils mobilise their first language to overcome difficulties in French. This strategy is not available to students in a monolingual system.

The examples below (Table 1) show how each language enriches the other in a communicative task. By being free to express themselves according to their knowledge and thinking, the pupils transfer and combine skills from one language to the other to produce meaningful writing related to Chadian tales and stories.

Table 1. Analysis of students' productions

 Le coq f ?r	« le coq fort »	The grapheme ɔ represents a sound in Sar
 gars o?	« garçon »	The French sound /on/ is equivalent to the Sar sound / ǫ/
 Un jour, suu decide	« un jour Sou décide »	The French sound /ou/ is replaced by the /u/ in Sar; in this case, it is a long vowel /uu/

Source: Ndoubalo (2019)

Nodjigoto (2019) highlights this phenomenon in natural science assessments: children effectively mobilise their multilingual skills to answer questions and express their knowledge on familiar subjects, such as animal diseases during transhumance. By alternating between languages in their answers, they reveal not only their rich linguistic repertoire, but also the link between the content taught and their daily lives, which gives meaning to their learning.

In a monolingual system, this ability to navigate between languages and to relate the knowledge learned in school to their lived experience would be severely restricted, forcing students to conform strictly to a single official language of instruction.

Ethnomathematics and Languages: Reconciling Calculations and Cultural Practices

In the early years in primary schools in Chad, arithmetic is taught mainly through the decimal numbering system, writing numbers as digits and operations. In the second year of primary school (CP2), pupils learn the value of coins in French and practise solving mathematical problems. For example, the official Étoile textbook (CNC, 2012, p.73) suggests the following situation: a mother gives her two children 70 francs, which she divides into coins of 25 francs and 10 francs. The pupils must answer in French, indicating the amounts received by each.

The monetary values and arithmetic operations carried out in Chadian languages do not correspond directly to the values in French. For example, there is an equivalence of 1 to 5 between the monetary value in Chadian languages and that in French: '100 francs' in French becomes 'gursu 20' in Sar or '20 riyal' in Chadian Arabic (5 francs = gursu 1 = 1 riyal). This disparity raises an important question: how can schools help children navigate between these different linguistic and numerical systems, while valuing their cultural practices and everyday experiences?

In schools using the MLE and ILN approaches, pupils learn to convert amounts in a Chadian language into their equivalent in French and vice versa by using division or multiplication by 5. Concrete activities, such as calculating amounts based on the coins available, encourage them to answer questions such as 'What is the total price of a purchase, expressed in French and in your Chadian language', thus preparing them for everyday life. For example, the CP2 mathematics sequence 'Les échanges au marché' (Exchanges at the market) features a dialogue in French between a customer and a seller: the customer asks for the price of a bundle of garlic and a bundle of onions, the trader replies 550 and 300 francs, then the customer asks for the total to be paid. The pupils calculate this sum in French and in their local languages (ProQEB, 2019, pp. 64-80).

Another example of this connection between mathematics and experience concerns the numbering systems in Chadian languages. Children grow up learning numbers in their first languages, which have different logics: in Sara-kaba, the number seven is expressed as 'mitikidjo' ('five and two'), while in Gday it is expressed as 'biyam-ta' ('there are three missing to make ten'). French, for its part, uses a base of groupings by tens, but this rule is not followed for certain numbers: for example, 80 and 90 are expressed as multiples of twenty (four-twenties [quatre-vingts; 4 x 20] and four-twenties-ten [quatre-vingt-dix; 4 x 20 + 10]). In Sara-kaba, they are based on thirties: 'koh djo bi djoké' for 80 (30 x 2 + 20) and 'koh mouta' for 90 (30 x 3).

The conceptual diversity of Chadian languages, with their own mathematical logic, raises questions about the integration of this linguistic wealth in schools. The MLE and ILN approaches build on these experiences by using local languages to contextualise the mathematical concepts taught in French, thereby enhancing pupils' understanding and grounding their learning in their everyday reality.

Comparison of Educational Approaches

The data from the skills assessment conducted in Chad (Nidegger, 2022) confirm the effectiveness of the bi-plurilingual approaches compared with the monolingual approach, and demonstrate the superiority of the ILN approach over the MLE approach (Table 2).

These results lead to two key observations:

1. Bi-plurilingual approaches are particularly effective when they integrate a contextualisation of school knowledge via culturally relevant practices (Figure 1).

2. Children who learn to read and write simultaneously in two languages (Figure 2) develop greater linguistic and cognitive flexibility than their peers in monolingual or language-aware education.

Table 2. Average percentage success in CP2 in language and mathematics according to the sub-domains tested and the types of school.

	Language		Mathematics		
	Decoding and Reading Comprehension	Entry into producing writing	Numeration	Arithmetic	Geometry
MLE	46%	52%	70%	64%	60%
ILN	55%	62%	78%	78%	78%
Monolingual	45%	44%	59%	57%	54%

Source: Nidegger (2022).

Figure 1. Images of children in bilingual schools.
Writing the words cat, chicken, and crocodile after reading an African tale.

Source: Enfants du Monde image bank

Figure 2. Images of children in bilingual schools.
Writing the value of money in French and another African language.

Source: Enfants du Monde image bank

Conclusion

A culturally appropriate bi-plurilingual education enables students to strengthen their academic skills while celebrating their multiple identifications, thus facilitating their personal development and social integration.

Conversely, restricting the use of heritage languages in schools limits the expression of children's knowledge, experiences, and perspectives on important global issues. Promoting the use of local languages in the educational context enriches the school environment, providing a platform for a diversity of voices and knowledge to address the complex challenges of today's world. This approach also highlights the need to rethink teacher training, curricula, and assessments to incorporate these essential elements.

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Deconstructing Boundaries and Building Translanguaging Spaces for Effective Multilingual Learning

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Summary
The monolingualizing of education has constructed artificial educational spaces disconnected from the lived multilingual reality of individuals. We discuss how boundaries are created and maintained and how this negatively affects learning in Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia. We conclude by advocating for the introduction of translanguaging spaces in education to deconstruct boundaries and provide more equitable, inclusive, and multilingual approaches to education.

Keywords
Translanguaging spaces
Boundaries
Primary education

Introduction

In this paper, we critically reflect on the role of boundaries in educational spaces and the extent to which boundaries create barriers and negatively impact the learning experience for children. We employ the concept of "translanguaging spaces" (Wei, 2018) to suggest approaches to education that may draw attention to the limitations and potentials of boundary work, highlighting where boundaries have negative impacts and challenging, deconstructing, and delinking from harmful boundary practices.

In the first section, we discuss how boundaries manifest in educational spaces, drawing on research on multilingualism and education in Tanzania, Botswana, and Zambia. In Section Two, we discuss the concept of translanguaging spaces, suggesting a further expansion of this notion based on empirical data from the three country contexts. We discuss the role which boundaries may have in the construction of translanguaging spaces. We conclude by advocating for the building of translanguaging spaces across education systems.

Research Contexts

The research we discuss here has its origins in the project *Bringing the Outside In: Merging Local Language and Literacy Practices to Enhance Classroom Learning and Achievement*, which was funded by the British Academy and investigated issues around multilingualism, education, and language policy in Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia. The project ran from 2019–2022 and was a partnership between the Universities of Botswana, Dar es Salaam, Essex, and Zambia. The goal of the research was to investigate language practices and language attitudes both inside and outside

of educational spaces and to see to what extent language practices of students and their communities were used and valued by education policy and in the school environment. We adopted ethnographic methods and data collection including classroom observations, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups.

The three countries differ in terms of their sociolinguistic and language policy situation. In Botswana, there are around 25–28 named languages, with the official language being English and the national language being Setswana. At the time of the project, language-in-education policy stated that Setswana should be used as the medium of instruction (MOI) in standard 1 and that English should be used as the medium of instruction from Standard 2 or as soon as is practical.[1] In Tanzania, there are around 150 named languages. The official language of the county is Swahili[2] and, in education, Swahili is the MOI for primary school, while English is the MOI for secondary school onwards. In Zambia, there are approximately 72 named languages. English is the official language, and there are seven national languages based on regions. The language-in-education policy in Zambia states that in the first four years of primary school a "familiar" language can be used as MOI, which in practice has meant one of the seven regional languages. English is taught as a subject from Grade 2, and from Grade 5 English is the MOI.

While there are differences in the linguistic situations and policy approaches, there are key similarities in each context. We suggest that, in these multilingual contexts, language-in-education policies have been constructed in an attempt to monolingualize education. Across each country, the majority of languages are not included in official legislation, MOIs at any given time are all monolingual with only one language being used as the MOI, and all of the policies are English dominant, with a switch to English at different points as students proceed in their education.

Legislation, language attitudes, and language practices intersect and influence one another (Spolsky, 2004) and contribute to how language policy is implemented and viewed in educational spaces. In the next section, we discuss how boundaries are created in education, drawing on data from our research.

Boundaries

Boundaries are widely prevalent in education systems across the world. The creation and maintenance of boundaries helps to uphold the status quo and perpetuate inequitable systems through practices of exclusion, othering, and marginalization. Boundaries manifest in many ways and can be "enacted through linguistic ideologies, language policies, or curriculum choice" (Windle et al., 2020, pp. xi–xii). We must recognize that the creation of boundaries is not a neutral act but an ideological one. Boundaries "are everywhere and they are not only geographic; they are racial and sexual; epistemic and ontological; religious and aesthetic; linguistic and national" (Mignolo, 2018, p. 112). In educational spaces, multiple boundaries are created and students must face these boundaries as they engage with their learning. Boundaries influence the choices that are made for education, and they directly influence the learning experience. These boundaries can include boundaries between home and school, between subjects, between periods of school, between year groups, between assessments, and between lessons and play.

The creation of boundaries between languages is well established, with languages being separated, named, and counted following a monolingual ideology. Language-in-education policies help to maintain linguistic boundaries by legitimizing a limited number of named languages as suitable for education and by excluding other named and unnamed languages, as well as fluid multilingual practices and contribute to the "monolingualizing" of education systems (Heller, 1995). Such language-in-education-policies ignore the lived multilingual realities (Reilly et al., 2022) creating and sustaining artificial monolingual spaces in education

Two boundaries that are particularly relevant to our discussion are spatial boundaries and linguistic boundaries, which intersect and reinforce one another. These boundaries manifest mainly through the separation of named languages and the separation of the home and the school. We can see the ways in which boundaries manifest in education in the following quotations. The first is taken from a classroom observation and recording in a Standard 2 English lesson in Botswana.

> *Teacher: Any other word that starts with D? A English word. Yes? D for? It is a? Say it very loud.*
>
> *Student 1: Tonki*
>
> *Teacher: Do we say tonki in English? Who can help him? Do we say tonki in English? Who can help him?*
>
> *Student 2: Donkey.*
>
> *Teacher: D for donkey. We are in an English lesson so if you have to say out an answer you say it in English. Don't say a Setswana word. Donkey, D for donkey. D for donkey. For donkey, donkey. Any other word?*

In this lesson, after receiving an answer in Setswana, the teacher explicitly states that this is not acceptable. The teacher reinforces the boundary between named languages and emphasizes that in English lessons, all answers must be in English, and that speaking in Setswana is not permitted.

Here, clear boundaries are being established between the two languages, with English being welcomed into the learning space and Setswana being discouraged. Alongside the linguistic boundaries, we also see that spatial and temporal boundaries are established which dictate when and where students are able to use different aspects of their multilingual repertoires.

The spatial aspects of boundaries are also exemplified in the following quotation from an interview with a parent in Zambia:

> *Eeh tukutituti muwufupi tukupusana, ndiwafuma walemba iciwemba kokoni cizungu, kootukulandavye icinamwanga ampela*
>
> *Yes we can say that, in short, we differ, when they do their work in Bemba and English at school, here at home we just speak Namwanga that's all*
>
> (This interviewee is a middle-aged woman currently working as a farmer. She reports mainly speaking Namwanga, with some knowledge of Bemba.)

Boundaries here are established between the school space and the home space. These boundaries are in part realized by linguistic differences in those spaces. In school, teaching and learning is done in Bemba and English, but at home these languages are not used, instead "we just speak Namwanga." The languages of the school, of formal education, are not the languages of the home. Again, we see boundaries that reflect the physical spaces in which certain language practices are expected and accepted.

The final quotation from a parent in Tanzania shares similar themes:

> *Sukuma, Nyiramba, Dushi languages, my child should leave them at home. At school, the child should follow their teacher's instruction, which is Swahili. I am a Sukuma person, I speak Sukuma, but some Nyiramba people can't speak the Nyiramba in public, some Nyaturu people can't speak Nyaturu language in public, so my perspective is that the community languages should be left at home and at school Swahili should be used.*
>
> (This interviewee is a man in his 40s. He reports speaking Sukuma as his natural language, and also speaking Swahili.)

In this excerpt, the parent shares their attitudes toward what languages should be used as the MOI in school. They favor the status quo and the use of Swahili. Clear boundaries are established between the school and home space, and the parent's view is that languages other than Swahili have no place in the education environment and they should be "left at home," and children should then be motivated to construct boundaries within their own linguistic repertoires and "leave" certain linguistic resources in specific spaces. This view is in line with the language-in-education policy in Tanzania, which assigns individual languages to specific contexts and does not promote concurrent multilingualism but only consecutive multilingualism—one language after another—at a given time in a given location. However, we also acknowledge that this parent's viewpoint is no doubt also shaped by their experiences of education and their hopes and aspirations for their child in this monolingualizing context.

Each of the above excerpts reflects the monolingualized language-in-education policy present across the three countries. Languages are viewed as separate, bounded entities, and there are clear distinctions made between different spaces that students inhabit—be that individual lessons in school or between the school and the home. What we see is that students' multilingual linguistic repertoires or lived multilingual realities are not welcomed or reflected in the learning environment. This is in contrast to an established body of research evidence that illustrates that students learn best using language practices that they are familiar with (see UNESCO, 2016). In the next section, we discuss the concept of translanguaging spaces and suggest how this could be used to establish more effective language use in education.

Translanguaging Spaces

Translanguaging spaces are defined as spaces that are "created by and for translanguaging practices" (Wei, 2018, p. 23). Not all educational spaces in which translanguaging occurs will necessarily be created both by and for translanguaging (Reilly, 2021), and both aspects should be considered when developing learning environments that provide the conditions and support for translanguaging practices to be welcomed and encouraged. In light of the boundaries discussed above, which we see being created through language-in-education policies, language practices in classrooms, and attitudes toward what languages should be used in school, we suggest that translanguaging spaces could provide a mechanism to dismantle, disrupt, or at least soften the restrictive boundaries that prevent learners from making use of their full linguistic repertoires in the classroom. Wei and Lin (2019, p. 212) state:

> *"When we talk about the classroom, we tend to have an immediate image of a confined physical space with specified and often hierarchical role sets and planned learning objectives and tasks. Translanguaging classroom discourse is not only about encouraging fluid multilingual practices within the limits and boundaries set up by these role sets, objectives and tasks, but to aim at challenging and transforming them."*

Introducing translanguaging spaces into education in the country contexts we have discussed would, in the first instance, allow students to draw on their whole linguistic repertoire to engage with their learning. It would also allow teachers to draw on their own repertoires in their teaching and not be restricted to keeping within the boundaries of an artificial monolingualism dictated by language-in-education policy. In this way, language practices that are more reflective of the lived multilingual reality of children, their wider linguistic practices, and their communities could be used in the education space.

Language-in-education policy also has to extend beyond the classroom and through the boundaries between language in order to consider the ways in which the other boundaries in educational spaces can be challenged and transformed. Translanguaging spaces should be introduced not just in the classroom but across curriculum design, teacher training, and assessment practices. Translanguaging spaces are present whether they are recognized and acknowledged or not. They should be built wherever possible.

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Endnotes

1. The Government of Botswana have recently begun implementing a new "Botswana Languages Policy in Education," which seeks to be more inclusive, introducing additional Botswanan languages as MOI at early stages of education.
2. Swahili here refers to the Swahili language, also known as Kiswahili. The various Bantu languages named in this article use different prefixes to indicate language. Hence, for simplicity and clarity, we are not using the prefixes when translating the names of languages into English.

Violence in Uganda's English-only-medium Secondary Schools: Advancing Multilingual Education for Reparative Futures

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Summary
The English-only (Anglo-monolingualism) policy in Uganda's secondary education system, together with its strict enforcement, has inflicted physical, psychological, emotional, and structural harm on students, while subjecting them to cultural dislocations. This situation ultimately leads to undesirable learning outcomes. To mitigate these historical injustices, we propose the deployment of reparative strategies where multilingual pedagogies and practices should replace Anglo-monolingualism.

Keywords
English-only policy
Violence
Multilingual resources
Reparative futures

Introduction

The use of English only (Anglo-monolingualism) as the LOLT has normatively defined the language-in-education landscape in Uganda's secondary schools. This has detrimental effects on students, as they experience violence in their everyday lives, inextricably leading to undesirable learning outcomes. Following the taxonomy advanced by Galtung (1990) and applied by Paulson and Tikly (2023) to educational settings, we posit that Anglo-monolingualism triggers violence in secondary schools in Uganda, which manifests itself in three ways:

1. Direct violence: corporal punishments are meted out to students who speak any language other than English in class or anywhere on the school compound, thereby leading to physical harm, as well as psychological and emotional distress.

2. Systemic violence: learners who cannot cope with speaking English or understand what is taught in English are excluded from meaningful learning in the classroom, without any systemic efforts to use other linguistic resources to take care of their needs.

3. Cultural violence: learners' home languages are trivialized and categorically excluded from any interaction at school, thereby relegating the learners' culture while exclusively promoting an unfamiliar language and culture.

Not surprisingly, under the above circumstances, the desired learning experiences and outcomes cannot be achieved (Milligan et al., 2020). This is an injustice that should be corrected.

This study draws on data from a qualitative study conducted in four schools in Kitgum and Amuru Districts in Northern Uganda, involving 64 students aged between 13 and 17 years. The study used interviews and focus group discussions, followed by thematic analysis. The interviews and discussions were about epistemic justice-related issues. Anglo-monolingualism, with its associated embodiment of violence, emerged as a prominent issue and is the focus of this article (for a fuller account of the research design and findings, see Milligan et al., 2024). The issues of violence are particularly important given the significant history and lasting effects of violence and conflict in Northern Uganda between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government.

Thus, we present typical examples of violence associated with Anglo-monolingualism based on students' lived experiences. We argue that this situation requires the design and implementation of reparative strategies that accommodate multiple perspectives and narratives so as to repair these past injustices (see, for example, Manning et al., 2024).

English-only Policy in Uganda's Secondary Schools

English is the only functional official language in Uganda (with Kiswahili[1] only used peripherally) (Isingoma, 2016). The official status of English is extended to all educational institutions, where the language policy requires the use of English as the LOLT in all secondary schools.[2] It has been claimed that English is a unifying force in Uganda, given the ethnolinguistic diversity of Ugandan society coupled with a history of ethnically related conflicts. Additionally, the leading role of English in international communication has also been advanced as a rationale for English LOLT in secondary education (Isingoma, 2016).

The implementation of the above policy has seen schools in Uganda draw up a rule that delegitimizes speaking any language other than English. All four schools in the present study enforced an English-only rule. Crucially, at two of the schools, this rule appeared at the top of the school's list of rules, thereby reflecting its assumed importance by the school leadership. The rule is not just restricted to classroom engagements but covers the whole school environment, including when students are on the compound, in the office, in the toilets, and so on. One student revealed that "as soon as you enter the gate you should speak in English." Failure to abide by the rule leads to punishment. Two of the schools have "language prefects", who are charged with the sole duty of keeping watch on whoever tries to speak a home language. A prefect who does not report fellow students to the teachers for speaking home languages is severely punished, as revealed by one of the prefects who had to wash latrines as a result of not performing his/her duties well (i.e., catching those "using vernacular" at school).

All in all, there is strict enforcement of the Anglo-monolingualism policy, and the consequent violence it creates includes the delegitimization of home languages in Uganda's secondary schools. Since the policy goes hand in hand with punishments geared toward eliminating the "vice" of speaking home languages, students who are unable to speak or comprehend English well have a price to pay.

Examples of Violence in the Implementation of the English-only Policy

As is the case in a number of other African countries, the English-only policy in Uganda's secondary schools requires the use of English only as the LOLT and language of communication in all school spaces (Nabea, 2009). Any violation of the policy is met with heavy punishments by teachers (Namyalo & Nakayiza, 2014), as stipulated in school rules and regulations. Moreover, the strict implementation of the policy not only robs students of their cultural heritages (i.e., by devaluing their home languages) but also instils fear in them, as well as causing epistemic injustice (cf. Kuchah et al., 2022). The secondary schools in our study demonstrated the mutually reinforcing relationship between direct violence, systemic violence, and cultural violence.[3]

Direct violence is associated with corporal punishments and other forms of punishment cited by the students, despite the existence of a law (cf. Government of Uganda, 2016) that prohibits corporal punishments in Uganda. Punishments may include, among others, cleaning the school compound, including toilets; fetching water; writing apology letters; or suspension. One student stated that their English language teacher "teaches well but will slap you if you make a mistake," while another one at a different school said, "Using vernacular can get learners punished, they are made to sweep or are beaten ..." Coupled with these punishments is the fear of being caught and the shame associated with not being able to speak English. In fact, in some cases, students are made to wear a bone around their necks. These situations are seen as instances of emotional and psychological violence, which is a subset of direct violence (Paulson & Tikly, 2023). Revelations about direct violence in Ugandan secondary schools in general have been reported before in southwestern Uganda (Ssenyonga et al., 2019). Namyalo and Nakayiza (2014, p. 13) state that secondary schools in Uganda do not allow students to use their home languages while at school; those who violate this rule are punished and "the punishments include caning the offenders, making them wear a sack, making a necklace out of an animal's bones which is worn by the offender, etc." Our findings empirically confirm

what Namyalo and Nakayiza (2014) recounted about the prevalence of direct violence in Uganda's secondary schools. At the same time, our findings relate to Nabea's (2009) revelations regarding a similar situation in Kenya. Thus, this situation underscores the prevalence of this kind of injustice and violence in this part of Africa.

Since English is a second language for most students in Uganda (and all the students in our sampled schools) and proficiency varies substantially, the strict implementation of the Anglo-monolingualism policy means that some students fall behind their peers in non-language as well as language subjects. Our findings indicate that the learning needs of students with lower levels of English proficiency are not supported. One student revealed, "Some learners have a hard time understanding the English ... making some learners drop out." We view this as a case of systemic violence, as some students are excluded by the linguistic system from accessing the curriculum. In a similar vein, our findings indicate that many students choose to keep quiet and cannot therefore interact with other students or teachers during lessons since they cannot speak English well. Hence, Anglo-monolingualism impedes progress toward the SDG4, namely ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (cf. UNESCO, 2021).

Cultural violence manifests itself as students being dislocated from their cultures by robbing them of the right to speak their home languages. As has been noted earlier by Kiramba (2018), instead of looking at home languages as cultural and linguistic resources that can support curriculum implementation, secondary schools in Uganda consider them to be liabilities. At the same time, students are compelled to use an unfamiliar language even where such students find enormous difficulties in coping with such school language rules.

Multilingual Education as a Reparative Strategy

There are increasing calls for a focus on repair and renewal within educational settings as part of UNESCO's new social contract for education (UNESCO, 2021). Advocates of reparative pedagogies highlight the need to support learners to engage with difficult knowledges, recognize multiple "truths," attend to dignity, and develop empathy (Manning et al., 2024; Zembylas, 2017). These are pedagogies that hold high language demands, for example, through evidence-based debates and collective problem solving. We would argue that these are very difficult, if not impossible, for young people who are learning in a language that they do not fully understand.

Crucially, some scholars also suggest that such strategies can not only help to repair historical injustices and violences but also build capacities for future peaceful actions (Manning et al., 2024; Walker, 2024). We believe that for such temporal links between violent pasts and more peaceful futures to be possible, it is essential to build peaceful presents in the classrooms where such issues are being taught. This may be particularly important when schools are situated in places of significant contemporary violence and structural inequalities and where there are distinct histories of conflict, such as in Northern Uganda. Multilingual approaches to education—particularly through the removal of the strict and violent enforcement of an English-only language policy—could be one necessary ingredient for reparative learning to succeed. We thus suggest a change to the strict enforcement of school language policies and for pre-service teacher training to highlight the ways that multilingualism is a resource and can be a reparative measure rather than a liability and source of shame for learners.

Conclusion

The endowment of Uganda with multilingual repertoires is a resource that, if put to optimal use, will provide positive learning experiences and outcomes in Uganda's secondary schools. This is one way of dealing with historical injustices and violences that have characterized Uganda's education system, where the English-only policy has been the norm. In view of this, we propose that Uganda should leverage the full spectrum of its multilingual repertoires available in all its secondary schools. We hold the view that different dimensions of multilingualism should be adopted as resources that resonate with critical orientations toward reparative futures that will stop these kinds of violence while concomitantly leading to desirable learning outcomes. By embracing the available multilingual resources, Uganda will respond to our call for reparative futures that advocate the recognition of multiple truths so that past mistakes such as the English-only policy in Uganda's education system and the resultant injustices can be repaired for a better future.

Endnotes

1. Also known as the Swahili language.
2. In the primary cycle, English is used as the LOLT in urban schools at all levels, while in rural primary schools, it is required from grade 5.
3. We follow Paulson and Tikly (2023), who identified three types of violence in educational institutions, namely direct violence, systemic violence, and cultural violence (see also Galtung, 1990).

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The Language Friendly School: Fostering a Global Network for Linguistically Inclusive School Communities

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Summary
The Language Friendly School (LFS) is a global network dedicated to valuing and supporting all languages spoken within school communities. With over 60 schools in 11 countries continually learning from each other, LFS provides an adaptable whole-school approach to inclusion that promotes learning, socio-emotional development, and the well-being and participation of all in the school community.

Keywords
Multilingual education
Inclusion
Education networks
Whole-school approach
Parental engagement

Worldwide, nearly 40% of the population does not have access to education in their first language (Walter & Benson, 2012, p. 282) and children are still punished for using a language different from their school's language of instruction (Hurwitz & Kambel, 2020). The Language Friendly School (LFS) is a response to this increasingly multilingual reality with the objective of quality education for all to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2017). LFS serves as both a quality label and a global network for schools committed to embracing and supporting all languages spoken within their communities. The LFS program is managed by the Rutu Foundation for Intercultural Multilingual Education, a non-profit organization based in the Netherlands. As with other large-scale global challenges, providing inclusive, multilingual education requires "a cooperative, democratic culture of collaboration" (voXmi, 2024). Established in 2019 with a pilot project in two schools in Amsterdam, the network now consists of more than 60 schools in 11 countries, including public and private schools, as well as asylum center schools, serving over 30,000 pupils.

This article explores LFS's whole-school approach. After defining the conceptual framework of LFS, we introduce a school in an Indigenous community in Suriname, which inspired the creation of the LFS program. Following this, we present a school in Canada with a diverse group of newcomers, which is representative of most school communities in the network. We analyzed teachers' and principals' reports, presentations and video recordings illustrating their classroom practices, school-level strategies, and activities within the broader LFS network. Therefore, this

research primarily highlights the impact on the school staff and their perceptions of the wider school community. Finally, we reflect on potential barriers for schools joining LFS.

Conceptual Framework

The basis of the work of LFS is the understanding that using home languages in school constitutes both a right and a resource (Ruíz, 1984) for students, their families, teachers, and other school staff (Le Pichon & Kambel, 2022). The right to education is fundamentally linked to "[t]he right to be educated in and through one's mother tongue" (Hurwitz & Kambel, 2020, p. 7). Members of the school community also have a right "not to be discriminated against, excluded, restricted or punished for using their mother tongue on school grounds, including in the classroom" (Hurwitz & Kambel, 2020, p. 7). This is why schools who apply for the LFS label agree not to prohibit, discourage, or punish students or their parents for using their languages at school. Schools also commit to nominate a Language Friendly School Coordinator, to develop a Language Friendly School plan, and not to allow exclusion or bullying around languages, dialects, or accents. These criteria not only protect the use of all languages but also help schools establish the structures to put their commitment into practice over a period of two years. The principles allow for all types of schools to join the network, regardless of their location, size, pupil population, resources, and previous knowledge of the subject.

Research shows that including all languages of a school community is beneficial for socio-emotional development and enhances learning (Cummins & Early, 2011; Le Pichon & Kambel, 2022). By viewing language as a resource, individual differences, such as linguistic and cultural funds of knowledge, are not seen as an extra challenge but rather as an asset for learning (Auger & Le Pichon, 2021). While it is common for schools to promote multilingualism, for example through teaching prestigious languages, minoritized students are often discouraged from maintaining and developing their home languages (Cummins, 2019, p. 1). Schools in the network thus make it a point to value all linguistic and cultural backgrounds equally so that individuals "feel accepted" and "develop a sense of belonging and feel included in the school community" (Le Pichon & Kambel, 2022, p. 46).

LFS foregrounds the active participation and leadership of all school members. Such a "whole school approach to social relations [...] values equally the knowledge and contributions of parents, teachers and pupils" (Laluvein, 2009, p. 10). Involving everyone in its implementation contributes to a sense of ownership. This approach allows for the inclusion of all parents independently of their language skills in the school language (Le Pichon & Kambel, 2022, p. 47) and empowers them as "primary partners in their children's academic journey" (Le Pichon et al., 2024, p. 23).

Although it may seem that language-friendly pedagogy is primarily aimed at multilingual students, it is in fact valuable for all. Students of all linguistic backgrounds can benefit from methods that facilitate the learning of the school register, which is crucial for academic development (Cummins, 2008). Pedagogies that make creative use of all available linguistic resources strengthen students' diverse linguistic repertoires and improve learning for all students (Bosma et al., 2022). Research at schools in the Netherlands that adopted a "multilingual approach," among them an LFS, shows that both monolingual and multilingual students improved their learning achievements, particularly in spelling (Gaikhorst et al., 2023, p. 333).

The collaborative approach of LFS extends beyond the level of individual schools: operating as a network encourages co-creation, knowledge sharing, and mutual support across distances, pushing for educational change (voXmi, 2024). Schools joining LFS pay a membership fee for two years, with higher fees for private schools. In turn, the schools receive organizational and professional development support through one-on-one online meetings. They also have access to regular network meetings to share and discuss mutually inspiring practices. Additionally, schools are invited to participate in international projects.

Foundations

The LFS approach was inspired by the highly diverse language situations of schools in Suriname. Suriname's Dutch-based education system is a remnant of colonial times. Most of its population does not grow up speaking Dutch, leading to high dropout rates, especially in rural areas (Le Pichon & Kambel, 2016). One of the schools serving as an inspiration for LFS is St. Antonius School, a primary school located in Galibi, which is a small community formed by the Indigenous villages of Christiaankondre and Langamankondre. While the lingua franca Sranan is most widely used in the country, Galibi presents a unique case: all generations speak Kari'na, a severely endangered Indigenous language. Established in 1925, St. Antonius School is the only school in Galibi, making it crucial for local children's education. Even though most teachers do not know any Kari'na and were not trained to teach children speaking other languages than Dutch, they find ways to bridge the language barriers and value the Kari'na language in the school.

The LFS program was founded in 2019 by the co-authors of this article, Ellen-Rose Kambel and Emmanuelle Le Pichon. After working on a bilingual math education project with Galibi and other Indigenous and tribal[1] communities in Suriname (Le Pichon & Kambel 2016), and considering the radically different language situations they had experienced in Surinamese schools, they were looking for an approach that could work anywhere. They discussed with the school

community of St. Antonius School, including parents, what inclusive education should look like. This led to the co-creation of the "Golden Rules of Galibi" (see Figure 1), encouraging parental involvement, the free use of languages, and the adaptation of school themes. The central role of Galibi in creating LFS challenges the colonial perception that countries in the Global South require input from the Global North, instead amplifying the voice of a minoritized Indigenous community. In 2023, St. Antonius School was awarded an honorary LFS membership in recognition of their contribution. This makes them the first and, to date, the only Indigenous school in the network.

A Case Study of LFS

Silver Creek Public School, located in Mississauga (Ontario), became the first Canadian school to join the LFS network in 2020. The school has around 320 students and 25 staff

Figure 1. The Golden Rules - St. Antonius School Galibi

Source: Authors

members, representing over 30 languages including English, Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu. Operating in a newcomer context, Silver Creek actively promotes inclusion and multilingualism through initiatives at the classroom, school, and broader network levels. Since the school is particularly active on all three levels, it serves as a case study to illustrate the different components of LFS.

Before joining the network, some teachers were already aware of the benefits of using students' home languages. For instance, teacher Karen James recalls: "I would encourage students to use their first language when they were learning new vocabulary words, participating in discussions, working on writing activities or having social conversations, [and] I found that they were excelling" (ESL/ELD Resource Group of Ontario (ERGO), 2022). She notes how sporadic support grew into a "domino effect" among teachers, leading to broader acceptance. James concludes: "[S]ince we've become a Language Friendly School I've seen that Silver Creek has changed in a positive way. It has changed the mindsets of educators and students, which has created a climate that embraces diversity" (ERGO, 2022). This shift highlights how individual efforts, when recognized within a whole-school initiative like LFS, help build an inclusive environment.

On a school-wide level, Silver Creek created the Welcome Tree, displaying multilingual welcome messages from students in the lobby. Their "Language of the Month" initiative further highlights linguistic diversity, with students researching and showcasing different languages. Students can volunteer as language ambassadors, welcoming parents during meetings at school in their home languages, encouraging parental involvement (ERGO, 2022). These efforts demonstrate how teachers creatively use the resources of the community to empower students, parents, and fellow staff members to actively participate in the school community.

In their efforts, Silver Creek staff is supported by the LFS network. By attending network meetings, they not only learn from others but also reflect on their own practices. Roberto di Prospero, the principal at the time, described attending these meetings as a connection to a broader network: "As an educator, it feels like you're part of something larger than just your own classroom or your own school, and I find that very joyful and rewarding" (ERGO, 2022). They also participated in collaborative projects, such as "LERI – Peer Learning in Language Friendly Networks," led by the Rutu Foundation and Austria's voXmi network. As part of the project, teachers visited other schools, attended workshops, and created lesson plans for their classrooms. These language-friendly lessons include activities such as developing classroom language policies and teaching others how to pronounce names correctly. The Silver Creek team has further shared its experiences at the first and second Language Friendly School conferences in 2022 and 2024.

Over time, Silver Creek has grown into a LFS that values the active participation of all its members—from classroom-level involvement to network-wide collaboration—strengthening partnerships and fostering inclusivity at every level.

Potential Access Barriers to the Network

The LFS network is built on principles that schools can adapt to their unique contexts, respecting local practices

and priorities. Many schools that join the network already have language-friendly practices in place, while other schools outside the network develop similar approaches independently. This contributes to a broader movement for linguistic inclusion in education.

Despite these developments, there is still relatively little awareness among educational institutions and limited political support for language-friendly approaches, which also affects the visibility of the LFS network. Most LFS resources are in English, Dutch, or French, the habitual languages of the LFS team and indicative of the areas where most schools in the network are located. At the same time, there are current initiatives to create focal points for various regions or countries to improve accessibility for speakers of other languages.

While LFS provides the necessary structure and support, the outcome still depends on the schools' long-term commitment—that is, the actual implementation of the declared goals. Teachers driving this change need support from school leadership, including dedicated time and staff discussions to develop a clear vision for their school. Financial and infrastructural constraints (e.g., lack of internet connection) may also limit access to the LFS network and its resources. LFS originated in an Indigenous context and is working to expand further participation through the Rutu Foundation's Indigenous-Led Education Network (ILED). Financial costs may prohibit participation for schools in marginalized contexts. To this end, a Language Friendly School Fund has been set up.

Conclusion

The LFS network aims to promote educational equity and social justice, ensuring fair treatment and access to educational opportunities to all students. This contributes to the achievement of the SDGs, particularly quality education (SDG4). LFS creates school environments that are inclusive of all members through the recognition and use of their home languages. Its bottom-up approach values everyone's knowledge and strengthens the connection between parents and schools. LFS emphasizes learning together, forming networks of cooperation to address the issue of creating inclusive education systems for all.

Endnote

1. In Suriname, Indigenous and tribal peoples are two distinct groups. Descendants of African enslaved people (also called "Maroons"), who freed themselves in the 18th and 19th century and formed their own nations in the interior, are internationally referred to as tribal peoples, with the same right to self-determination as Indigenous peoples.

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Part 2

Multilingual Education for Foundational Learning

The articles in Part Two discuss different aspects of L1-based MLE in primary education. L1-based MLE commences literacy acquisition in children's L1 and continues to use L1 across the curriculum as L2 becomes incrementally more prominent in teaching and learning. Hevia et al. discuss tools for assessing reading ability in an endangered Indigenous language in Mexico. They comment on the close synergies between language revitalization and foundational learning. Wandi et al. outline how an L1-based MLE approach is integral to two "Teaching at the Right Level" (TaRL) programs in Uganda. Dixit and Jhingran discuss the pedagogical beliefs of teachers working with Adivasi communities in India. Adivasi is a collective term adopted by minoritized groups in India, who regard themselves as the or earliest dwellers or inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent. Ancarno and Jatta describe a teacher training toolkit for early years teachers in The Gambia. Finally, Zhao et al. comment on the potential of digital media to facilitate L1-based MLE, drawing on findings from a recent international literature review.

Integrating Language Revitalization and Foundational Learning in Chiapas, Mexico

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Summary
This article examines the importance of linguistic revitalization through foundational learning. It describes an intervention that developed formative assessment tools and learning interventions in the Bats'i K'op language in Mexico. The MIA intervention exemplifies the crucial role of mother tongue education in literacy development, cultural inclusion, and student motivation.

Keywords
Fundamental learning
Foundational learning
Literacy
Revitalization
Indigenous language
Mexico

Introduction

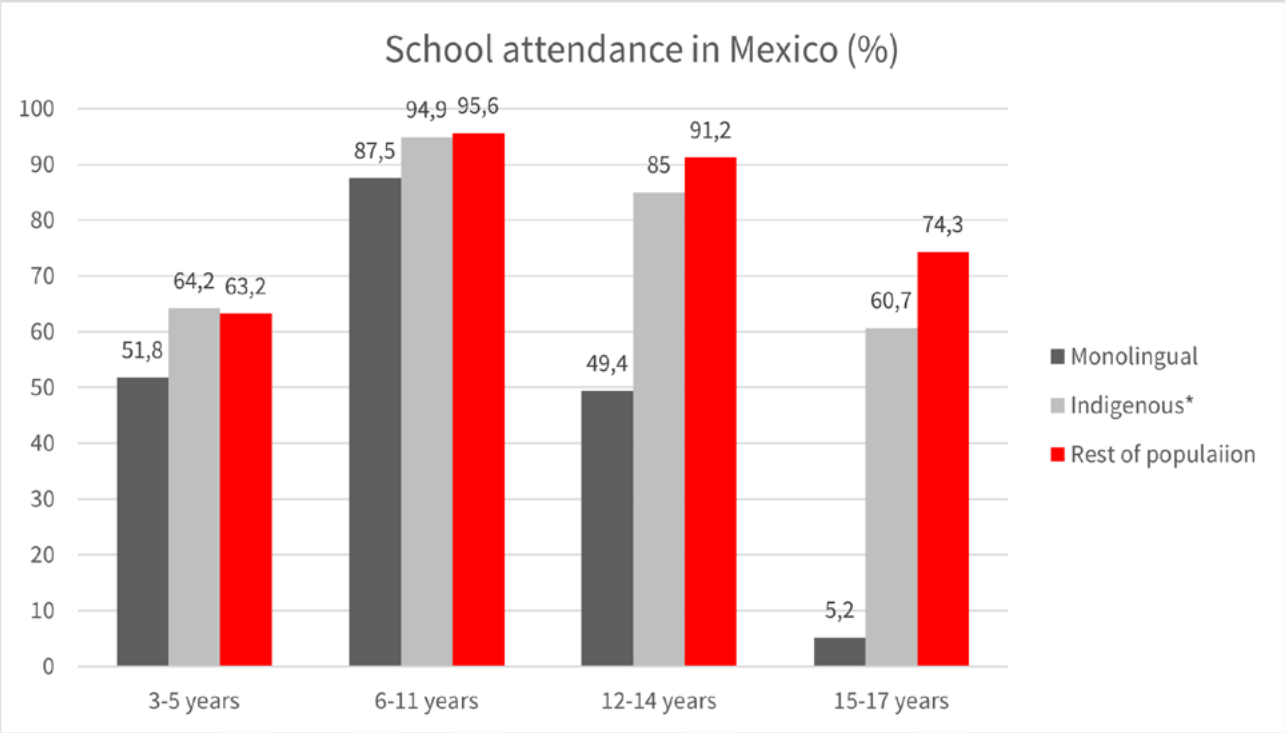
This article examines the importance of educational projects that improve foundational learning and help revitalize endangered Indigenous languages. Focusing on the Bats'i K'op language in Mexico, it analyzes a project that developed formative assessment tools and learning interventions. This project, known as the Medición Independiente de Aprendizajes (Independent Measurement of Learning) (MIA) intervention, serves as an example of how mother tongue education can be used in foundational learning programs and to revitalize endangered languages.

Context: Marginalization of Indigenous Peoples

In Mexico, as in the rest of Latin America, structural inequalities systematically disadvantage Indigenous peoples. Seventy percent live in poverty and with more limited access to health, housing, social security, food, and essential services than the rest of the population. In education, the inequality is evident in lower school attendance among the Indigenous population. Only 5.2% of the monolingual in Indigenous language population aged 15-17 attends school regularly (See Figure 1).

According to a recent report from the National Commission for the Continuous Improvement of Education (Comisión Nacional para la Mejora Continua de la Educación, 2024), Indigenous peoples in Mexico have a lower average level of schooling, with a gap of about four years of schooling between speakers of Indigenous languages (6.2 years) and the rest of the population (10 years). The illiteracy gap is also huge. Nationally in the school year 2021–2022, 7.5% of the population 15 years of age and older could not read or write a simple passage. Among Indigenous language speakers this percentage rose to 33.7%, and 43.2% among women speakers of Indigenous languages.

Figure 1. Percentage school attendance in Mexico by ethnic adscription.



Source: Authors based on data from Comisión Nacional para la Mejora Continua de la Educación (2024)

Low performance is partly due to the education system's struggle to provide instruction in minoritized or Indigenous languages. The importance of learning in one's mother tongue, is highlighted in UNESCO's 2021 report on The International Year of Indigenous Languages. As Nishanthi (2020) argues, learning in a familiar language is critical for a child's development, particularly cognitive development, and overall well-being. Speaking the mother tongue in school increases self-confidence and thinking skills and conveys freedom of speech (Ozfidan, 2017).

Globally, the number of Indigenous languages that are spoken is decreasing, with much of the decline in the Global South (UNESCO, 2021). Many languages are in danger of disappearing as they face multiple threats, including from the enduring coloniality of government, society and education(Flores Farfán, 2011).

A valuable cultural legacy is lost when a language ceases to be spoken. The survival of a community's language is linked to economic, demographic, and ecological benefits for that community. Efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages are therefore valuable, and education has an important role to play. However, to fulfill this role, educators need educational materials and assessment instruments designed for Indigenous languages (Hinton et al., 2018) and with the active participation of Indigenous peoples.

The MIA Project

The University of Veracruz and Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology (known as CIESAS) developed MIA as an action-research and social advocacy project. The intervention aims to reduce the disadvantage of children from Indigenous language communities with respect to fundamental learning. Fundamental learning encompasses essential skills, values, and attitudes needed for lifelong learning and healthy personal and psychosocial development. These extend beyond traditional literacy and numeracy to include life skills such as citizenship, self-care, and socioemotional skills. Without these foundational skills, learners risk social exclusion. We work with the Bats'i K'op language spoken in Chiapas, a state in the southeast of the Mexican Republic (De León Pasquel, 2005). Bats'i K'op belongs to the extensive Mayan linguistic family, and it is estimated to have 531,662 speakers in Chiapas.

Together with the educational authorities of the state of Chiapas, we seek to generate educational interventions in the Bats'i K'op language that are based on the "Teaching at the Right Level" (TaRL) approach. According to a World Bank working paper (Angrist et al., 2020), the TaRL approach has been implemented across diverse contexts in the Global South and in myriad languages (see for example, Wandi et al., in this NSI). It is expected that, once children complete this program, schools will be able to teach in Bats'i K'op, the children's L1, and introduce Spanish as L2. In simple terms, the TaRL model has two main characteristics: it uses formative assessment to indicate to students, teachers, and

their families the fundamental learning level of each child, and to organize pupils by learning level rather than by school grade. In the TaRL methodology, the first step is to design and validate a simple-to-apply but robust assessment instrument to identify the level of mastery of reading and comprehension skills in Bats'i K'op. We have chosen to start with reading because of its importance in the acquisition of new learning and because it is a fundamental element in the process of linguistic revitalization. This language has standardized writing rules shared by the speech community, developed by the National Institute of Indigenous Languages (INALI). This standardization makes it possible to use writing in the mother tongue as an effective means of cultural and educational production and reproduction.

The instrument ranges from simple syllables to simple narrative and informational texts, with comprehension questions that involve retrieving explicit and implicit information. For further details, see our report, Lessons Learned from Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) in MIA Interventions (Hevia de la Jara et al., 2023). We assembled a team of educators and linguists to develop an instrument to assess reading ability and learning needs. This instrument allowed us to detect a range of difficulties, from the most straightforward (reading monosyllabic words with a simple pattern) to the inferential comprehension of informative texts (See Table 1).

Table 1. Content and sub-competence of the assessment instrument

Content	Sub-competency	Performance	Evaluation criteria	Level
Reading fluency	Reads aloud monosyllabic words in a simple pattern	Choose two syllables and read them aloud	Reads at least two of three syllables fluently	Simple pattern syllables
	Reads aloud words with bi-syllabic words (CVC-VC/ CVC.CVC pattern)	Choose two words and read them aloud	Reads at least two out of three words fluently	Simple words
	Reads aloud words with glottalized consonants	Choose two words and read them aloud	Reads at least two out of three words fluently	Complex words
	Reads aloud short sentences of simple structure (VOS) with at least one glottal consonant and in the present tense	Choose two statements and read them aloud	Reads at least two out of three statements fluently	Statements
	Reads aloud a simple story of at least four linked statements	Read a short story carefully	Reads the text clearly (i.e., no pronunciation errors) and does not miss/change words more than four times while reading	History
Reading comprehension	Locates explicit and implicit information in narrative text	Correctly answer an inferential comprehension question	Answer correctly	Comprehension 1
	Locates explicit and implicit information in informative text	Read aloud the following text ... now answer the following question:	Answer correctly	Comprehension 2

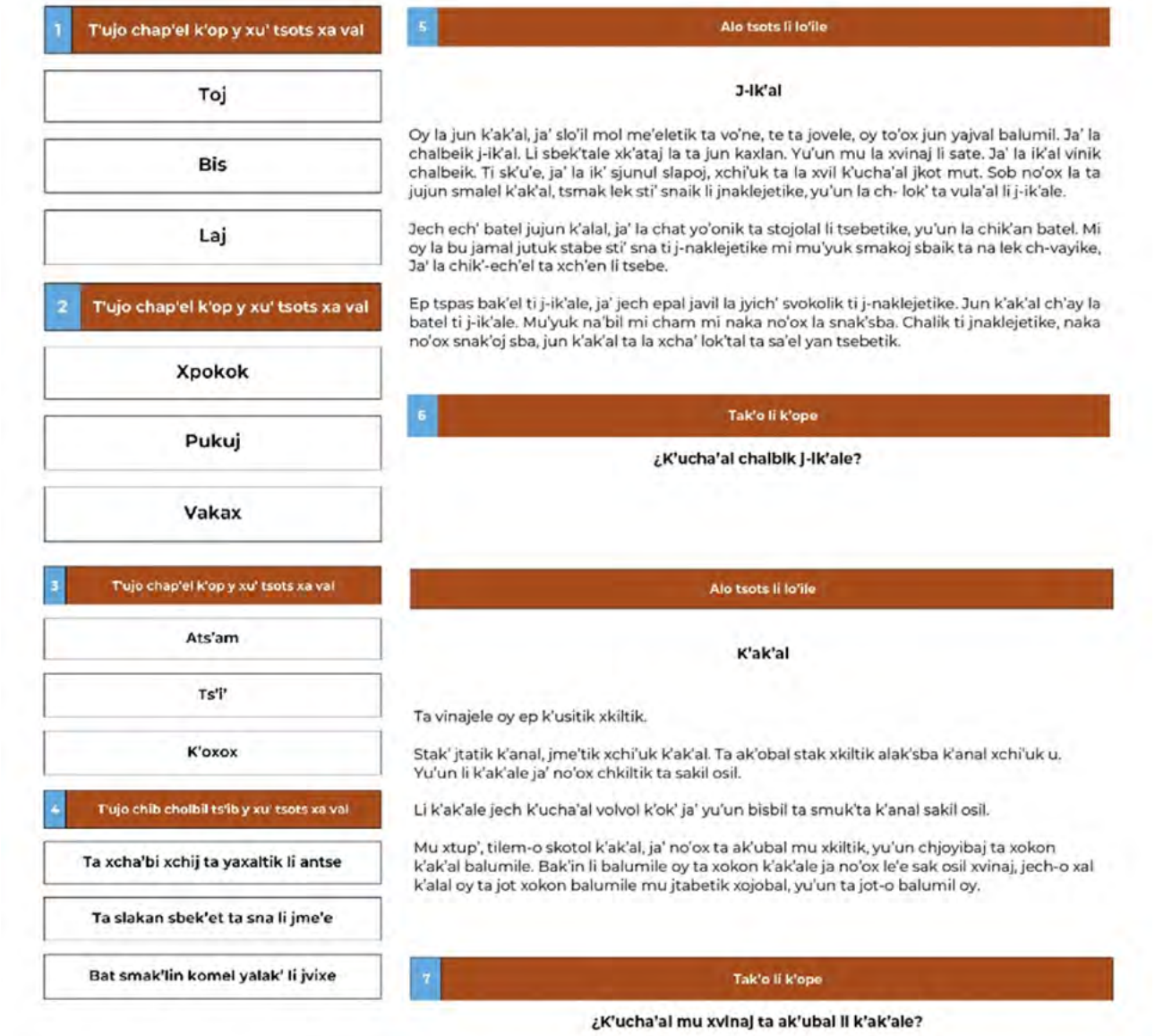
Source: Authors

The team created a bank of items, and the instrument underwent a rigorous process of validation and reliability employing various statistical procedures, including through the application of item response theory. This process resulted in a robust instrument that was administered verbally, one to one. The results allowed us to identify the percentage of success that each student has in reading Bats'i K'op and adjust the educational intervention for each student (Figure 2).

We administered the first version of this instrument to 410 children from grades 3 to 6. Although 92% could read one-syllable words, only 38% could read sentences, and only 25% could answer a simple comprehension question (See Figure 3).

With this information, the second step was to design a series of educational interventions for each learning level, ranging from simple to complex, with collective learning actions. In

Figure 2. Bats'i K'op measuring instrument



Source: Authors

2024, the MIA project, together with the Ministry of Education, developed these interventions, which are expected to be implemented and validated in schools throughout the 2024–2025 school year, seeking to increase the percentage of children who can read and understand Bats'i K'op.

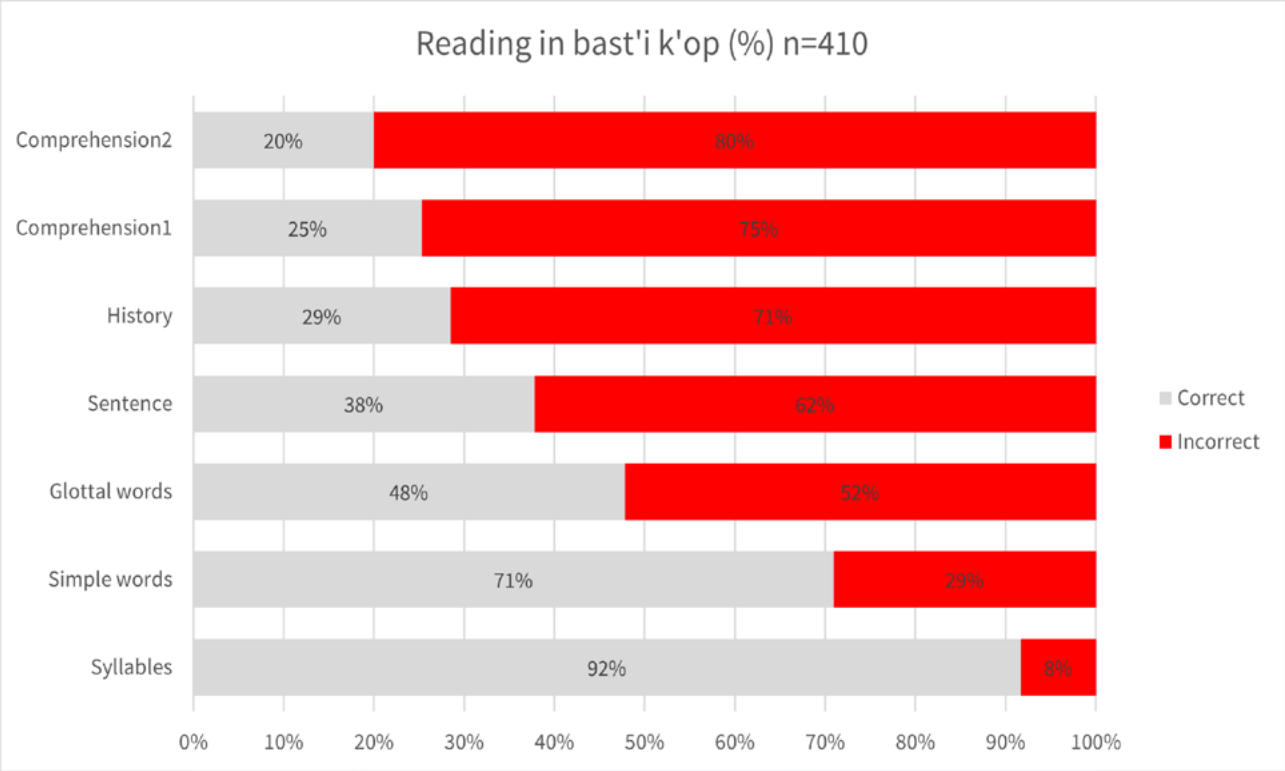
Final Words

Language revitalization and improving fundamental learning are two sides of the same coin. Maintaining and promoting the use of Indigenous languages is an extremely difficult process (Fishman, 1991). As several relatively successful examples of language revitalization worldwide show, it requires comprehensive policies that address various factors beyond just language learning, such as its status, community involvement, and availability of resources (Flores Farfán, 2011; Hinton & Hale, 2013).

On the one hand, it is essential to provide teaching and learning in learners' mother tongues, which allows Indigenous peoples to revalue their languages, ensure their fundamental learning, and thus improve their life prospects. Through the MIA intervention, we have made notable progress, but this is not the case in other languages, due to the multi-causal nature of the problem, including the low status of indigenous languages, the tendency towards monolingual education and structural problems within education systems. The development of a measurement tool and interventions to increase the use of written language is a first step in ensuring that basic learning is taking place. In this sense, having Indigenous language assessment instruments that are free and easy to apply can help to achieve more significant equity in the educational systems as they can be used in the design and evaluation of Indigenous language fundamental learning programs.

On the other hand, while it is hoped that children who complete the program will be able to continue their

Figure 3. Results of the application of the Bats'i K'op measurement instrument



Source: Authors

education in Bats'i K'op as L1, the reality is that many schools and teachers still prefer to teach only in Spanish. It is therefore important that these programs are linked to a policy of linguistic revitalization that allows for the revaluation of Indigenous languages. Language revitalization policies have in the past been developed through broader political movements for the public recognition of Indigenous communities. Within these movements, the promotion of the mother tongue is frequently a strategic arena of dispute (Fishman, 1991; Flores Farfán, 2011).

We hope that the assessment instrument we have created will contribute toward creating an impetus for linguistic revitalization policy. It has the potential to generate data that vindicate political movements advocating for the revitalizing of Indigenous languages and extending their use in schools. We know that this effort alone is not enough to address the structural problem of inequality, but having tools to understand the severity and intensity of the problem and being able to link this information with improvement can be a good first step.

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Addressing Foundational Learning Gaps: The TaRL Language Learning from Familiar to Formal (L2F2) Methodology in Uganda's Multilingual Education Landscape

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Summary
In Uganda, despite advances in primary enrolment, many learners leave primary school without foundational literacy skills. The Language Learning from Familiar to Formal (L2F2) methodology leveraged in "Teaching at the Right Level" (TaRL) interventions helps learners in Grades 3 to 5 strengthen their literacy skills in the country's multilingual context.

Keywords
Multilingual education
Teaching at the right level
Uganda
Language transition
Literacy instruction

Background

In many parts of the world, children go to school, but they do not learn, partly due to the use of unfamiliar languages of instruction. Globally, approximately 40 percent of children lack access to education in a language they can understand (World Bank, 2021). This trend is also reflected in Sub-Saharan Africa, where most education systems mandate learners to transition from the mother tongue to the formal language of instruction after the initial years of primary schooling (United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2020b). Typically, beyond Grade 4, all subjects are taught in L2, with L1 either offered as subjects or removed from curricula.

The formal language of instruction often reflects a nation's colonial past. For instance, many former British colonies use English as the language of instruction (Ramachandran, 2017). However, without relevant foundational skills in the L1, many learners struggle with the transition. This is compounded by teachers, who are products of the same education system and may lack proficiency in teaching English, making it difficult to meet curriculum expectations.

The Ugandan context illustrates how evolving language policies and education programs address the challenges faced by countries where a second language is used as the medium of instruction.

Ugandan Context

Uganda, a country with over 40 spoken languages, designated English as the official language and medium of instruction after independence from Britain in 1962 (USAID, 2020a). Resulting from challenges with the use of English, a 1992 white paper (Uganda Education Policy Review Commission, 1992) advocated using L1 as a medium of instruction until Grade 4, with English taught as a subject from Grades 1–4 and becoming the medium of instruction from Grade 5 onwards. A new language policy and curriculum reflecting this was enacted in 2007, mandating local languages for instruction in Grades 1–3, with English introduced in Grade 4, which serves as a transitional year (Altinyelken, 2010). The curriculum accommodates urban areas and regions without a predominant local language, allowing English to be used as the medium of instruction in these cases.

Despite policies supporting L1 instruction in the early years, several contextual factors hinder effective implementation (Ssentanda, 2014). These include inadequate bilingual teaching-learning materials and limited teacher professional development in pedagogical approaches to facilitate the transition from L1 to L2. Additionally, policies granting refugees free access to Uganda's schools and promoting integration challenge educators who are unfamiliar with refugee languages. A study on language use in refugee-impacted schools in Uganda (Hicks & Maina, 2021) found that English is commonly used as the medium of instruction, posing challenges for many students, who are more familiar with French, Arabic, Kiswahili[1], or other refugee languages. While some teachers adopt bilingual methods, many still need professional development to effectively implement them. The use of teaching assistants proficient in both refugee languages and the medium of instruction is common but not widespread enough to provide all refugee learners the language support they need.

As a result, many primary school learners in Uganda are unable to read at grade level. Recent national assessments showed that only 42.7 percent of Grade 6 learners were grade-level proficient in English literacy (Uganda National Examinations Board, 2024). The 2021 Uwezo assessment showed 32 percent of Grade 7 learners were not proficient in local language literacy, highlighting the need for innovative solutions to help learners catch up on foundational reading skills. The Language Learning from Familiar to Formal (L2F2) methodology in "Teaching at the Right Level" (TaRL) proves to be a promising solution to address multilingual education challenges in Uganda.

L2F2 Methodology: A Promising Solution

TaRL is a rigorously evaluated approach (Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), 2022) to accelerate learners' acquisition of foundational skills. Developed by Pratham International and TaRL Africa, L2F2 is an innovative methodology that leverages TaRL principles to accelerate children's foundational reading in both L1 and L2 by leveraging their proficiency in the L1.

The methodology's design aligns with three primary objectives: expanding learners' English vocabulary, fostering fluency in English through L1 support, and facilitating their comprehension of English text. Establishing a correlation between the L1 and English is key. As most Ugandan local languages use the Latin script, learners familiar with local language reading already recognize English alphabet sounds and shapes.

L2F2 teaching-learning materials are co-created and validated with local stakeholders for the L1 and the L2. These materials leverage pre-existing knowledge to help learners move from the known to the unknown using familiar pictures, words, and sentences in both languages. For example, the English Calendar Chart (Figure 1) helps learners build their vocabulary, recall words, and construct sentences in an independent and nonlinear way by making connections through the following pattern:

1. Learners are introduced to the English letter sounds and shapes.

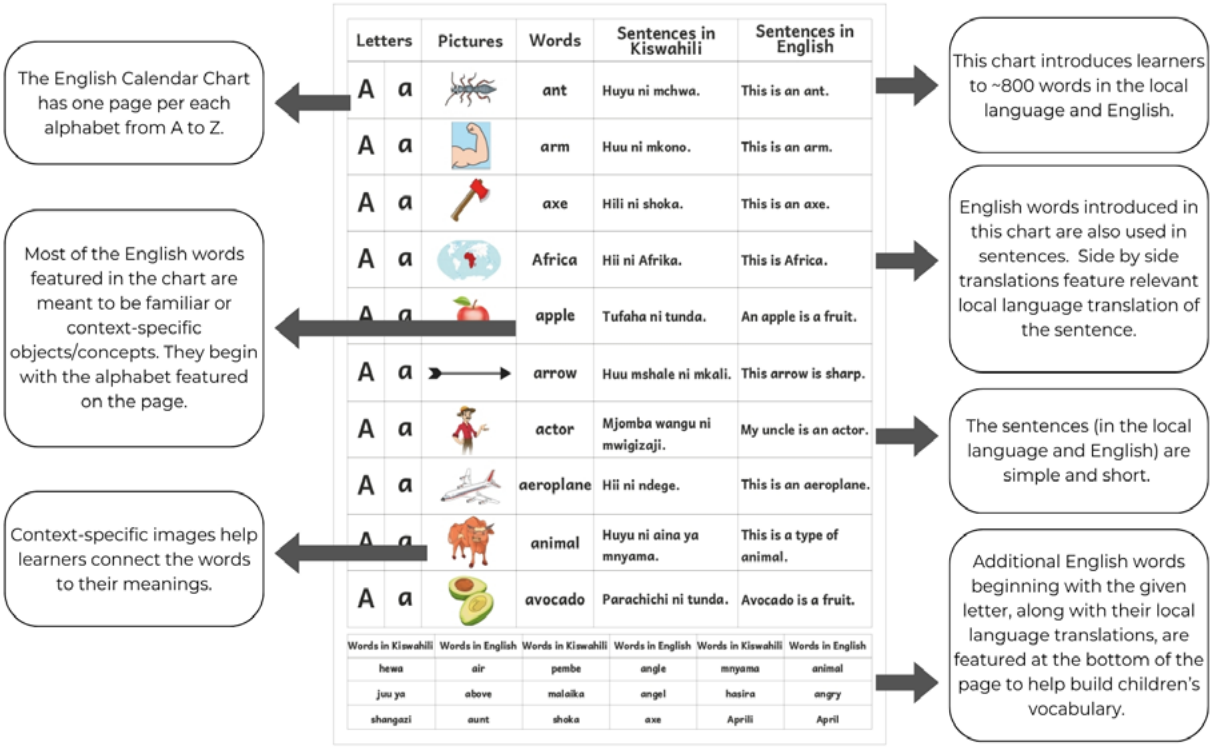
2. Through carefully curated word associations and context-specific imagery, learners grasp how a given letter is used at the beginning of a word.

3. English words and sentences are paired with their translations in the local language, familiarizing learners with English sentence structures.

With continuous reading practice and internalization of the pattern, learners can read and recall letters, words, and sentences in English.

L2F2 progressively transitions children from L1 to L2. Assessment-driven grouping facilitates tailored instruction, while a balanced approach to language learning combines phonics with whole-language methods, teaching language skills in nonlinear ways. For example, children are explicitly taught letter-sound mapping through engaging activities while also being exposed to simple text reading. The methodology integrates new activities alongside evidence-based, play-based TaRL practices, enriching dual-language acquisition.

Figure 1. Bilingual chart in Kiswahili



Source: Developed by Pratham International and TaRL Africa

VVOB, a Belgian and Flemish non-profit organization working towards quality education internationally, and Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID) have applied the L2F2 methodology in Uganda to help learners catch up on their literacy skills. The following section highlights key program design elements, successes, and challenges in using L2F2 in the Ugandan context.

Case Study 1: UCatchUp Kasese

VVOB and the Hempel Foundation have supported the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), Kasese District Local Government, and the Kasese Municipal Council to implement an L2F2 program since 2022. The program, called "UCatchUp," was initially implemented in 80 public primary schools, and scaled up to all 264 public primary schools in 2025.

UCatchUp is implemented by trained government teachers and is supported by existing government structures. Teaching-learning materials for both L1 and L2 were contextualized, translated, and validated in collaboration with relevant departments and agencies of the MoES, including the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), and the district language board.

The program is implemented for an hour a day across three school terms. In Kasese, each school selects one of three languages (depending on their pupils' L1) —Runyoro/Rutoro, Runyankole/Rukiga, and Lukhonzo—as mediums of instruction. In UCatchUp classes, these languages serve as a bridge to reading English.

Before starting UCatchUp classes, teachers assess learners to gauge their reading levels in both L1 and L2. UCatchUp is structured into two phases: Phase I (between baseline and midline assessments), focuses on letter names, sounds, and basic word associations, guiding learners in simple sentences, in both L1 and L2. In Phase II (between midline and endline assessments), learners practice simple conversations and grammar concepts such as tenses and singular/plural usage. English activities are also used to introduce learners to synonyms, antonyms, and comprehension skills.

Results from the pilot consistently show significant improvements in learners' literacy skills. In 2023, there was a 21.1 percentage point increase in the proportion of Grade 3 to 5 learners who can read simple sentences in English, rising from 33.2 percent at baseline to 54.3 percent at endline. In local language literacy, there was a 37-percentage point increase in learners who can read at least a simple paragraph, from 24.7 percent at baseline to 61.6 percent at endline.

Notably, baseline assessments reveal a higher proficiency in English than in the local language. In the 2023 baseline assessment, a larger proportion of learners could read a simple paragraph in English compared to the local language. Specifically, 17.8 percent of Grade 3, 36.7 percent of Grade 4, and 50.0 percent of Grade 5 learners could read a simple paragraph in English, while 16.1 percent of Grade 3, 23.6 percent of Grade 4, and 37.7 percent of Grade 5 learners could read a simple paragraph in the local language. The data indicate low literacy in both languages, suggesting

standard classroom practices may not effectively improve outcomes.

The disparity in performance at baseline necessitates further investigation. Discussions with teachers during the review of the assessment results suggest several hypotheses for further exploration. Teachers reported inconsistencies in their adherence to language policy, frequently opting to conduct instruction in English rather than the local language. Contributing factors include high parental demand for English as it is viewed as the language of opportunities, neglect of teaching the local language after Grade 4, and difficulty teaching local languages different from their own mother tongues. The findings illustrate the need for caregiver engagement to emphasize the importance of mother-tongue instruction. Additionally, teacher professional development should focus on adhering to language policy and using pedagogies such as L2F2 to improve literacy in both L1 and L2.

Case Study 2: Kyaka II Refugee Settlement Bridging Program

Uganda's Kyaka II refugee settlement is home to approximately 130,000 refugees, primarily from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite progressive education policies allowing refugees access to the Ugandan education system, refugees face significant challenges integrating into the education system due to language barriers.

YARID has implemented the Bridging Program in Kyaka II since 2020, facilitating the integration of out-of-school refugee children aged 9 to 14 into formal schools using the L2F2 methodology. Kiswahili is used as the medium of instruction as most of the enrolled learners are already familiar with it. The six-month program features a Grade 3 teacher from the host community and a refugee teaching assistant. The first 1.5 months focus on instruction in Kiswahili, the next 1.5 months on instruction in both Kiswahili and English, and the final three months on instruction in English.

In addition to cultural exchanges, the L2F2 methodology has improved children's literacy skills. Data from 4,461 children between 2020 and 2022 show a 37-percentage point increase in children who could read basic words in English, from 0 percent at baseline to 37 percent at endline. Stakeholders report positive feedback; headteachers find their work easier as students improve their English proficiency, enhancing communication and integration into formal classes. Parents appreciate their children learning and speaking basic English, while students gain confidence to participate actively. The L2F2 methodology has also strengthened the connection between learners and teachers, creating a supportive learning environment.

Several challenges have emerged. In the first 1.5 months, when instruction is in Kiswahili, learner interest is low as they expected to learn English immediately. This phase is also challenging for Ugandan teachers who lack proficiency in Kiswahili, hindering effective communication with learners. To address this, the program employs teaching assistants fluent in both Kiswahili and English to provide language support for teaching and learning. Transitioned learners also face difficulties in formal schooling, struggling with the languages of instruction and large class sizes that differ from those in the Bridging Program.

Reflections on Implementation, Policy, and Research

The case studies highlight the potential and challenges of implementing multilingual education strategies such as the L2F2 methodology, emphasizing the need for context-specific adaptations and stakeholder involvement.

A key success of the L2F2 methodology is that it has strengthened learners' reading skills both in the local language and English through highly interactive classes, leading to the rapid progress of children's learning. The L2F2 methodology makes teaching enjoyable as it builds on what learners already know, helping teachers engage learners more effectively and capture their interest, and encouraging regular attendance.

However, challenges remain, including limited resources, teacher training needs, and the gap between policy and practice particularly due to caregiver resistance to L1 instruction, all of which impact the success of any innovative approach. The program models are being refined with stakeholder input to address the challenges and scale up the initiatives to reach more learners.

Future adaptation of this methodology for other L1s and contexts and with other prevalent L2s such as French and Portuguese could yield generalized lessons on multilingual education strategies for low-resource, low-capacity settings such as Uganda. While positive outcomes are evident in children's learning and government capacity to implement and scale the program, further research is needed to assess the L2F2 methodology's effectiveness on a larger scale.

Endnote

1. Also known as the Swahili language

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Navigating Multilingual Pedagogies in Primary Education for Adivasi Children in India

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Summary
This paper explores the dynamic relationship between traditional beliefs and practices and the more modern pedagogical strategies that promote a balanced and mixed use of languages. In addition to restructuring teaching methods, the study calls for a reculturing of teacher beliefs—an onerous process in which teachers actively question and transform their existing beliefs and habits.

Keywords
Teacher beliefs and practices
Language of instruction
Pedagogical strategies
Adivasi education

Background

Multilingualism, a lived reality in India, is hierarchical in nature. It is characterized by a double divide—one between the elitist language of power (English) and the major regional languages and the other between the regional languages and non-dominant languages[1] (Mohanty, 2010). Assigning certain languages a constitutional status in India has also contributed to the marginalization of the non-dominant languages. For instance, Hindi has been named the official language of the Union, English has been designated as an associate official language, and 22 regionally dominant languages have been formally recognized in the Constitution of India. The local, non-dominant languages are at the bottom of the power structure. The school systems and language education policies also reflect this marginalization of local languages. "It has been estimated that 37% of students in low- and middle-income countries are taught in a language they do not understand" (World Bank, 2023). It is estimated that 25% of primary school children in India face a moderate to severe learning disadvantage owing to the difference between their home language and the official language or medium of instruction used at school; this does not include another 25% of students studying through the medium of English in low-quality affordable private schools (Jhingran, 2009). This is alarming given that providing instruction in learners' home languages or mother tongues (L1s) has the potential to improve educational access, quality, and equity, particularly for groups that have been socially marginalized (UNESCO, 2010, 2013).

Context of the Multilingual Education Intervention

In Dungarpur, a district in Rajasthan, almost all the children speak Wagdi at home. Wagdi is a non-dominant Adivasi language with some degree of social and regional variation. Adivasi is a collective terms for Indigenous peoples, meaning earliest dwellers or inhabitants. There is a low level of parental literacy in Dungarpur, and most teachers understand and speak children's L1. In general, at the level of educational administration, there is a low level of acceptance for Wagdi and its variants to be used as formal media of instruction.

The multilingual education (MLE) based early language and literacy program designed and implemented by the Language and Learning Foundation, Delhi (LLF) in Dungarpur aims to develop basic vocabulary, listening comprehension, oral expression, and literacy skills in Hindi (L2) while building oral expression and higher-order thinking of children (grades 1 and 2) in their primary language, Wagdi (L1). Using L1 in the classroom for various pedagogic activities for an extended period can improve children's confidence, self-esteem, comprehension, higher-order thinking, communication, and expression, according to the program's central idea (see Figure 1). An evaluation of student learning outcomes in the MLE program based on a quasi-experimental design has shown impressive effect sizes of 1.50 to 2.0 for most language and literacy skills over three years (LLF, 2022).

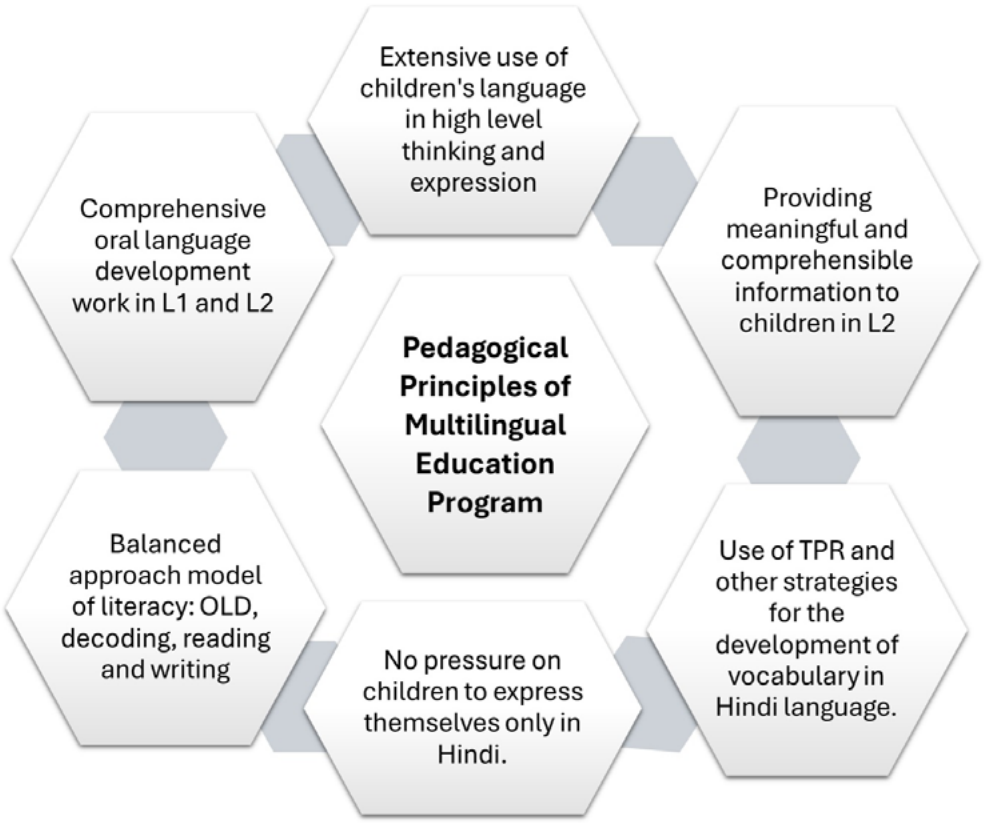
Research Findings about Teacher Beliefs

The study "What Makes an Effective MLE Programme?" (Dixit & Jeurkar, 2023) was conducted in a selected sample of intervention and comparison schools to explore various aspects of LLF's MLE intervention in Dungarpur, Rajasthan. The research objectives included examining (a) curricular and pedagogic practices used by teachers, (b) beliefs of teachers regarding MLE and early language and literacy (ELL), (c) language used by students and teachers inside classrooms, and (d) engagement of students with curriculum, materials, and pedagogic practices. This paper will explore the key insights drawn from data analysis on teacher beliefs.

Data were gathered using teacher belief survey questionnaires and interviews with 40 teachers—20 from LLF's intervention schools and 20 from comparison schools. Interviews were conducted with teachers in 12 of the schools (8 intervention and 4 comparison). Survey responses from the teachers were then scored by the researchers on their degree of appropriateness, based on established best principles of early language and literacy pedagogy as well as multilingual education. Total scores were interpreted on their degree of appropriateness. The data were gathered across the following belief categories: beliefs about children and their background, higher-order thinking, common underlying proficiency, use of L1, L2 pedagogy, multilingual education, balanced literacy approach, and mixed language use (see Figure 1).

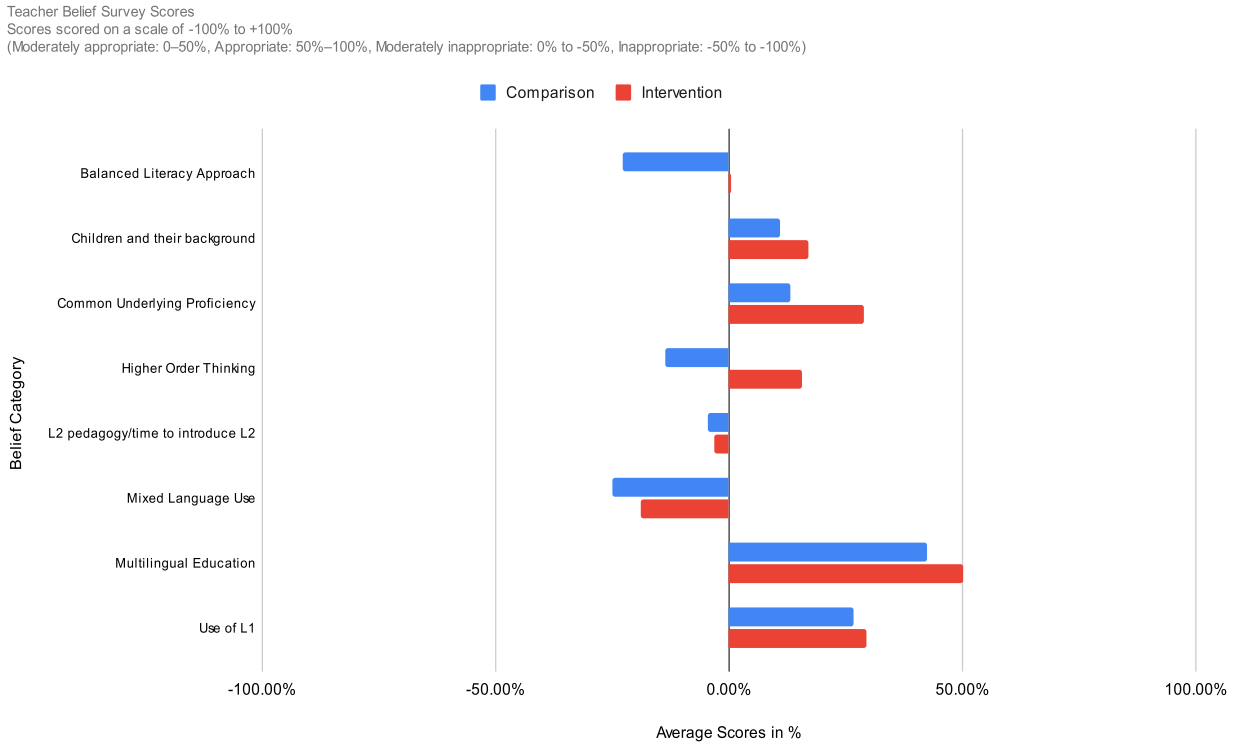
The scores suggest that all teachers from both intervention and comparison schools have somewhere between moderately appropriate and moderately inappropriate beliefs on various aspects of ELL and MLE. On average, teachers in intervention schools hold more appropriate beliefs around the principles of ELL pedagogy. In comparison schools, the strategy employed by the teachers for teaching literacy is through rote and repetition, as opposed to a variety of activities (e.g., action songs, games for creating phonological

Figure 1. Pedagogical principles of the multilingual education program



Source: "What Makes an Effective MLE Programme?" (Dixit & Jeurkar, 2023)

Figure 2. Teacher belief survey scores



Source: "What Makes an Effective MLE Programme?" (Dixit & Jeurkar, 2023)

awareness, shared reading, and big books, to name a few) targeting different learning competencies in intervention schools. Teachers from both intervention and comparison schools have moderately positive views around multilingual education and the use of children's L1 in classrooms. Teacher interviews shed further light on why teachers have a favorable opinion of MLE and using children's home languages in the class. However, intervention and comparison teachers differ in certain beliefs—for example, beliefs around higher-order thinking, a balanced literacy approach, and common underlying proficiency.

Entrenched Beliefs and Evolving Practices

The intersection of teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices reveals ongoing tensions in implementing MLE strategies. As one comparison schoolteacher shared, "We 'have to' use Wagdi in class. These children do not understand Hindi when they enter school. So, we just cannot use Hindi in class." The teacher highlighted Wagdi's role as a "language of comprehension." This belief also carries a connotation that Adivasi children cannot understand Hindi (dominant, MoI, with a superior status). Thus, they "have to" use Wagdi (dominated, no formal place in the classroom, with a lower status). The practice of using Wagdi in comparison classrooms is non-intentional, non-strategic, and ad hoc in nature. This underlines a challenge that all intervention schoolteachers have faced: to continue a practice (use children's L1) but derive it from a different set of beliefs. The challenge for intervention teachers lies in shifting this practice from mere necessity to a deliberate, pedagogically informed strategy, which requires clarity in both purpose and method.

Opinions seem to be split among teachers on whether they think all children in their class can become good readers and writers. About 40% of teachers in comparison schools and 35% of teachers in intervention schools believe that "some children are born with a special ability which helps them learn a second language." A striking correlation was observed between a teacher's belief in all children's ability to become fully proficient in literacy and the teacher's good performance in class. Teachers who did not believe in every child's ability to become good readers and writers also performed poorly in class and did not include all children in pedagogical processes. They often blamed students' irregular attendance, poverty, and lack of parental attention or resources for their inability to learn. Some teachers also seemed to have rationalized their beliefs about children's abilities by claiming that not every student in class needs to become a good reader or a writer, as some children can be good at music or sports instead.

There also seems to be a certain amount of contradiction in teachers' beliefs around the best way of teaching L2 to children. On the one hand, an overwhelming majority of teachers (75% in comparison schools and 77% in intervention schools) agree with the survey prompt, "The best way to learn Hindi is if everyone in school is made to converse only in Hindi." On the other hand, almost a similar percentage of

teachers also seem to agree with the statement in the survey: "If children have a better grasp of their mother tongue, it will help them in learning other languages as well."

The former belief that complete immersion in Hindi is the best way to learn it follows from a monolingual paradigm that prioritizes maximum exposure to L2. The latter belief stems from a more multilingual understanding of language learning based on the interdependent growth of two or more languages. This is also a belief in children's ability to use their knowledge of L1 to learn L2, and using L1 in the L2 acquisition process is treated as an asset and not as a hindrance. However, it seems that teachers may not have had much opportunity to think through these contradictory ideas, reflect upon their practice, and arrive at a coherent understanding of language acquisition that stems from their reflexive practice.

All the teachers that were interviewed can be said to have a "deficit view" (Williams, 1970) toward children from Wagdi Adivasi backgrounds. In their response to the belief survey, around 40% of teachers in comparison schools and 10% of teachers in intervention schools expressed the opinion that "Adivasi children's culture is very different and thus not very relevant to school learning." They enumerated several challenges that children's socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds pose in their learning processes. However, there seems to have been a fair acceptance with intervention schoolteachers that using Wagdi in the classroom can improve children's self-esteem.

From Restructuring to Reculturing

One of the crucial reasons for the gap between principles and practice is that individual agents (trainers, curriculum experts, government officers, and teachers) responsible for change can misinterpret reform and change surface features or practices (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). In this case, it is evident that the LLF has successfully introduced new instructional strategies and fostered more interactive classrooms. As a result, children from intervention classrooms are more vocal and confident. However, greater effort and energy are needed to grasp the significance of these new practices and "why" they matter. A shift in teachers' beliefs and how they engage with this tension between long-held beliefs and evolving practices needs further work.

Gaining a deeper understanding of practices while questioning and reframing one's own beliefs is a monumental task. For this to happen, simple or even rigorous restructuring (for instance, updating textbooks, creating supplementary material, introducing new teaching methods, etc.) is not enough. Educators often rush to adopt new structures and strategies without considering their deeper implications (Oakes et al., 1999). This often happens because the education ecosystem of administrators mandates such changed practices. This "prescribed" and top-down approach to change often douses the need and ability to question one's beliefs and results in surface-level adoption of practices by teachers.

Implementing the MLE program and conducting the research study has provided LLF with a valuable opportunity to observe the nuances of language integration and gain critical insights into the complexities of teaching practices and teacher beliefs. This experience has fostered a strong sense that an approach of "Reculturing"—essentially how teachers come to question and change their beliefs and habits (Fullan, 2016)—is what is needed. While teachers often adopt new practices, and students might benefit from more structured approaches, lasting change—particularly in areas such as integrating children's non-dominant languages—requires a deeper shift in underlying beliefs. This calls for a transformation in how teacher professional development is planned and implemented. Collaborative ownership among all stakeholders is crucial, beginning with acknowledging the tension between beliefs and practices and creating both academic and personal spaces within education systems for educators to reflect on their beliefs about MLE. More specifically, teachers' beliefs about the sociocultural hierarchy of languages and the positioning of mixed-language practices within the classroom need focused attention. This involves not only recognizing the need for change but also understanding the reasoning behind new approaches, enabling teachers to adopt them more effectively.

It is vital to advocate not only for restructuring how teachers adopt MLE strategies but also for "reculturing"—how educators shift their assumptions and habits around language use. While restructuring focuses on adjusting instructional methods, "reculturing" involves a vital cultural transformation that supports teachers in adopting newer practices while they simultaneously question and realign their beliefs.

Endnote

1. We use the term non-dominant languages to describe non-standard variants of regional languages and the languages of Adivasi communities, highlighting that these languages are typically excluded from formal, administrative, and educational domains.

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L1-MLE Pedagogy in Teacher Training: Innovations for Multilingual Education in The Gambia

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Summary
This article explores the implementation of multilingual education (MLE) based on children's first languages (L1s) in The Gambia. It examines a teacher training toolkit designed to integrate these into educational practices. Set against recent policy changes and developments, this study investigates how teacher training and pedagogical innovation can enhance multilingual education policy implementation and classroom practice.

Keywords
Multilingual education
Education policy
Teacher training
Pedagogic innovation
The Gambia

Introduction

Although there is ample research supporting L1-based multilingual education (Benson, 2017), many countries, including The Gambia, face implementation challenges due to the historical exclusion of African languages.

Our article focuses on a non-commercial teacher training toolkit co-developed with teachers to empower primary school teachers to incorporate learners' L1s into their resources. The toolkit aligns with current debates about the need to integrate national languages into Gambian education. It promotes the use of multiple languages in the classroom, echoing L1-based MLE's focus on "the purposeful and systematic use of learners' strongest languages for literacy and learning" (Benson, 2017, p. 20) before introducing other official/national/international languages as additional languages of instruction (Benson, 2021).

We compare our teacher training with the objectives of Gambian education policies, specifically the 2023 first language-in-education policy recommending the use of national languages from early childhood development (ECD) to Grade 3. Our findings offer insights into how pedagogical innovation can advance multilingual education policy and practice in The Gambia, bridging the gap between policy and practice.

The Gambia's Linguistic Landscape

The Gambia recognizes seven national languages: Mandinka, Pulaar (Fulfulde), Olof, Sarahule, Jola, Seereer, and Manjaku, each with various dialects spoken beyond its borders. Mandinka, Pulaar, and Sarahule are spoken in more countries in West Africa than the other four, which are mostly confined to The Gambia and Senegal. For instance, Pulaar/Fulfulde is spoken in twenty countries in Africa, including the Central African Republic. Mandinka and Sarahule are spoken in The Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso, among others.

Variation among these languages is complex and under-researched. Mandinka, with the widest range of speakers in the country, has varieties determined by factors such as the district, community, and region to which its speakers belong. Such variation affects the development of learning materials in the national languages. Although the different varieties of these languages are largely inter-intelligible, none of them is perceived as a standard or more acceptable than others—or at least there seems to be no agreement as to which varieties should be used over others in prestigious domains such as education.

Since its colonization, The Gambia's formal education system has been largely dominated by English. Until the 2023 official language-in-education policy, attempts to integrate Indigenous languages in education were unsuccessful. A recent language mapping exercise aiming to determine which language should be used as a language of instruction revealed that apart from Mandinka, Pulaar, and Olof—which are spoken across the country—the remaining four languages are only spoken in specific areas. For instance, Sarahule would be used as a language of instruction in some schools in the upper river region (URR) because the Sarahule-speaking population, except for two villages in Jara east district, is concentrated mainly in that region.

Even in schools where a single language predominates, minority language speakers will likely be present, necessitating explanations in their L1s. Teachers will therefore need to continue using languages other than the primary language of instruction to enhance comprehension and facilitate learning even after the implementation of the new policy.

Despite the history of excluding national languages from education, characterized by strict English-only policies where teachers and learners using a minoritized language could be severely punished, these languages have a long history of supporting learning, such as through translation and summaries in the national languages (flexible multilingualism). In recent years, this oral use of national languages to help children understand what they are learning has become widely accepted and encouraged. As academic literature and recent discussions in The Gambia have shown, integrating national languages into education is crucial for educational equity and quality in The Gambia because all children, regardless of their linguistic background, can access education in a language they understand. The benefits are manifold—for example, it not only improves comprehension and learning outcomes but also fosters a sense of cultural identity and pride among students. However, so far challenges to the implementation of L1-based MLE programs in The Gambia have been numerous.

Challenges in Implementing L1-based MLE

In The Gambia, the terms "mother tongue," "Indigenous languages," "local languages," "Gambian languages," and "national languages" are often used interchangeably when discussing multilingual education. Debates regarding attempts to integrate national languages in education are therefore to be understood as being driven by a desire to allow children to learn in their L1.

Research on L1-based MLE in Africa reveals many challenges. In his seminal article, Stroud (2001) reported that the problems foiling attempts to use African languages in education were widely documented, including misconceptions regarding the purpose of this practice (Kioko et al., 2014), the often-cited lack of resources and teacher training issues, the low literacy status of some African languages (UNESCO, 2014), inconsistencies in writing systems (Benson & Young, 2016), unstable policy contexts and/or a lack of governmental support (Trudell, 2016), inadequate pedagogical design and assessment systems (Zamora et al., 2024), and language ideologies that undervalue African languages (Childs, 2020).

Research on The Gambia echoes these findings (e.g., Igboanusi, 2014). Ancarno, Bouy and Jeng (2024) discuss the specific challenges of an early parallel biliteracy program, prescribing equal literacy lessons in English and one national language from grade one to grade three. They highlight "practical hurdles" (Ancarno, Bouy & Jeng, 2024, p. 177), such as the challenges pertaining to national language teacher training, the low literacy status of the national languages, inconsistencies in spelling in the national languages, and the need to improve teaching material quality (including but not limited to national language teaching material). They also reveal less commonly discussed challenges in The Gambia, namely language ideological beliefs and limited expertise and experience in the national languages.

Insights into the difficulty of integrating national languages in education in The Gambia, especially now that interest among educators, academics, and the general public is high, can be found beyond the academic literature. These are crucial given the lack of literature on language in education in The Gambia. One of the authors, the Honourable Sidia Jatta, has spoken extensively about these challenges. Early in his career, he had to discontinue a pilot project using national languages as the medium of instruction in three schools due to a lack of governmental support and the need to handwrite all resources. The acute awareness of the difficulties of integrating national languages in education among senior educators since government approval of the new language of instruction policy is apparent and reassuring. Momodou Jeng's comments about teacher preparation and the need for support from a range of actors during the July 2024 launch of

our toolkit illustrate this:

> *"Because the policy may be good, but if the implementation of that policy is not well prepared, so that the teacher capacity is built, nothing will happen. And that means the policy is never going to be implemented […] As a ministry, we design the policies and frameworks and guidelines. But the implementation of these policies is going to be only effective if all the stakeholders, including training institutions, including parents, including community leaders, everybody that has a stake in education, play their role in supporting the implementation"* (Jeng is the Director of the Curriculum Research, Evaluation and Development Directorate).

However, this understanding alone does not guarantee the success of this new language-in-education policy, as many challenges still exist.

Case Study: Implementation in The Gambia

The teacher training toolkit provides practicing teachers and teacher trainees with the confidence and proficiency to facilitate the use of students' L1(s) in the classroom. Developed between 2021 and 2024 in collaboration with five teachers, it involved consultation with numerous stakeholders, including policymakers, national language desk officers of the Curriculum Research, Evaluation & Development Directorate (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education), teachers, head teachers, and representatives from educational charities.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the multilingual resources for primary schools in The Gambia toolkit

Source: Ancarno, Little and Jatta (2024)

The toolkit comprises nine units (Figure 1). The first five units focus on helping teachers understand the basic principles of L1-based MLE, while the remaining four units guide teachers in applying these principles to create written teaching and learning materials that embrace all the languages spoken by their learners. Additionally, the toolkit includes a Multilingual resource bank, which we plan to update continually based on teachers' suggestions.

This toolkit will be used to deliver a course at Gambia College, the national teacher training institution in The Gambia. In the 2024–2025 academic year, it will train approximately 500 first year teacher trainees (they are trained as generalists). Feedback from teachers, policymakers, and educators has been extremely encouraging, and we anticipate more in-depth feedback throughout the pilot phase.

We foresee that the toolkit will have a tangible impact on teacher education, as the college has previously been unable to focus on multilingual pedagogy in its curriculum. The Multilingual resource bank is also timely and will complement the textbooks and other materials being developed in the national languages for the new language of instruction policy.

Discussion and Conclusion

The toolkit promotes linguistic inclusivity by encouraging the use of any language spoken by learners, complementing government initiatives for integrating national languages. As the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, Ebrima Sisawo, is reported to have stated, "Our language-in-education policy is evidence of our commitment to cultural heritage, promoting multilingualism, and nurturing well-rounded individuals who can communicate effectively in a globalised world" (Jadama, 2023).

We also had to decide which languages to translate resources for the Multilingual resource bank into. Due to financial constraints, the toolkit focuses on the seven national languages of The Gambia, as well as Gambian Sign Language, Arabic, English, and French. The latter three languages are used in schools as languages of instruction and/or are taught as academic subjects (e.g., Arabic is used as a language of instruction in Madrassas), while a growing number of schools for deaf and hard of hearing children are opening throughout The Gambia.

Independent small-scale projects adopting an L1-based MLE approach in The Gambia are scarce but timely. They foster more innovation than officially sponsored large-scale programs because they are free from systemic barriers (e.g. standardized testing and assessment systems) and promote discussions that can shape future language-in-education practices and policies. This was evident during a reflective group discussion in 2024 on "Creating multilingual library corners" (led by Amadou Sowe, a teacher and author of children's stories and books in Pulaar, and Alhagie Cham, an experienced primary school teacher and educator), where

valuable suggestions were made including establishing a multilingual unit to oversee such initiatives.

However, ensuring the long-term effectiveness of the toolkit will be challenging due to its embedding within the broader narrative of language-in-education policy in The Gambia and Africa more generally. This context has historically led to the partial or complete failure of many initiatives aimed at integrating African languages into education. As Stroud notes, "Mother-tongue programmes and policies seldom deliver what they promise, and often, with respect to stated goals and ideologies (cognitive enhancement, language maintenance, etc.), must be classed as downright failures" (Stroud, 2001, pp. 339–340). The reasons for these failures are well-understood (e.g., financial constraints, language ideologies, lack of public/political support).

More contextually and linguistically sensitive research and analysis are therefore needed to truly advance scholarly research into language-in-education in The Gambia, including work questioning the very concepts at the core of L1-based multilingual education. This applies to the term "translanguaging," which has notably been criticized for inadvertently reproducing colonial perspectives on multilingualism—for example, the practice of translanguaging is seen to reflect Western epistemological frameworks taking precedence over Indigenous systems and ways of using language in multilingual situations (Meighan, 2023). Others have also highlighted that the application of translanguaging pedagogy in African contexts requires careful consideration of local linguistic dynamics and cultural factors. Mpofu (2021), for example, suggests that it can be time-intensive and ethnic-based, while Mbirimi-Hungwe (2022) points out that it can reveal classroom language politics, with majority language speakers potentially dominating minority language speakers.

We hope that future work will address issues of decoloniality, especially as these are evoked in the increasingly frequent conversations regarding the use of Gambian languages in prestigious domains such as education. It should also be mindful to include Gambian Sign Language as well as verbal languages—for example, through collaboration with the Gambia Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing—as we did in our toolkit.

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EdTech and Minoritized Mother-tongue-based Learning: Current Practices and Future Directions in Low- and Middle-income Countries

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Summary
This article explores the use of educational technology (EdTech) for minoritized mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in low- and middle-income countries, drawing on a literature review and exploratory workshop with staff of four initiatives that use EdTech in MTB-MLE. The uses of EdTech as part of MTB-MLE and impacts on learning and teaching are presented, along with factors that influence successful EdTech implementation within MTB-MLE and recommendations for the future.

Keywords
Multilingual education
Mother tongue
Minoritized languages
Educational technology
Low- and middle-income countries

Overview

Mother-tongue-based multilingual education[1] (MTB-MLE) is an important strategy to support the foundational literacy of children whose first language (L1) differs from the official language of instruction (LOI) when they begin school. This means learners read and write in their mother tongue before learning the LOI as an additional language, then transition to learning subjects using the LOI. The transition can be either additive (i.e., the L1 and L2 are used for subject teaching and learning) or subtractive (i.e., the L2 replaces the L1). Existing studies have linked MTB-MLE to significant learning gains, while EdTech provides a much-needed solution to the lack of educational materials in minoritized languages. This article highlights practical insights from Zhao et al. (2024), who investigated the current status and future directions of MTB-MLE and technology in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Zhao et al. (2024) began with a multilingual literature review conducted via Google Scholar and Google searches in eight languages, Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Kinyarwanda, Pashto, Portuguese, and Spanish. The searches explored existing research and initiatives. We then identified four EdTech and minoritized languages initiatives in LMICs and conducted

an online exploratory workshop with their representatives[2] (see Table 1). The workshop covered the factors that influence successful EdTech implementation within MTB-MLE, the impact of EdTech, and future directions, with a focus on the role of technology in developing early L1 literacy.[3]

Table 1. Workshop and interviews: participating initiatives

Name	Geography	Languages	Summary of activities
African Storybook	Africa	227 African languages	Provides open access, downloadable, illustrated storybooks as well as the Reader and Maker Apps for offline use
CLEAR Global	148 countries	220+ languages across contexts	Offers language services to humanitarian and development organisations
Curious Learning	Africa	50+ languages across contexts	Offers curation, localisation, distribution and measurement of free open-source apps to help children learn to read
eLimu	East Africa	Alur, Kiswahili, Lugbarati, Somali	Offers a repository of interactive digital learning resources and apps

Source: Author

The findings are summarized in this paper, with the final section charting the future of the MTB-MLE and EdTech nexus, outlining practical, policy, and research priorities for the sector.

Background on MTB-MLE

Studies on MTB-MLE in LMICs have demonstrated its positive impact: the use of L1 in education is strongly associated with improved access, quality, and equity for marginalized groups (Ouane & Glanz, 2011; Seid, 2019), as well as foundational literacy gains (Bühmann & Trudell, 2008; Daly et al., 2021). Positive impacts of early mother-tongue literacy on general learning outcomes (Laitin et al., 2019; Seid, 2016) and longer-term employment outcomes (Seid, 2019) were also found. Meanwhile, mismatches between L1 and LOI have been identified as a key cause of school repetition, failure, and drop-out (Benson et al., 2019).

Research on MTB-MLE programs across different African languages show similar benefits. For example, using Indigenous LOIs was found to improve students' performance in end-of-primary school exams in Burkina Faso (Bamgbose, 2011). In Ghana, the use of Asante Twi and Akan as the LOI enabled students to catch up in foundational literacy after transitioning from complementary education to government schools (Carter et al., 2020). Similarly, in Kenya, Piper et al. (2016) found an improvement in oral reading fluency and comprehension when the mother tongue was used in addition to Kiswahili[4] and English. In Cameroon, improvements were seen in both English and math results, as well as increased attendance, when Kom was used as the LOI instead of English (Laitin et al., 2019).

However, barriers to operationalizing MTB-MLE at scale were identified in the literature. These include rigid policy frameworks regarding LOIs and, significantly, the lack of educational materials in minoritized languages (Bühmann & Trudell, 2008). The use of multiple L1s in the classroom may also place increased stress on teachers, who may not have knowledge of all students' mother tongues (Daly et al., 2021).

Digital media are being increasingly used to address the challenge of providing L1 learning and teaching materials. A longitudinal study in South Africa utilized digital materials in English and three mother tongues (Xitsonga, Sepedi, and Tshivenda[5]) and achieved an improvement in reading comprehension for early primary students (Castillo & Wagner, 2018). In Haiti, DeGraff and Stump (2018) reported on the MIT-Haiti initiative, which explored the strategic use of digital tools in Kreyòl to improve Haitian students' learning outcomes. The authors concluded that EdTech played an important role in learning gains and facilitating access to MT resources. Overall, the literature indicates the value of MTB-MLE in improving educational outcomes and suggests a key role for EdTech in facilitating it.

Summary of Key Findings

The key themes discussed in the workshop are described below. Table 2 provides an overview.

Uses of Digital Technology for MTB-MLE

Technology played a pivotal role in adapting and translating content across languages, streamlining the process and supporting multilingual education. It enabled connections with freelance linguists via online job networks, though finding sufficient linguists for minoritized languages remained

Table 2. Key findings of the workshop

Theme	Summary
Pedagogical approaches	Clear pedagogical principles are important The use of multiple languages in class could cause confusion and place unrealistic expectations on teachers
Impact on teaching and learning	Learning gains are reported Teachers are more motivated to use MT and learners are more confident in using MT Wider community can still undervalue MTB MLE and prioritise colonial languages
Technology	Technology helps to streamline the process of developing and publishing multilingual resources Technology enables MTB MLE irrespective of teacher MT proficiency Gamification increases learner engagement Barriers include script and keyboard compatibility and teachers' digital literacy
Policy	Language policies advocating the use of MT in early schooling years are a facilitating factor Alignment with national curricula can be challenging logistically and financially
Decolonisation agenda	Increased interest in linguistic and cultural preservation promotes MTB MLE

Source: Author

challenging. When working with linguists, who can frequently contest spelling and word choices, an editor is often needed to make final decisions. Other technical issues include script compatibility for different writing systems on app stores and the difficulty accessing language-specific keyboards.

Technology's potential for democratizing content creation was also noted, as it allowed smaller and independent contributors to publish and reach audiences, bypassing lengthy publishing processes. Technology also helps scaffold content in classrooms where the teacher does not speak the mother tongue of the students, or in situations where multiple mother tongues are present. However, technological success depended on existing infrastructure, with unreliable electricity and internet access limiting effectiveness. Despite these challenges, technology could increase engagement through gamification and interactivity, where features such as avatars, league tables, and scoring systems can lead to sustained engagement in learning content. That said, attitudes toward technology in education varied, with some communities and teachers viewing it skeptically, especially gamified learning. Participants also cited that sometimes teachers felt uncomfortable and lacked the confidence to use technology in class.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

Participants reported literacy gains among students engaging with their MTB-MLE initiatives (e.g., Orozco-Olvera, 2022), supporting broader evidence of the benefits of MTB-MLE (e.g., Laitin et al., 2019; Seid, 2016; Taylor & Von Fintel, 2016). Teachers were reportedly increasingly willing to use students' mother tongues in class, improving communication and motivation. Using mother-tongue resources can also motivate teachers, who are often involved in designing and writing the stories. From a socio-emotional perspective, students felt more confident and free to express themselves in their L1, a finding supported by Kalland & Linnavalli (2022). However, community perceptions often undervalue MTB-MLE, with some parents, caregivers, and teachers prioritizing colonial languages, unaware of the benefits of mother-tongue education.

Factors Influencing Successful Implementation of EdTech for MTB-MLE

Pedagogical Approaches

Participants emphasized the importance of clear pedagogical principles when using digital technology as part of MTB-MLE, particularly focusing on L1 phonics. Scaffolded progression, beginning with phonemes and graphemes before advancing to words and phrases, was identified as beneficial, particularly for syllabically complex languages such as Zulu. Restricted exposure was also favored: limiting stories to a maximum number of phonically accessible words and presenting text in bitesize chunks to aid comprehensibility, though it can also reduce engagement. Contextualization was considered crucial for relatability, and visuals were essential for comprehension and enjoyment. Indeed, stories written by users closest to the learners (e.g., teachers) with deep contextual knowledge can ensure they resonate with students' experiences. Allowing teachers to adjust difficulty levels based on learning needs was seen as beneficial. However, the use of multiple languages in class could confuse students, and expecting teachers to be proficient in many languages could be unrealistic.

Policy

Policymakers significantly influence the success of EdTech MTB-MLE initiatives. For instance, device distribution policies, when well-executed, can lead to substantial learning gains. However, participants called for thoughtful implementation, citing examples where ministries failed to consider content access or device usability. Language policies advocating the use of the mother tongue in the first years of schooling are also important facilitating factors for these initiatives, though in practice such policies might not be fully implemented (Reilly et al., 2022).

Aligning content with national curricula, though generally viewed as good practice, also poses challenges. Curriculum changes could lead to increased costs for content developers if they are required to realign materials to repeatedly shifting criteria. Moreover, governmental approval processes are often slow and stringent, leading to delays and sometimes content censorship, especially when content competes with government resources.

Decolonisation Agenda

The shift toward decolonizing education has positively impacted engagement with mother-tongue resources. There is growing interest among language experts on writing for children in their L1s, driven by a renewed desire to preserve languages and cultures, and improve literacy outcomes. MTB-MLE initiatives can raise the profile of minoritized languages, enabling users to access content in their mother tongues. This visibility helps counteract the perception that colonial languages are superior.

Scoping the Future

Practical Priorities

Funding: Funding was repeatedly identified by participants as necessary to improve practice. EdTech MTB-MLE is enabling but not free of cost. Costs include training and support for teachers to develop pedagogical strategies, and the development of appropriate content. Currently, there is limited investment in minoritized languages, especially at pre-primary level, and this limits the impact and sustainability of initiatives. A greater commitment from governments and donors to support localized initiatives is needed. Linking MTB-MLE to foundational literacy funding mechanisms is an opportunity.

Recommendation: The broader focus on foundational literacy—and the associated funding pots—should be leveraged in the first instance when seeking funding for MTB-MLE.

Content: A need for sustained publishing of books and other educational content was noted by all participants. Notably, non-fiction storybooks about local contexts focusing on issues such as climate change were identified as a current gap. Collaborating with established institutions and systems, such as national libraries, was seen as an opportunity to sustainably produce content in minoritized languages. Printed materials are essential to widen the reach of minoritized language content, bypassing infrastructural constraints related to accessing digital resources. Thus, delivering minoritized language content through multiple modalities, including print, is an important method of reaching a greater and more diverse range of learners.

Recommendation: EdTech MTB-MLE initiatives should work with established content and publishing institutions—including libraries—to widen access to minoritized language content in multiple modalities and reduce inequitable access.

Policy Priorities

Government and Donor Coordination: All participants identified a need for greater coordination between government and donors to create a conducive space for EdTech and minoritized language program implementation. Active, long-term support was emphasized as critical to allowing initiatives the space to iterate and adapt. Freedom to experiment was noted as a crucial element of fostering long-term success; governments could facilitate this by providing promising EdTech initiatives with access to schools to conduct pilots.

People working in initiatives with existing working relationships with education departments could facilitate smaller initiatives' access to policy dialogue, while government gatekeepers (e.g., curriculum authorities) should use their positions of power to facilitate initiatives' growth. This role in providing ease of access and accelerating bureaucratic processes can be the difference between an organization's success or failure.

Recommendation: Funders should commission longer-term programs that enable smaller-scale initiatives to test, iterate, and scale over time, while governments should facilitate innovation at the school and policy levels.

Teacher and Parental Engagement

A systematic approach to support teachers and students who use minoritized languages is necessary, including strengthening positive attitudes toward MTB-MLE with teachers, learners, and families. Pre-service and in-service training must include pedagogical support for teachers to understand, value, and implement MTB-MLE.

While supporting teachers is a priority area to target attitudinal shifts at the school level, similar work must be done to support caregivers, who play a significant role in illustrating the importance of literacy through use of the mother tongue at home. However, caregivers must first understand this significance.

Recommendation: Teacher professional development programs should include modules related to working with learners of minoritized languages, particularly in multilingual settings. These programs must be supplemented with broader community engagement and support for caregivers outside school, including accessible communication of research findings around the benefits of MTB-MLE.

Research Priorities

Adaptive research projects that support learning and iteration of EdTech initiatives should be promoted. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are often used in education research, but the associated costs are prohibitive, particularly in an already under-funded sector. Support for local universities to deliver contextualized research is also needed.

Centralized databases are critical to providing initiatives with the information required to ensure their work is in line with the latest thinking in the sector. For example, Translators without Borders maps the use of languages on its website. Programs must also systematically collect data from participants regarding language preferences (e.g., written, oral, sign) to support continuous language mapping.

Furthermore, the use of AI for translation is becoming more accurate and effective. This is also the case for minoritized languages, however at a more nascent stage (Claus, 2024). More research on the use of AI to support translation of minoritized languages is required, as is the fair distribution of benefits with minoritised language speakers. Platforms such as Lelapa AI and the No Language Left Behind project offer useful entry points for this research.

Recommendation: Smaller-scale evaluative approaches that are independently commissioned—and locally-sourced—should be promoted, in line with available funding across the sector. When funding for larger-scale trials is available, these approaches can be scaled.

Endnotes

1. A wide range of terms are used for languages in education within LMICs, some of which are more helpful than others. Please refer to the full report for clarifications on the terminology used in this paper.
2. Initiatives were selected based on the extent to which “mother-tongue” or “minoritized” languages were core aspects of their work, the extent to which links between languages and education—or specifically EdTech—were apparent, and the amount of readily available documentation and/or data.
3. The main data sources from the workshop were organizational and personal reflections, rather than scientific evaluation studies. For a detailed methodology of the analysis and potential limitations, see Zhao et al. (2024).
4. Also known as the Swahili language. Throughout this article, prefixes that indicate language are used in the naming of Bantu languages (see Box 1 in the editorial for further explanation).
5. The languages of the Tsonga, Pedi and Venda peoples respectively. As explained in footnote 4 and Box 1, the prefixes differentiate the language from the people.

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Part 3

Language Transition and Multilingual Pedagogies

Language transition occurs wherever the LOLT is a national or globally dominant language that is not the main language used in learners' communities. It may occur at the point of entry to pre-primary or primary school or part way through the basic education cycle. Language transition may occur gradually, with L1 continuing to be used alongside a new LOLT for a year or longer, or abruptly. Part Three focuses on pedagogies that have been developed for multilingual learners within such transition MLE systems. Clegg's contribution introduces language supportive pedagogy and explains how it can inform the design of textbooks for learners in transition MLE systems. Ndabakurane then reports on research trialing language supportive materials in English language classrooms in Tanzania. Staying in Tanzania, Sane describes some of the ways science teachers adapt their practice to be inclusive of multilingual learners within a late-exit transition MLE system. Essien theorizes pedagogic translanguaging in mathematics education, drawing on collaborative research with primary school teachers in South Africa. Finally, Deutschmann and Zelime discuss the possibilities for making national examinations more inclusive for learners who are less proficient in the LOLT, with reference to the Seychelles.

Multilingual and Language-supportive Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Summary
This article consists of an outline of two pedagogical strategies appropriate to teaching and learning in more than one language in schools in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA): language-supportive education (LSP) and multilingual education (MLE). It is suggested that these strategies are necessary to avoid language-related low attainment in schools.

Keywords
Pedagogy
Language
Attainment
Materials
Classroom

The practice of teaching learners in more than one language is characterised by two main approaches to pedagogy: language-supportive pedagogy (LSP) and additive or maintenance multilingual education (MLE). LSP is intended to help learners with incomplete ability in the LOLT to learn subjects in L2. It is designed to support learners in a transition MLE system, within which L1 is eventually phased out, through extending the use of L1 to support understanding of curriculum subjects whilst developing academic language skills in L2. It has strong similarities to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), an approach found across the world, in which learners learn subjects in L2 (Ball et al., 2015). MLE as defined here aims to help learners use two or more languages in the same classroom. It is used in the Global South as reported by Schroeder et al. (2021) and UNESCO (2022) although there are very few examples of its use beyond primary education; and it has been developed as an approach in multilingual communities in the Global North, especially in the USA.[1] This article outlines classroom procedures of both kinds which are appropriate for SSA.

Language-related Limits to School Achievement

Local African languages are commonly the LOLT in the initial years of schooling in SSA. Learners often speak two or three L1s and are, after a few years of education, initially literate in one. After this period, learners must normally abandon these fluent languages and start to learn subjects in an international language (L2) in which they are often not fluent. Common languages used as L2 are English, French, and Portuguese. This article refers to English as L2 and to Kinyarwanda and Kiswahili[2] as L1, because the LSP and MLE materials it refers to were designed for speakers of those languages in Rwanda and Tanzania. However, since average language abilities in L2 at the change of medium are recognized in the relevant literature (for example Erling et al., 2021; Schroeder et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2022) as being broadly similar across SSA, the pedagogical principles which the materials embody offer insights for multilingual contexts throughout the region.

Many learners in SSA often have only a developing ability in the L2 when they start using it as LOLT (for example, see Biseko & Barrett's analysis of language transition in Tanzania in this NSI). This initial L2 ability limits classroom communication and contributes to low school attainment (Milligan et al., 2020; Lüpke and Cissé, 2024). The abandonment of a fluent LOLT and adoption of an unfamiliar LOLT at an early stage in schooling, often referred to as an "early exit" strategy in school language policy, is said by commentators to be a key cause of educational under-achievement in SSA (Heugh, 2009). The consequences of language-related barriers to school attainment are considerable both for the achievement and psychological growth of individual children and for the effective building of a national skills base, and for the economic development of countries as a whole (e.g., Djité, 2008; Clegg, 2025).

In most contexts in SSA in which learners learn through a developing L2, suitable learning materials for learners with an early level of L2 rarely exist. Materials used in schools are often designed with L2-fluent learners in mind (Clegg, 2021) and are, therefore, relatively inaccessible (Biseko & Barrett, this volume). Most learners, in contrast, at the transition of LOLT, will find reading about school subjects in L2 difficult.[3] They will also not be able to talk effectively in pairs and groups in L2 about subject topics. The sentences they can produce, with some difficulty, in written L2 are short and linguistically simple, and they will struggle to understand some of what the teacher says.

There is often a mismatch between the view of publishers and education ministries about what learners can do in L2 and what they can actually do. Learners may have near-elementary L2 ability (UNESCO, 2022), but publishers often assume they are near-fluent (Clegg, 2021, 2023). The result is that teachers may not use these inaccessible textbooks, preferring to use teacher-talk from the front of the class, supported by the board (Bowden et al., 2024). In addition, because learners cannot normally talk about curricular concepts with peers, and because school language policy may outlaw the use of classroom L1, learner talk is often absent from classrooms. Thus, textbook reading, peer talk, and learner-initiated writing may play little role in learning.

Two main solutions to the problem of unusable textbooks are first that publishers should work to an exact account of the L2 abilities of their learners and second that they should explicitly include pedagogies that are both language-supportive and multilingual. Both LSP and MLE pedagogies claim to deliver educational benefits. LSP, which aims at the acquisition of subject concepts using incomplete ability in L2, is successful in the form of CLIL in maintaining/increasing both levels of subject knowledge and L2 ability (Ball et al., 2015) and shows signs of doing the same in SSA (Barrett & Bainton, 2016). MLE, which aims to facilitate learning in two or more languages, is claimed to increase both subject knowledge and L2 ability (García & Klein, 2016). Learners are also said to maintain their cultural and linguistic roots, to be confirmed in their sense of self (Milligan & Adamson, 2022), and to be able to communicate with their parents about schoolwork.

Both approaches to learning are visible in SSA but not widely used. LSP is pursued in experimental projects, for example those illustrated in this article. MLE, while also pursued in experimental projects in SSA, (Schroeder et al., 2021; Bowden & Barrett, 2022; UNESCO; 2022) is slow in receiving official recognition and normally restricted to the primary phase. Both governments and parents are wary of it. It is common for L1s to be outlawed in the classroom and bilingual subject materials are rare. Education ministries and publishers show low interest in LSP and MLE and seem reluctant to take seriously the damage to school achievement caused by the language barriers that inappropriate L2 use creates.

Classroom Procedures in LSP and MLE

This section illustrates how LSP and MLE can be reflected in materials. It should be noted that in the classroom procedures outlined, a version of MLE is used in which L2 predominates. Teacher-talk, learner writing, and learner reading occur more in L2 than L1; learner peer talk, however, is largely in L1. The materials referred to were published for year 1 of English-medium schooling, Grade 4 in Rwanda (Language Supportive Textbooks and Pedagogy [LaST] project) and Grade 8 in Tanzania (Strengthening Secondary Education in Practice, Language Supportive Teaching and Textbooks in Tanzania [LSTT] Project).

Teacher Talk in the Plenary Classroom

In order to help learners understand presentations of new concepts, teachers need to use LSP strategies, such as explicit signaling of lesson stages (e.g., enumeration of points, summary, conclusion), repetition and paraphrasing of key terms, the use of visuals, the use of short-answer and yes/no questions, and the use of prompts.

In addition, they need to use MLE by encouraging the learners' L1 (Probyn, 2019). This can increase comprehension—for example, by explaining in L1, translating key terms into L1, and repeating instructions in L1. It can also help learners respond by, for example, offering brief talking time with a partner in L1 and eliciting L1 responses and translations.

Learner Talk in Pairs and Groups

At the transition of LOLT from L1 to L2, many learners cannot yet discuss subject topics with peers effectively in L2. Teachers therefore need to use LSP to support limited talk in L2 and MLE to encourage talk in L1. Publishers need to provide the specific range of tasks to support L2 talk that LSP

offers. These include, for example, substitution tables (see Figure 1, activity 28). Supported peer talk like this enables L2-restricted learners to talk about subject concepts. Although these utterances are limited, the majority of learners in Rwanda at the beginning of Grade 4 will not be able to produce them easily without support.

Supported L2 talk, however, is cognitively and linguistically diminished in comparison to L1. It cannot provide the crucial route to classroom concept development that "exploratory" talk amongst peers is thought to offer. Commentators in language in education describe forms of peer talk which have this potential. To import cognitively and linguistically demanding exploratory peer talk into classrooms in SSA, L1 talk in pairs and groups—alongside limited talk in L2—is necessary. Evidence for its value in SSA exists: Probyn (2019), for example, claims that it has a concept-developing effect in a South African context.

Examples of multilingual talk are shown below. In Figure 1, for example, learners talk in L1 before reading in L2. Learner L1 talk can also facilitate L2 talk; this is sometimes called the "translanguaging advantage"—learners who talk about a topic first in L1 will then find it easier to talk about it in L2. Figure 2 and Activities 5.1 and 5.2 in Figure 4, designed for the beginning of English-medium biology in Tanzania Grade 8, show how this can work.

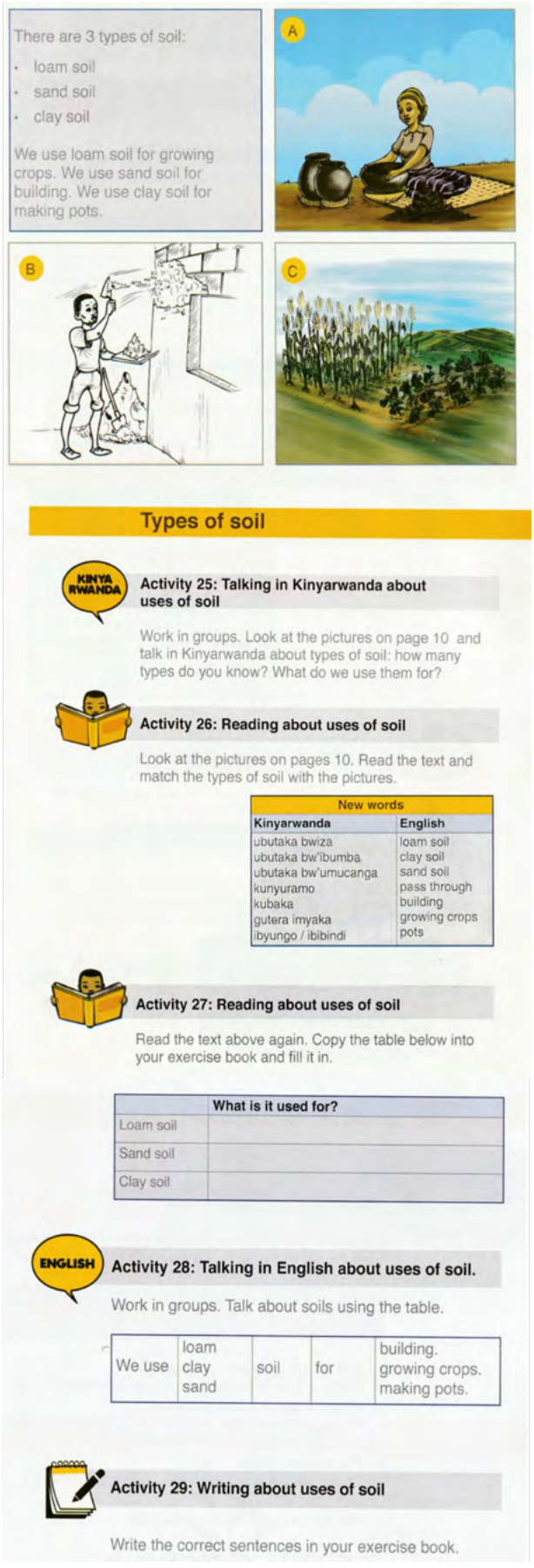
Learner Writing

Learner writing can be in L2, if teachers use LSP to provide support, as in Figure 1, Activity 29. However, supported L2 writing, at the change of LOLT, is often cognitively limited - learners will be able only to write a sentence that is short and linguistically undemanding.

Limitation of L2 writing ability can continue for some years and at matriculation may even prevent learners from demonstrating subject knowledge in written assessment (Rea-Dickens & Yu, 2013). For this reason, MLE should encourage some writing in L1 as in Figure 4. MLE-supported writing in L1 is linguistically and cognitively easier and allows learners to express subject knowledge more effectively. It can also facilitate in writing what Cummins (2021) refers to as the transfer of academic language skills from L1 to L2.

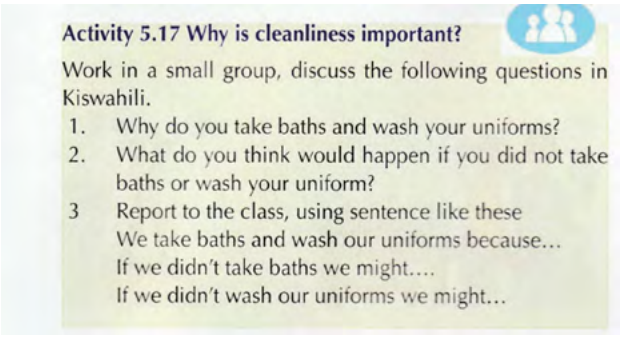
Learner writing often requires learners to talk in pairs and groups for the purposes of planning, ongoing construction of the L2 text, and review. For most learners, this talk can only be done in L1. However, the use of L1 talk to generate L2 writing—the translanguaging advantage—is likely to improve the quality of both L2 writing and the expression of subject knowledge. Figure 3 shows learners talking in L1 before writing in L2.

Figure 1. Excerpt from language supportive science textbook for Rwanda Grade 4



Source: Muheirwe et al. (2014)

Figure 2. Excerpt from language supportive biology textbook for Tanzania Grade 8



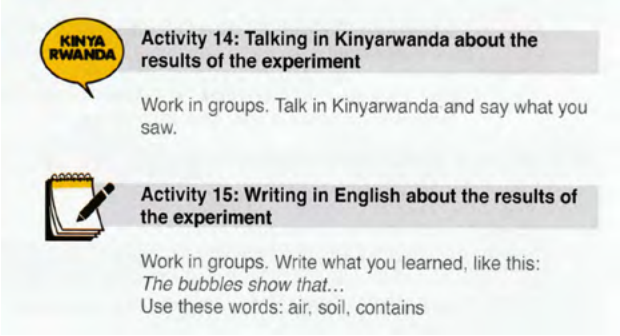
Activity 5.17 Why is cleanliness important?

Work in a small group, discuss the following questions in Kiswahili.

1. Why do you take baths and wash your uniforms?
2. What do you think would happen if you did not take baths or wash your uniform?
3 Report to the class, using sentence like these
We take baths and wash our uniforms because...
If we didn't take baths we might....
If we didn't wash our uniforms we might...

Source: LSTT (2015)

Figure 3. Excerpt from language supportive science textbook for Rwanda Grade 4



KINYA RWANDA

Activity 14: Talking in Kinyarwanda about the results of the experiment

Work in groups. Talk in Kinyarwanda and say what you saw.

Activity 15: Writing in English about the results of the experiment

Work in groups. Write what you learned, like this:
The bubbles show that...
Use these words: air, soil, contains

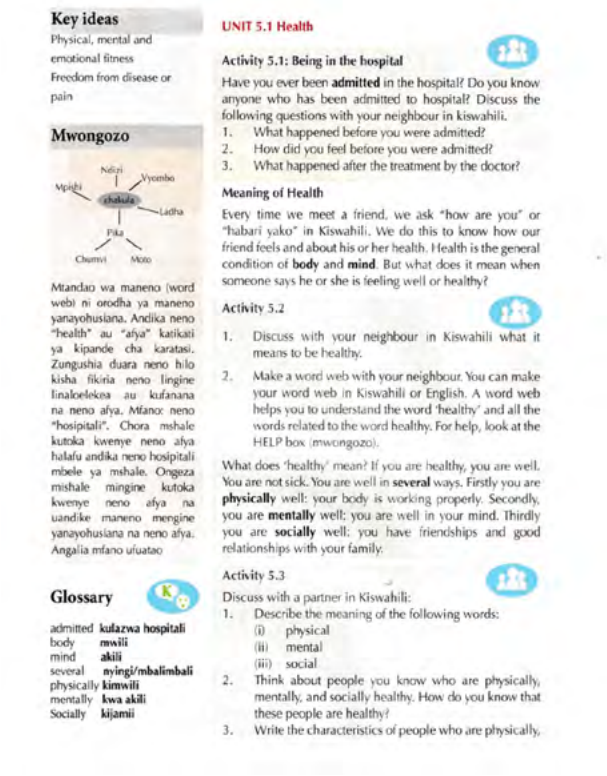
Source: Muheirwe et al. (2014)

Learner Reading

Learners can read in either L1 or L2. If the L2 text does not match the actual L2 reading ability of the learner but is aimed at a fluent L2 reader, reading comprehension may be low and sometimes impossible. LSP provides texts designed with the early L2 reader in mind and tasks that support L2-medium reading, as in the matching task in Figure 1, Activity 26. Most reading in L2 for some years after the change of LOLT should be supported in this way.

Reading in L2 can also be supported by MLE. For example, texts in both L1 and L2 are shown in Figure 4. In addition, learners often need to talk in L1 before and after reading a L2 text. This increases motivation for L2-medium reading, as well as comprehension of the L2 text. L1-medium talk tasks before reading in L2 are shown in Figure 1, Activity 25 and Figure 4, Activity 5.1. Bilingual glossaries help learners to understand unfamiliar vocabulary, as in Figure 1. Figure 4 shows learners discussing vocabulary in L1/2.

Figure 4. Excerpt from language supportive biology textbook for Tanzania Grade 8



Key ideas

Physical, mental and emotional fitness
Freedom from disease or pain

Mwongozo

Ndizi
Vyombo
Mpishi
chakula
Ladha
Pika
Chumvi
Moto

Mtandao wa maneno (word web) ni orodha ya maneno yanayohusiana. Andika neno "health" au "afya" katikati ya kipande cha karatasi. Zungushia duara neno hilo kisha fikiria neno lingine linaloelekea au kufanana na neno afya. Mfano: neno "hospitali". Chora mshale kutoka kwenye neno afya halafu andika neno hospitali mbele ya mshale. Ongeza mishale mingine kutoka kwenye neno afya na uandike maneno mengine yanayohusiana na neno afya. Angalia mfano ufuatao

Glossary

admitted	**kulazwa hospitali**
body	**mwili**
mind	**akili**
several	**nyingi/mbalimbali**
physically	**kimwili**
mentally	**kwa akili**
Socially	**kijamii**

UNIT 5.1 Health

Activity 5.1: Being in the hospital

Have you ever been **admitted** in the hospital? Do you know anyone who has been admitted to hospital? Discuss the following questions with your neighbour in kiswahili.

1. What happened before you were admitted?
2. How did you feel before you were admitted?
3. What happened after the treatment by the doctor?

Meaning of Health

Every time we meet a friend, we ask "how are you" or "habari yako" in Kiswahili. We do this to know how our friend feels and about his or her health. Health is the general condition of **body** and **mind**. But what does it mean when someone says he or she is feeling well or healthy?

Activity 5.2

1. Discuss with your neighbour in Kiswahili what it means to be healthy.
2. Make a word web with your neighbour. You can make your word web in Kiswahili or English. A word web helps you to understand the word 'healthy' and all the words related to the word healthy. For help, look at the HELP box (mwongozo).

What does 'healthy' mean? If you are healthy, you are well. You are not sick. You are well in **several** ways. Firstly you are **physically** well: your body is working properly. Secondly, you are **mentally** well: you are well in your mind. Thirdly you are **socially** well: you have friendships and good relationships with your family.

Activity 5.3

Discuss with a partner in Kiswahili:

1. Describe the meaning of the following words:
   (i) physical
   (ii) mental
   (iii) social
2. Think about people you know who are physically, mentally, and socially healthy. How do you know that these people are healthy?
3. Write the characteristics of people who are physically,

Source: LSTT (2015)

Conclusion

Both LSP and MLE in SSA can contribute to a transitional pedagogy, leading learners from L1-medium to L2-medium education. More interestingly, they can constitute the accepted method of delivering the whole education service until matriculation. Circumstances would favor it, especially the highly multilingual nature of community communication and also the multilingual ability of individual learners. With appropriate ministerial leadership, textbook publishing, and teacher education, SSA could be a natural home for effective LSP and MLE.

Endnotes

1. See, for example, Celic and Seltzer's Translanguaging guide for educators in New York. (https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/translanguaging-guides/).
2. Kinyarwanda is the national language of Rwanda, widely spoken throughout Kinyarwanda . Kiswahili is also known as the Swahili language. It is the national language of Tanzania, spoken along the Coast and in all urban areas. It is also the language of learning and teaching in nearly all government primary schools.
3. Uwezo's "Are our children learning?" report (2019) found that 47% of children in Grade 7 could not read or comprehend simple English texts. (https://uwezotanzania.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Uwezo-Tanzania-Learning-Assessment-Report-2019.pdf).

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Enhancing Reading through the Use of Language Supportive Material in Tanzanian Secondary Schools

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Summary
Students in rural Tanzania transitioning from Kiswahili-medium primary education to English-medium secondary education face a multitude of challenges. One such challenge is reading ability in English, which is far below the level required to engage with grade-appropriate texts. This study focused on enhancing students' reading comprehension in secondary schools using English language supportive materials.

Keywords
English language teaching
Language supportive pedagogy
Teaching and learning materials
Language transition

Introduction

Tanzania is one of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that embrace the English language in various domains of use, and education is no exception. While English is taught as a compulsory subject in public primary schools, it is both a subject and the language of instruction in English-medium primary schools and in all secondary schools. Hence, both English language learning and the learning of other subjects impacted by forcing students to learn in a language in which they lack sufficient proficiency. As Deutschmann et al. (2024) put it, ability in the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) is a prerequisite for learning. Lower secondary school students in Tanzania do not have the language skills in English to engage meaningfully with the curriculum (Brock-Utne et al., 2006). Barrett et al. (2024) argue that language skills need to be practiced in the subject English language before they are required for other subjects.

This article reports on research to enhance one key language skill, reading for comprehension, through the use of English language supportive materials. Reading comprehension is linked to skills for interpreting, linking, and evaluating ideas in both written and oral texts (Kaya, 2015).

Context of Learning English in Tanzania

Tanzania is endowed with an estimated 120 Indigenous languages. Many children living in rural areas learn to speak in their ECL before acquiring Kiswahili[1]. Therefore, many students joining secondary education are multilingual, with proficiency in an ECL and Kiswahili. However, English is the declared language of instruction in all formal post-primary education. Despite being familiar languages to most children, ECLs and Kiswahili are removed from teaching and learning across most of the curriculum (see Biseko & Barrett in this NSI). This leads to an unfavorable learning environment for many students, who cannot understand what is said in the classroom and struggle to read written texts. This forces teachers to use multilingual strategies, such as those described by Sane in this NSI. It also creates educational inequity between learners who attended Kiswahili-medium and English-medium primary schools. This further benefits

learners in English-medium primary schools, which are predominantly located in urban areas where both secondary and primary schools tend to better resourced. To address these inequalities, I designed and trialed language supportive materials in an English language classroom with students in the second year of secondary education (ninth year of their basic education), known as Form II.

Designing and Evaluating the English Language Supportive Materials

English language supportive materials were designed for five curriculum topics: "Talking about Events," "Asking for Services," "Giving Descriptions," "Talking about Cultural Activities," and "Expressing Opinions." These topics were identified as difficult by both teachers and students. The materials included engaging activities, accessible language, English-Kiswahili glossaries, probing statements, shorter and easily comprehensible passages, and illustrations (described fully in Ndabakurane, 2020).

Figure 1. Telephone conversation

Source: Ndabakurane (2020, p. 31)

The materials were trialed in four secondary schools in different districts of the Kagera region, in the northwest of Tanzania. The process of trialing the materials was an iterative process of design, trialing, revising, and then trialing the materials again. Three versions of the materials were trialed. During formative assessment of the first and second versions, a questionnaire, observation, and focus group discussions were used to collect data. For the final version, a questionnaire, students' attitude test, and reading comprehension test were used. The students' attitude test was administered to students to assess their perception with regard to effectiveness of English language supportive materials in enhancing their reading comprehension proficiency. The attitude test was administered to students, who had used the materials for eight months.

Findings and Discussion

When using the materials, students worked collaboratively to make sense of the text, moving freely between English and Kiswahili in discussions amongst themselves. However, to maximize their opportunities to practice English, they were encouraged to compose written and spoken outputs in English. The findings showed that students were able to read, comprehend, and respond to questions about simple English texts much better than they could before the intervention. Here are some examples of sentences produced by the students:

1. *The graduation ceremony was conducted at Annex Hotel.*
2. *The graduation ceremony was closed by the headmaster.*
3. *My mother invited friends on my birthday party.*
4. *We were all invited to the wedding party.*
5. *My mother is stepped to the shamba.*
6. *I stepped on the stage to make her announcement.*

(Ndabakurane, 2020, p. 114)

Although most students demonstrated improved ability to construct grammatical and acceptable sentences (see sentences 2 and 4), they also produced minor mistakes (see sentence 1, 3, 5 and 6). On some occasions, teachers and learners had to switch to using Kiswahili to discuss more key ideas in the reading comprehension texts, as reflected in the following dialogue:

Teacher: *What do contestants do during the election campaigns?*

Student: *Of leaders to come to … to speech in … in … ze before (total silence for at least 30 seconds).*

Teacher: *They come to speech! Enhe! (teacher seems to lose his temper)*

Teacher: *Okay. Hebu niambie unavyoweza kuyasema haya kwa Kiswahili. Niambie. [Okay. Tell me how you can say these in Kiswahili. Tell me.]*

Student: *Wakati uchaguzi haujafika, wanakuwa wanapita viongozi ambao wanaenda kuchaguliwa. Wanaoomba uongozi wa shule hupita madarasani wakiomba kura. [Before the election, aspirants for leadership positions present themselves. Those applying for school government leadership pass in the classes asking for votes.]*

(Ndabakurane, 2020, p. 114)

The findings suggest that bilingual education and translanguaging offer a more effective approach to learning than submersion or monolingual education, which limit students' effective participation in the learning process (Baker, 2006). Creese and Blackledge (2010) also recommend

the effectiveness of translanguaging as it enables teachers and students to engage actively in tasks. Another finding from my research was that the encouragement for group activities within the English language supportive materials facilitated effective reading comprehension. Permitting students to draw on Kiswahili in their interactions meant that they were able to collaborate to make sense of the text. As William and Ndabakurane (2017) observe, the majority of lower secondary school students, particularly in rural schools, are unable to use English when working in groups.

It was also found that English language supportive materials changed the teacher's role from delivering content to providing guidance, as learners engaged independently with the materials. The materials also offered students opportunities to assess their own learning by means of statements that guide the learners through the appropriate way of answering the questions. Teacher talk was directed toward providing scaffolding for the students to engage with the activities and so nudging them toward a higher level of performance and toward becoming autonomous learners.[3]

Discussions, which were conducted with groups of four students from each participating school. Nine out of 16 students ranked their reading comprehension proficiency as "very good" after using the materials. Students attributed their improvement in reading comprehension proficiency to the presence of the English–Kiswahili glossaries. This support with vocabulary helped them to comprehend the texts and read them more quickly. The students' self-evaluation was supported by the reading comprehension scores collected during the preliminary investigation and evaluation of the final version. The pre-test mean score for female students was 4.81 with a range from 0 to 16 out of 42 marks while their post-test mean score was 12.14 with a range from 0 to 31 out of 42 marks. The pre-test mean score for male students was 5.67 with a range from 0 to 15 out of 42 marks while their post-test mean score was 13.77 with a range from 0 to 28 out of 42 marks.

The project thus shows that when students are provided with learning materials designed for multilingual learners, their reading comprehension proficiency improves. The features of such learning materials include vocabulary lists alongside reading passages, short paragraphs, and images that support interpretation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that English language supportive materials have considerable potential for enhancing the reading comprehension proficiency of less privileged learners. It also follows from the study that, if English needs to be used as the language of instruction at post-primary school level, then the English language as a subject should be well-resourced in primary school, most especially in rural areas, where children have limited exposure to English outside of school. This study recommends, among other strategies, the accommodation of students' familiar languages as a resource for enhancing the teaching and learning of English and of subjects through English. It also recommends scaling up language supportive teaching and learning materials of the kind evaluated in the study and distributing them to rural secondary schools.

Endnotes

1. Kiswahili is also known as the Swahili language.
2. Here, translanguaging refers to the use of two languages in a planned way. In the Tanzanian context, translanguaging occurs when the teacher or learner switches between English and Kiswahili. Given learners' low English proficiency, teachers are obliged to allow learners to express themselves in Kiswahili.
3. This aligns with language teaching strategies recommended in Thompson (2012).

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Multilingual Practices in Tanzanian Secondary School Classrooms: Implications for Policy

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Summary
This article explores how teachers in Tanzania employ multilingual strategies to support students in transitional classrooms where English is the LOLT. Teachers employed code-switching, multimedia, and scaffolding to bridge language gaps. However, their success depended on teachers' pedagogical skills. The findings demonstrate the need for targeted teacher training, resource development, and policy reforms to enhance multilingual education in transitional classrooms.

Keywords
Tanzania
Multilingualism
English
Education policy
Teacher education

Introduction

In Tanzania, English as the LOLT reflects colonial-era policies, which have persisted into the post-colonial period. Kiswahili[1] serves as the LOLT across the curriculum in primary education.[2] Post-primary education shifts to English, deemed essential for academic and professional success. This transition is facilitated by a brief six-week English orientation program. Transition practices often overlook the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners. This article overviews findings from classroom and interview research in secondary schools in Tanzania, conducted as part of the Evaluating Language Supportive Approaches to Transition at Scale (ELSATS) project (Barrett et al., 2024), which was funded by the British Council.[3]

Context

In Tanzania, Kiswahili is the official national language, the dominant lingua franca in urban areas and the language of the national media.[4] In rural regions, Indigenous Bantu languages are commonly used, which belong to the same broad language family group as Kiswahili. However, some ethnic groups originating from the north of Tanzania, including the Maasai, speak non-Bantu languages. Additionally, certain areas on the island of Zanzibar use dialects of Kiswahili, including Kimakunduchi/Kihadimu and Kitumbatu (Stigand, 2013).

Educational policies and authorities have historically discouraged using Kiswahili and other local languages in secondary schools, promoting English as the dominant language (Adamson, 2022). Policies such as the Education and Training Policy (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014) do not recognize the use of multilingual education, and the ongoing debate on language in education is persistently framed as a choice between either English or Kiswahili as the LOLT (Mapunda, 2022). This has led to a perception that the use of Kiswahili, and most especially Indigenous languages, is detrimental to gaining proficiency in English. Research, by contrast, shows that excluding home languages negatively affects students' engagement, comprehension, and overall academic performance (Brock-Utne et al., 2010).

Methodology

The ELSATS project, conducted between 2022 and 2024, set out to evaluate how science teachers used language-supportive pedagogies (described by Clegg in this NSI) and whether these improve learning in the transitional grade (Grade 8, the first year of secondary education). The research was conducted in 16 schools across various rural and urban contexts in four regions of Tanzania (Arusha, Dodoma, Morogoro, and Zanzibar), reflecting diverse sociolinguistic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds. Three data collection methods were employed: assessment of students' knowledge of scientific vocabulary in English, observation of biology lessons, and interviews with teachers and students. Observations focused on how science teachers' practices supported learners with limited proficiency in English. Interviews with biology and English teachers explored their awareness of language learning needs, teaching practices, and support systems. Student interviews and focus group discussions addressed their experiences with language transition, beliefs about language learning, and available support and resources. The research methodology and findings are reported in full in Barrett et al. (2024). This article overviews biology teachers' practices by focusing on a small number of lessons.

Findings

The biology teachers observed in this study employed various strategies to support science learning and language development in the transitional class, although their effectiveness varied. All teachers admitted they must strategically move between English and Kiswahili since most students would not understand if only English were used. However, just over half (9 out of 16) teachers believed the use of two languages to be good practice:

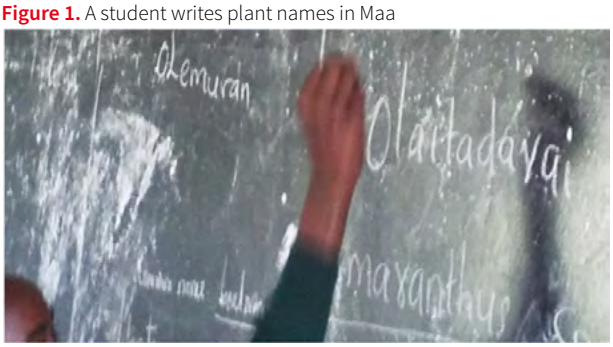
> I have thought about the issue of language because of the performance of children in my biology classes. Success comes to those who understand the language. (Interview with biology teacher)

Some teachers deliberately tried to connect scientific concepts with students' prior knowledge by allowing them to use their home language, while others applied multimedia, group talks, and hands-on activities to lessen the language barrier. In other instances, despite using Kiswahili and English, the teachers' approaches lacked sufficient scaffolding and interactive elements, limiting students' opportunities to engage fully with the content and language development.

Positive Example 1: Drawing on Students' Home Languages

Clegg, in this NSI, highlights LSP as essential for fostering language development in diverse classrooms, and the teachers' practices exemplify these principles. The most successful teachers scaffolded students to connect scientific concepts to their prior knowledge and everyday experiences by allowing them to use their home language. They allowed students to articulate their understanding of familiar scientific ideas in their language before learning to express scientific concepts in English. One teacher, in particular, engaged students' detailed knowledge of plants in their environment through their Indigenous language. He worked in a Maasai community school, and himself knew Maa (the Maasai language). Using both Maa and Kiswahili, he elicited students' prior knowledge before transitioning to English. His lesson stood out from others observed for its inclusive sense of joy. Almost every student was visibly engaged and smiling.

Figure 1. A student writes plant names in Maa



Source: Author

Positive Example 2: Use of Translation

A second positive example of linguistic inclusivity was observed in a rural school in Zanzibar, where the teacher used several strategies to support students' understanding and lessen the burden of the unfamiliar LOLT. The teacher repeated key questions and phrases ("What is first aid?") several times and in different ways ("Who can define it in Kiswahili?"). In this way, the teacher bridged the gap between the new and familiar languages, making it easier for the students to understand and remember. When a student offered an answer in Kiswahili, the teacher accepted and celebrated it, before providing the English translation:

> **Teacher:** *Who can give the meaning of first aid, even in Kiswahili?*
> **Individual learner:** *Huduma ya kwanza*
> **Teacher:** *Good! Clap hands to him. Jamali told us first aid is …*
> **Whole class:** *Huduma ya kwanza*
> **Teacher:** *All of you, say first aid and first aid kit*
> (Biology lesson)

The teacher went on to read the definition in chunks ("First aid is the immediate assistance …"), explaining each component to break the English sentence into digestible pieces. The terms "immediate assistance" and "sick or injured" person were explained repeatedly with Kiswahili equivalents. The teacher checked for understanding through follow-up questions, requiring students to think and apply the information in the real world. For instance, "Why does an injured person need first

aid before going to the hospital?"

Student testimonies reveal a strong preference for teaching that drew on their familiar languages to aid understanding. They indicated that relying solely on English often left them uncomfortable and hindered understanding:

But if you teach subjects like chemistry, some of us don't know the vocabulary. Lessons pass us by … (Student focus group)

… English poses challenges for us. When the teacher allows us to discuss in Kiswahili, it empowers us … (Student focus group)

Positive Example 3: Use of Audiovisual Resources

A third positive example, also from Zanzibar, demonstrates using an audiovisual resource to reduce the linguistic demand, foster student engagement, and integrate science with language learning. Talking about tangible objects or events is easier than abstract ideas or concepts. The video showed images of laboratory equipment, making the lesson content less abstract. The lesson was structured to allow time for reflection, discussion, and engagement before moving on to more complex tasks. Students were asked to recall and identify information from the video and, thereafter, identify laboratory apparatus brought into the class to engage them directly with the material. Students were invited to respond individually and share their observations, promoting engagement and building their confidence in speaking. Throughout the lesson, the teacher was attentive

Figure 2. Students identify scientific apparatus during a multimedia-based learning session

Source: Author

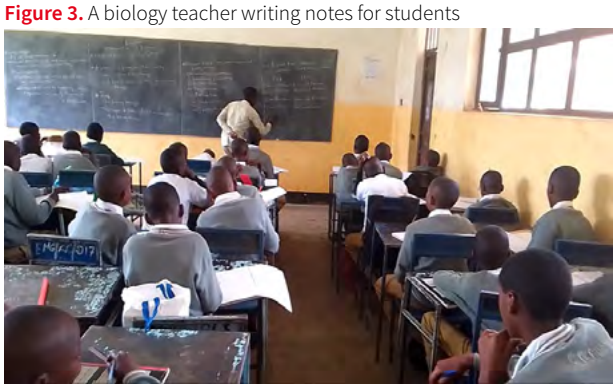
to gender dynamics, encouraging boys and girls to participate equally and ensuring all felt supported to contribute. After each student's response, the teacher provided feedback and referenced specific actions in the video. For instance, when a student mentioned the rule of not eating in the laboratory, the teacher recalled an example from the video. The teacher also related the lesson to students' local context using Kiswahili and terms such as "mzee baba" (fun-loving guy), making the content more relatable. Students were regularly praised using phrases like "Very good," "Clap for him/her," and "Safi sana" (perfectly correct), creating a supportive and motivating classroom atmosphere. Expectations were communicated before students were engaged in an activity.

Typical Practices: Incomplete Scaffolding

Observations from other classrooms showed teachers attempting practices to support learning in the transitional class. However, these were not sufficiently adapted to students' language abilities. The teachers tried to explain concepts slowly with posters and notice boards but struggled to provide the necessary scaffolding to support students in expressing their ideas in English. Teachers frequently switched from English to Kiswahili to clarify specific points or address misunderstandings. However, this "code-switching" (Clegg & Afitska, 2011) seemed to be ad hoc rather than a deliberate strategy for language development. Previous research by Criper and Dodd (1984) and Galabawa and Senkoro (2006) indicates that unplanned code-switching has been common in Tanzanian classrooms for decades.

Teacher talk dominated the lessons, with limited opportunities for students to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Figure 3. A biology teacher writing notes for students



Source: Author

The board was often filled with notes or drawings to support understanding of the content, but little or no explicit support was given for language acquisition. Beyond giving short one-word responses to the teacher's questions during episodes of whole-class teacher-led question and answer, students had minimal opportunities to practice productive skills of talking or writing in English. Activities such as pairing or small-group discussions, where students could explore terms and rules in their own words, were rarely employed. Students were not given time to think individually or permitted to respond in their home language before expressing themselves in English. Hence, opportunities were missed to foster greater participation and create a supportive learning environment.

Discussion

Education policy and national curriculum documents fail to account for the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students (see Biseko & Barrett in this NSI). However, science teachers' practices (as well as interviews with science teachers, not

presented here) show that subject teachers recognize that multilingual strategies support students transitioning to English as the LOLT.[5] Yet, their ability to adapt their teaching to students' linguistic abilities varied. Exceptional teachers demonstrated considerable pedagogic skills to reduce the linguistic demand of the lesson. They were masters of pace, allowing space and time for student participation. They were also resourceful, seeking out appropriate visual or audiovisual resources and fully using students' linguistic resources. Above all else, they recognized students as knowledge holders and sought to help them articulate their knowledge. Hence, they were epistemically inclusive in the dual sense of making the curriculum accessible to learners and recognizing the knowledge practices learners brought from their home communities (Milligan, 2022). However, not all the teachers demonstrating these practices were able to fully articulate in the interview the theory or rationale for their practice. The exceptions were two teachers, who had trained at St. John's University of Tanzania, where the theory and practice of language supportive pedagogy is integrated across the teacher education program (as explained in Rubagumya et al., 2021).

A minority of the biology teachers who struggled to integrate language support into their lessons themselves had limited mastery of English. Others appeared to have limited teaching and learning resources to draw upon in the classroom. They all adhered to the curriculum and focused on relaying content to students, prioritizing "covering the syllabus" over students' active engagement in learning.

Implications

These findings point to three implications. First, they highlight the need for continued professional development to equip teachers with the necessary pedagogical theory and skills to adopt supportive multilingual strategies for the learners in their classrooms. However, professional development activities should seek out and draw on the expertise of outstanding teachers already working within Tanzanian secondary schools. Second, they demonstrate the dependence of the majority of teachers on curriculum materials and, hence, the pressing need for textbooks and other curriculum materials to be designed for multilingual learners (as described by Clegg in this NSI). Finally, the findings demonstrate the distance between the monolingual ideals of the language in education policy in Tanzania and the multilingual realities of secondary school science classrooms. Hence, they highlight the need for policy to prioritize the inclusion of learners with diverse language capabilities.

Endnotes

1. Also known as the Swahili language.
2. In Zanzibar, transition to English as LOLT starts in upper primary, when English is used for science, mathematics, information technology, and geography.
3. ELSATS was funded by the British Council through its "Widening Participation" grant scheme.
4. Kiswahili is also spoken outside of Tanzania and is among the 10 most widely spoken languages in the World (UNESCO, 2021).
5. Note that we had a different finding for English language teachers, who strongly supported the "English only" policy.

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Harnessing the Epistemic Potential of Multiple Languages in Transitional Multilingual Mathematics Classrooms in South Africa

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Summary
This paper proposes a way of rethinking transition and teaching in multilingual classrooms in a way that draws on and exploits the epistemic potential of the multiplicity of languages in classrooms to benefit students who have transitioned from a home language to a globally dominant language. It is based on research in South African language transition classrooms in Grade 4 (aged 10).

Keywords
Translanguaging
Language responsive mathematics teaching
Transition classrooms
Indigenous language

Introduction

Language fulfills at least two functions: a communicative function and an epistemic function. The communicative function of language deals with language as a vehicle for thought and social interaction. In mathematics, the epistemic function of language relates to how language is used for ongoing conceptualization, for validation, or for conceptual development. For students to adequately understand mathematics, language in the classroom needs to fulfill both roles. Seeing language solely in its communicative role runs the risk of a mathematics teacher focusing mainly on the social aspects of teaching. Such a teacher will focus on 1) who is talking and who is not, 2) the language proficiency of students, and 3) the social norms that regulate interaction in the classroom. While all these are important in the mathematics classroom, focusing solely on these runs the risk of neglecting *the mathematics*. On the other hand, focusing solely on the epistemic role of language runs the risk of 1) a lack of focus on participation in discussions on the mathematics concept at hand and 2) solely focusing on algorithms—on steps—that lead to the correct answer of a mathematical problem, and so on. For classrooms where there is a presence of more than one language, and where any of the languages present in the class has the potential of being used in teaching and learning, the dual role of language becomes more complex as these twin roles need to be realized in multiple languages. The presence of multiple languages is a phenomenon common to most African countries, with African Indigenous languages co-existing side-by-side with globally dominant languages including English, French, Arabic and Portuguese. As Trudell (2023) points out, the transition Multi-Lingual Education (MLE) is the most widely used approach for incorporating Indigenous languages into formal education, meaning that they are displaced by a globally dominant language at some point during the basic education phase (see Box 1 in the Editorial for this NSI).

This article presents insights from the Language and Mathematics in Early Grade (LMEG) project, which provides

support to Grade 4 teachers in South Africa. Grade 4 (10 years of age) in many South African schools is a transition year. South Africa has 12 official languages, of which nine are Indigenous. Up to 2024, the curriculum requirement, especially in public schools, is for the Indigenous (home) language to be used for teaching and learning up to Grade 3 and for the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) to switch to English from Grade 4 onwards. Even though the national curriculum advocates for additive bilingualism, what is seen in practice is a system of multiple monolingualism—where only one language of teaching and learning is used at a time in a multilingual setting (Sapire & Essien, 2021).

Transition for students whose mother tongue is not English gives rise to language issues in multilingual mathematics classroom contexts. One of these issues is the assumption that learners have gained access to both academic and communicative proficiencies in the home language and in English to the extent that these languages can now play the dual function of being both communicative and epistemic tools. These assumptions can impede attainment in mathematics into the higher grades. The LMEG project is concerned with how Grade 4 teachers can best draw on multiple languages when teaching mathematics in such a way that students benefit cognitively from their multilingualism.

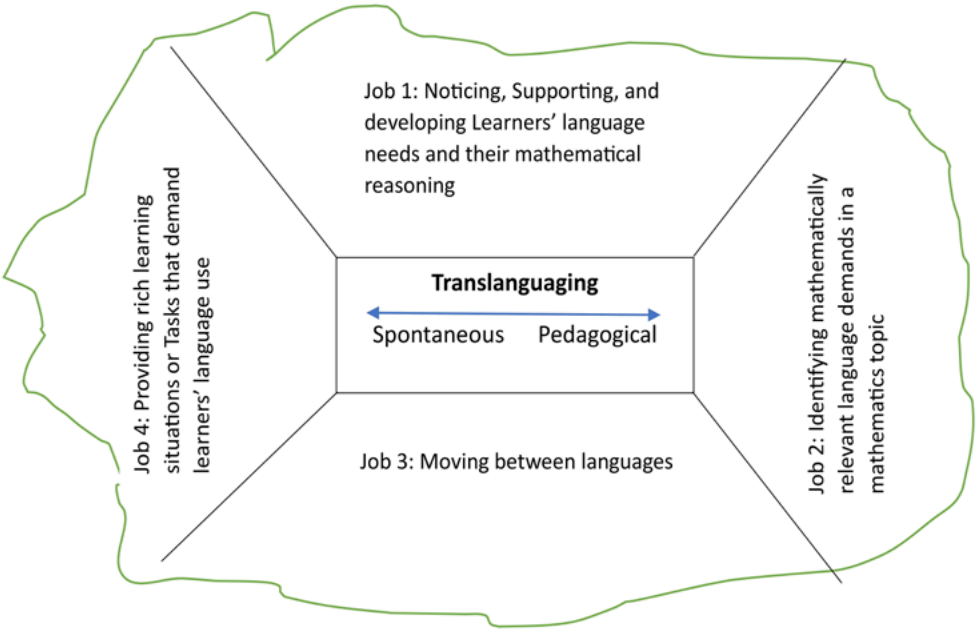
This article presents a merged framework that brings together both the translanguaging framework and the language responsive mathematics teaching (LRMT) framework in the context of language transition in South Africa. The focus of the paper is to show how translanguaging can inform the four "jobs" for mathematics teachers in this and other comparable contexts, which are presented as a model and then explained in the article.

Translanguaging and Language Responsive Mathematics Teaching (LRMT)

Through inductive and deductive approaches, a framework that brings together translanguaging and language responsive mathematics teaching emerged from the LMEG research and development project. In this paper, I present this framework in the quest to inform policy and practice on how teachers can draw on and exploit the epistemic potential of the multiplicity of languages in classrooms in ways that lead to meaning-making in multilingual classrooms in general and more specifically in transition classrooms.

According to sociolinguistic researchers, translanguaging suggests that multilingual speakers do not compartmentalize their languages but instead utilize a single, unified linguistic and communicative repertoire, which they can access seamlessly and flexibly (Wei, 2018). Essien and Sapire (2022, p. 85) refer to this linguistic repertoire as "an individual's linguistic 'baggage', that is, the totality of the set of knowledge and skills an individual possesses of one or more languages that can be drawn upon in any instance of speaking, writing, reading, and sense-making." A key thread in García et al.'s (2017) key functions of translanguaging in education is the focus on language and content. This idea of fusing language learning goals with content learning goals is also the key idea of language responsive mathematics teaching following from the work of Prediger (2019) in the Global North. For our own context in (South) Africa, based on findings from our professional development work and research in classrooms, we have identified four "jobs" of a teacher that lend themselves to language responsive mathematics teaching, as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1. The LRMT Translanguaging Framework



Source: Author

Job 1: Noticing, Supporting, and Developing Learners' Language Needs and Their Mathematical Reasoning

Professional noticing is an essential skill for teachers, enabling them to make real-time instructional decisions. This process consists of three interconnected abilities: focusing on students' thinking, interpreting their understanding, and determining how to respond to both (Jacobs et al., 2010). In classrooms, particularly multilingual ones, an important aspect of fostering meaningful learning is the teacher's awareness of students' language use during discussions (McLachlan & Essien, 2022). The linguistic diversity in these environments requires a teacher's thoughtful attention to how language either facilitates or impedes student participation. On noticing students' use of language, it then becomes incumbent on the teacher to support and further develop students' language. This support and development can be done either within a specific language or across languages.

Job 2: Identifying Mathematically Relevant Language Demands in a Mathematics Topic

Identifying mathematically relevant language demands in a mathematics topic entails 1) expanding students' language repertoires across different mathematical topics, 2) linking everyday language to mathematical language, and 3) utilizing various representations, along with the language tied to each, in instruction. Therefore, for this job, teachers are expected to identify and address the specific language demands of a given mathematics topic (Adler & Essien, 2024) and employ multiple representations to promote deeper engagement with the material.

Job 3: Translanguaging as Moving Between Languages

We conceive of translanguaging as moving between two languages in at least two ways. The first is a situation where both the home language and English are used in regular teaching and learning interactions, much of which are done spontaneously. The second is in the sense of pedagogical translanguaging, where the movement between languages is pre-planned through:

1. Providing mathematics tasks/materials in both English and the home language;

2. Cross-linguistic comparisons, where a concept is explained in terms of the similarities and differences across both home language and English; and

3. Boundary crossing, where the mathematics terms and their definitions are displayed in the home language alongside the question in English, or vice versa.

In terms of the second (cross-linguistic comparisons), as part of our LRMT framework, teachers can engage students in reflecting on the conceptual similarities and differences in the mathematical language (also called mathematics register) in the home language and in English using questions like the ones below.

Consider different mathematical terms in your home language in key topics in mathematics.

1. What does the everyday understanding of the term mean in English?

2. How do these meanings align to the mathematical meanings (as we know them)?

3. How can we use these meanings to better teach the mathematics concept?

A key question that captures the quintessence of the above task is "[W]hat mathematics register related to this task would you want to explore further in your learners' home language?" (Adler & Essien, 2024). The findings from our project point to the fact that a task such as the above enables teachers to engage with the conceptual similarities and differences between the languages that are present in the class and, by doing so, use these similarities/differences to better enable epistemic access.

Job 4: Providing Rich Learning Situations or Tasks That Demand Learners' Language Use

In any classroom, but more specifically in multilingual classrooms, choosing and using mathematical tasks with a strong focus on explaining, justifying, conjecturing, and critiquing are important in developing learners' language use. In the same vein, our research and development project has shown that while having questions that lend more readily to algorithms is important, it is also important to provide students with questions that demand their use of language to express their mathematical thinking—questions that ask "why," "explain," "justify," and so on.

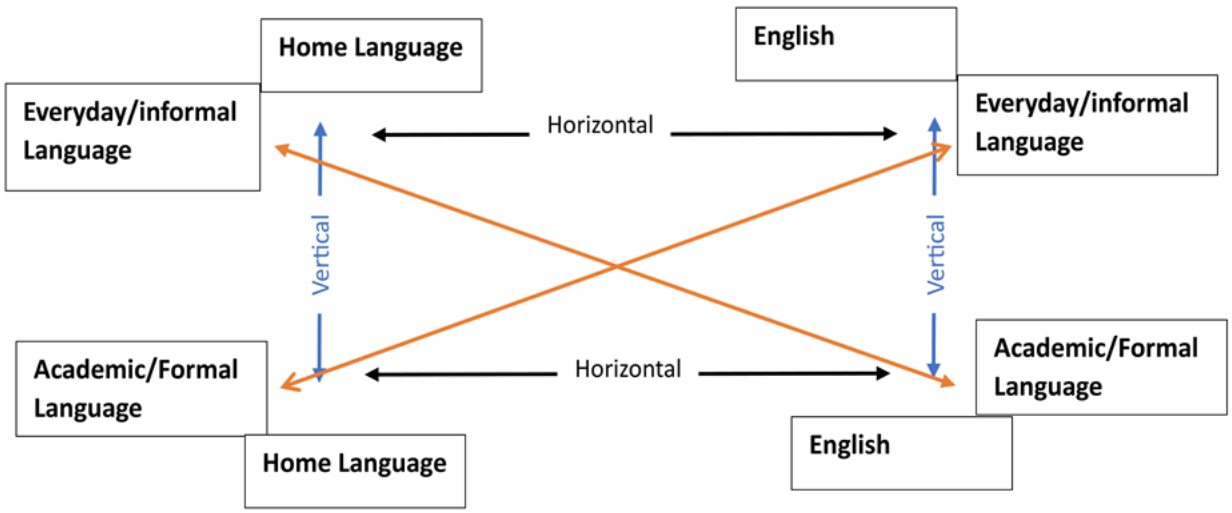
What the "jobs" Mean for Transition and Multilingual Mathematics Education

Drawing from Essien and Adler (forthcoming), I argue that in multilingual classrooms, these four jobs need to be necessarily understood in the context of register movement within and across languages. To be more explicit, our contention is that any language capable of being used for academic purposes will have within it the everyday language and the academic language. Using English and isiZulu (an Indigenous language in South Africa) as an example, the register movement can be within English, that is everyday English and mathematical English (or for isiZulu, everyday isiZulu and mathematical isiZulu).

In language transition/multilingual contexts where other languages are used or present the potential to be used, this movement between the everyday and the academic can be across languages in bidirectional ways, as shown in Figure 2 below.

In simple terms, for students to benefit from their multilingualism, the use of home language need not remain only at the everyday (informal) register level (Heugh, 2021) in all four jobs. For Jobs 1 and 2, students need opportunities to also develop ways of expressing concepts in their home language that go beyond the everyday to the more formal ways. For Job 3, opportunities for talk need to be in both home language and English and across languages, and for both informal (horizontal movement) and formal mathematics language (vertical movement). Focusing solely on the horizontal movement from informal home language to informal English alone keeps students at the communicative level; the vertical and diagonal movements are necessary to move learners to the epistemic domain.

Figure 2. The interplay between everyday language and mathematical language in multilingual classrooms



Source: Author

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Identifying and Defining Language Support Needs in Second Language of Instruction Examination Contexts

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Summary
The Seychelles' education system does not provide for language support during exams, disadvantaging students with limited English proficiency. We argue that more inclusive language-in-assessment policies are needed to ensure that high-stakes exams assess subject knowledge rather than language proficiency. Suggested improvements include the implementation of language accessibility principles, multilingual options, and marking practices that focus on knowledge rather than language.

Keywords
Multilingual education
Assessment
Language support
High-stakes exams
Language policy

Introduction

"If we assess children in a second language it may not tell us what they know." (Clegg, 2005, p. 43)

During recent discussions in March 2024 with the Assessment Division at the Seychelles Ministry of Education, an interesting question came up: How do we ensure that children sitting high-stakes exams in subjects such as mathematics and the natural sciences get the language support needed to understand the questions asked and to communicate what they really know?

This is obviously a question of relevance for many L2 LOLT settings, especially in post-colonial contexts such as Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) but also in multilingual learning contexts in middle-high income countries in the Global North. In this short paper, we will attempt to initiate discussions on principles for more inclusive language-of-assessment policies in L2 LOLT contexts. We are aware of the fact that the question is larger than mere assessment issues and that general language-in-education policies are often connected with assessment practices. However, here we will limit our discussions to assessment only.

Context and Background

At this point, it is relevant to contextualize this discussion further. The interviews we were undertaking are part of a project, "Understanding Understanding," funded by the Swedish Research Council, a project that addresses challenges related to subtractive language of instruction transition policies. More specifically, the project seeks to gain a systematic understanding of the guiding principles behind language-in-education policies and how steering documents and curricula in various English medium of instruction (EMI) contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa acknowledge (or not) the realities and challenges involved in learning and teaching through a second language. The Seychelles is one of the contexts explored in this project.

The Seychelles is a small island nation in the Indian Ocean. It has three national languages, Seselwa, English, and French. The vast majority of Seychellois have Seselwa as L1 (85.1% according to the Seychelles National Bureau of Statistics (2022). This is followed by English, which is L1 for 8% of the population according to the SNBS (2022). Nevertheless, the Seychelles has adopted a subtractive EMI policy in school from Primary 3 onwards. Despite official overarching language-in-education policies in the National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, Seychelles, 2013b, p. 6) that state that Seselwa can be used as a language of support, in practice the system adopts an English-only medium of instruction praxis from Primary 3 (Grade 3) onwards (see Zelime & Deutschmann, 2016, for example).

High-stakes Exams

Also noteworthy in this system is the importance of formal written exams. The Seychelles obligatory school system is divided into five key stages: Key Stage 1 – Pre-school and Primary 1 and 2 (LOLT is Kreol Seselwa); Key Stage 2 – Primary 3 and 4 (LOLT is English); Key Stage 3 – Primary 5 and 6 (LOLT is English); Key Stage 4 – Secondary school years 1–3 (LOLT is English); and Key Stage 5 – Secondary school years 4–5 (LOLT is English). At the end of each stage, learners take national exams, which are marked centrally. These exams are extremely important in deciding what opportunities are available for learners. For example, results from national exams are used to stream children to decide whether they are eligible to sit more academically oriented International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) exams or instead are steered to pursue more vocational pathways.

Support—Language Needs vs Special Needs

According to the Seychelles National Assessment Framework, "assessment tasks must be accessible to all students including those with special needs" (Ministry of Education, Seychelles, 2013a, p. 3.). Given this context, language support during exams for learners who have limited proficiency in English seems reasonable. However, in the curriculum and assessment frameworks there is no discussion of language-of-assessment policies in examination contexts. Discussions with the National Assessment division revealed several supportive functions that are available during exams for learners with special needs. For example, children with dyslexia have the right to reading and writing support during exams, and children with ADHD have the right to receive additional time to complete their exams.

However, language needs are not deemed as a special need or, indeed, a need at all. There are no supportive measures available during exams for learners who have problems understanding questions or expressing their knowledge in English. Furthermore, answers that are partially written in Seselwa in subjects such as biology or social science are generally deemed as invalid by examiners, even when factually correct, according to the Assessment Division. The Seychelles is in no way unique in this respect. In their report Loud and Clear, the World Bank (2021) discusses this as a general problem, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 80% of children are being taught and examined in a second language (p. 9). The report points to the fact that "when tests are de facto testing language proficiency, then the ostensible subject-matter tends to be obscured, and the results biased" (p. 49).

From our discussions with the Ministry of Education, some major challenges were pointed to in structuring systematic language support in exam contexts. First, special supportive resources in situations such as exams involve costs, and systems often require a formal needs diagnosis for support eligibility. Despite general inclusion policy statements such as "assessment tasks must be accessible to all students" (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 3), a formal special educational needs (SEN) diagnosis is a prerequisite for special support during exams. No such needs diagnosis exists for language needs.

As a result, many children facing language challenges risk being diagnosed as SEN learners. Internationally, there are numerous examples of systematic oversights where language needs have been classified as SEN (see, for example, Becker & Deris, 2019; Schmaus, 2022). Schmaus (2022, p. 43) points to a general problem in the assessment of SEN, in that "most SEN assessment instruments [are] designed and normed for monolingual students." One major issue here is that language needs incorrectly classified as SEN risks placing learners in inappropriate ability groups or sets and pedagogic contexts that do not provide well-matched cognitive challenges.

Second, diagnosing language support needs is problematic. How do you decide who does and who does not receive language support in an exam? Where do you draw the line? Our conclusion, based on the policy statements referred to above, is that ALL students should be eligible for language support in understanding exam questions in subjects other than English language. Language support should therefore be seen as a general, rather than special, need.

Toward an Inclusive Language-in-assessment Policy

For this to become a reality, there needs to be a general adjustment of language-of-assessment policies toward more inclusive frameworks that acknowledge the language challenges many learners face. Working out such policies is obviously complex, and many factors need to be considered. We would, however, argue that a general strategy that benefits all learners is preferable.

Such frameworks need to consider several aspects. Below are some considerations that emerged from our discussions. First, there needs to be clear language policies as regards the language used when constructing exams, policies that consider language accessibility. For example, simple and unambiguous language should be strived for in exams. Furthermore, images and illustrations can help to clarify meaning. Instructions need to be clear, explicit, and detailed. Here, example answers can be used to help students understand how they should tackle a question. Such solutions align with recommendations from scholars in the field of language supportive pedagogy (see, for example, Clegg, 2022; Mtana & O-saki, 2017).

The challenges of assessment in an L2 are in no way unique to the Seychelles. Similar needs, challenges, and solutions in learning contexts in the Sub-Saharan (SSA) region are discussed at length by scholars such as Mahoney (2023) and Rea-Dickins et al. (2009), and specific examples of shortcomings in assessment policies due to monolingual and monomodal requirements of formal assessments have been explored in various SSA learning contexts such as Namibia (McKinney & Set, 2023), Ghana (Erling et al., 2023), the Tanzania mainland (Mapunda, 2023), and Zanzibar (Rea-Dickins & Yu, 2013).

There is also a strong case for providing multilingual options whereby not only task instructions but also answers can be provided in more than one language (see Zelime et al., 2018). Other alternatives include allowing students to use dictionaries and/or providing them with multilingual glossaries of key terms. Cultural relevance should be considered when exam tasks are formulated, and examples and illustrations should be taken from culturally familiar content (Zelime & Deutschmann, 2019).

Policies related to assessment practices are also important. For example, examiners marking papers should be instructed to focus on subject knowledge rather than language proficiency. Students should not be penalized for code mixing/translanguaging, as is the case in the current system. Furthermore, a variety of question types (e.g., multiple choice, short answer, diagrams, oral testing) that do not rely solely on written text can be used to minimize language obstacles.

Building a robust system should also rely on continuous adjustments for improvements. For example, after exams, feedback can be collected from students on their experience with the language and cultural aspects of the test. This feedback can then be used to revise future exams to improve inclusivity, ensuring that they become more equitable and language-friendly over time.

This issue of language-of-assessment policies extends beyond the Seychelles, with the World Bank (2021) identifying it as an especially significant problem in Sub-Saharan Africa, where many children are taught and examined in a second language. The lack of language support in assessments can seriously bias results and obscure subject knowledge, leading to exclusion from educational opportunities due to lack of proficiency in the L2 LOLT. Furthermore, language difficulties may be wrongly classified as SEN, leading to inappropriate educational placements for affected students.

The above outcomes from our discussions with the Seychelles Ministry of Education are obviously just starters in addressing such issues. Ultimately, inclusive policies need to consider more than just assessment. Teaching and learning practices are the key to knowledge production, and here comprehensive reforms toward more inclusive language-in-education policies are urgent. We would, however, argue that pointing out the blatant injustices of current language-in-assessment policies is helpful in illuminating the lack of general equity in many L2 LOLT systems in SSA. It is also clear that language needs are not special needs in these systems but rather are general needs that exclude huge parts of the population from education.

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Part 4

Multilingualism in Adult Learning

The articles in this section explore multilingualism in adult education. Key themes include diversity, equity and achievement, the transformative potential of multilingual education for sustainability, and the uses of digital media for multilingual learning and teaching. The first article discusses the potential of higher education to foster multilingualism across the education system and other sectors, drawing on good practice examples from Makerere University, Kyambogo University, and the National Institute of Teacher Education (UNITE) in Uganda. In the second article, we see how the emphasis on Mandarin in Chinese Minzu universities undermines the national bilingual education policy at all levels of schooling and marginalizes Tibetan students. The third article considers connections between multilingual education and sustainable futures, drawing on the example of a European teacher development project. The fourth article shows how adult learners use their multilingual resources for peer teaching and learning on an international, mass-scale online educational platform. Together, these articles expand our understanding of the benefits of multilingualism in adult education for students and their communities and challenge the perceived need to choose between languages in education for national unity and academic and professional advancement.

Promoting Linguistic Diversity in Ugandan Higher Education: Integrating Indigenous Language Training

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Summary
The integration of Indigenous languages into degree programs at Makerere University, Kyambogo University, and UNITE is transformative for Uganda's education. It preserves linguistic diversity, enhances professional opportunities, and aligns with multilingual education principles. This initiative supports inclusive education, informs curriculum design, and advocates for language preservation, while teacher training in L1 ensures sustainable educational futures.

Keywords
Uganda
Multilingualism
Language rights
Leave no one behind
Indigenous knowledge

Introduction

Uganda's rich linguistic diversity—it is home to over 65 spoken languages—represents a valuable national asset. The integration of these Indigenous languages into higher education is a necessary step toward preserving this rich diversity and promoting inclusivity. Indigenous language training is essential for promoting linguistic diversity in a nation where, despite official promotion of English and Kiswahili,[1] numerous languages remain in daily use and risk marginalization (Gulere, 1998). Moreover, language is not merely a means of communication but also an avenue through which cultural heritage is preserved and individual identity is expressed.

The Ugandan Constitution enshrines the right to citizenship based on Indigenous heritage (Uganda Const., art. 10(a)), acknowledging the importance of language in defining personal and cultural identity. These rights are guaranteed for members of Uganda's 56 Indigenous communities but also for adopted children and citizens by registration (Uganda Const., art. 12). It is clear that the recognition of language plays a key role in promoting not only cultural preservation but also civic duty and identity. The duty to put into practice this constitutional mandate falls on the National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC).

The Role of National Curriculum Development and Examination Bodies

Despite the clear constitutional mandate, institutions tasked with curriculum development and assessment—such as the National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC) and the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB)—are under-resourced. Both organizations lack trained professionals who can effectively address the "language question" in Uganda. As a result, the non-discriminative teaching of all 56 Indigenous languages remains a significant gap in the current education system. This deficiency limits opportunities for citizens to fully embrace their cultural identities, engage in meaningful interactions, and transform their lives through education. It also has significant implications for the country's educational development, as it deprives learners of the opportunity to

study and interact in their L1, a crucial factor in identity formation and social development (Mazrui, 2004).

The inclusion of all Indigenous languages in the education system is essential for fostering a cohesive national identity, enabling individuals to learn, write, and communicate in their mother tongues. Access to written stories and translation opportunities in Ugandan languages on renowned platforms such as Academia, StoryWeaver, African Storybook, and TranslationDirectory marks a significant development. I have been privileged to contribute to these initiatives that have made reading, writing, listening, and speaking in Uganda's minoritized languages more accessible. I have heard many testimonies of individuals whose lives were transformed by the knowledge and use of their L1. These efforts have been crucial in promoting linguistic diversity in Uganda, leveraging community libraries and digital platforms to overcome physical and resource limitations (Gulere, 2019; Harley, 2018). Such initiatives ensure that Indigenous languages remain relevant languages of learning and teaching (LOLT) in the digital age, reaching both local and global audiences.

The Need for Indigenous Language Instruction in Higher Education

Teaching Indigenous languages in higher education is not only a matter of academic inclusion but also a vital tool for personal and societal transformation. Having minoritized languages taught, studied, used, documented, and preserved at university level fosters a sense of belonging among the people, empowering them to associate with their specific and diverse heritage and, thus, transforming their shared lives in meaningful ways. Indigenous languages are more than just tools of communication; they are repositories of cultural knowledge, Indigenous science and technology, human values, and social practices. When individuals are educated in their L1, they gain a deeper understanding of their culture and history, which enhances their self-esteem and social identity (Guthrie, 1962).

The teaching of minoritized languages at the university degree level equips future educators, researchers, and policymakers with essential skills to promote language education and innovation. Institutions such as Makerere University, Kyambogo University, and the Uganda National Institute of Teacher Education (UNITE) are at the forefront, offering degree programs in these languages. Makerere University provides courses in Luganda, Runyakitara (Runyankore, Rutooro, Runyoro, Rukiga), Luo (Leb Lango, Leb Acholi, Dhopadhola), and Kiswahili, recently adding Lusoga. These courses emphasize communicative, academic, and teaching skills, integrating oral and written literacies with cultural knowledge, Indigenous sciences, and literature. Kyambogo University, initially offering Luganda and Kiswahili,[2] has expanded to include Lusoga and Runyoro, further enriching linguistic diversity. UNITE's proposed curriculum aims to broaden access with over 18 minoritized languages, including Ateso, Lugbara ti, Aga Karimojong, and Samia, preparing educators for effective instruction across primary to tertiary levels. These programs align with global trends in multilingual education, supporting the use of L1 as LOLT to enhance learning outcomes and foster social inclusion, which is crucial for preserving linguistic and cultural identities (UNESCO, 2017).

The Importance of Indigenous Languages in Society

Language plays a vital role in the development of individuals and societies, shaping how cultures evolve and interact. The adaptation of languages such as Kiswahili and English to local contexts illustrates how languages can adapt to meet the needs of different cultures across the globe (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998). Similarly, Indigenous languages provide rich cultural contexts that deepen the understanding of values and virtues. For example, universal concepts such as humility and peace are present across cultures, but they carry specific nuances that are best understood within the linguistic and cultural framework of the speaker (Mazrui, 2004). At Makerere University, staff and students of the Advanced Lusoga course have reported increased job opportunities for translation services and teaching simply by mentioning their involvement in the course (Masabe, 2024).

In higher education, teaching and using Indigenous languages allow students to connect more deeply with their cultural heritage and promotes inclusivity. For educators and learners in multilingual settings, familiarity with the local L1 or any other language used as a language of learning and teaching (LOLT) fosters a sense of trust and confidence. Teachers feel "comfortable using that language and confident that their students will understand" (De Galbert & Gulere, 2023, p. 122). Therefore, higher education institutions must embrace Indigenous languages not only to preserve them but also to enrich the academic and cultural experiences of instructors and learners from diverse backgrounds. Moreover, these languages are integral to sectors such as tourism, which Uganda aims to develop, and the "Buy Uganda Build Uganda" (BUBU) philosophy, which thrives in a populace well-versed in their community languages.

Challenges as Opportunities

A key challenge in Uganda's language policy is the dominance of English and Kiswahili as official languages, which has marginalized local languages (L1) in both public and educational domains. This monolingual approach affects not only classrooms but also public administration. For instance, local government meetings are often conducted in L1, but minutes are recorded in English, leading to discrepancies in interpretation and official records. Embracing linguistic diversity could help reduce cases of "corruption" stemming

from miscommunication and miscoordination in official statements. In education, the same issue arises when students understand a concept but struggle to express it in the official language. Promoting L1 can foster cultural understanding and ensure that all citizens feel represented and valued, creating more technical and professional opportunities.

Many in my Lusoga class had to overcome the shame and fear associated with using L1 in official public discourse (Gulere, 2012), particularly before the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) introduced Lusoga as a secondary school subject. One student reported: "The school doesn't like it that teacher trainees are using Lusoga as language of instruction" (De Galbert & Gulere, 2023, p. 129). The imposition of an official language is not inherently wrong but becomes problematic when it suppresses L1, as has been the case in Uganda. This suppression can make learners, instructors, and professionals feel incompetent, impacting their confidence, thinking, and overall life opportunities. The Primary Teacher Training Colleges (PTCs) require their students to instruct their classes in L1. However, they are mostly given minimal orientation in the area languages.

The study of Indigenous languages is evidently not merely about cultural preservation but also about securing individual rights. As the Ugandan Constitution emphasizes the right to belong to a language community (Uganda Const., art. 37), the state has an obligation to promote linguistic diversity at all levels of education. Indigenous languages are integral to local governance, culture, and individual identity, and their appropriate scholarship is essential for fostering an informed sense of belonging and community ethos. University-level education and research will facilitate the preservation of these languages for future generations. The deeper understanding of Indigenous languages contributes to a more inclusive society where all cultural groups feel recognized and respected, which, in turn, fosters national unity and social cohesion (Crystal, 2000).

Implications for Policy and Curriculum Development

The integration of Indigenous languages into the education system has far-reaching implications for policy and curriculum development in Uganda. First, it provides a framework for the national curriculum to be more inclusive of the country's linguistic diversity, which is essential for meeting the needs of all learners. Second, it informs the development of education policies that recognize the importance of language as a human right, promoting linguistic equity in the classroom and beyond. The Ugandan constitution, through its cultural and language objectives, emphasizes the promotion of Ugandan languages as a means to enhance the dignity and well-being of its citizens (Constitution of Uganda, 1995). Wambi (2024), a curriculum specialist, puts the burden on the NCDC, UNEB, and the Area Language Boards to liberate the citizens from losing their heritage.

Conclusion

The implementation of linguistic diversity in higher education is crucial for building an inclusive and cohesive society. Indigenous languages are central to Uganda's cultural identity and should be integrated into all levels of education to ensure their survival and growth. The current incapacity of national bodies such as the NCDC and UNEB to address the "language question" highlights the need for a more systematic approach to language policy in Uganda. Through training professionals to teach and assess Indigenous languages, Uganda can take meaningful steps toward inclusivity and cultural preservation, ensuring that the students learning these languages have valuable instruction and preparation to meet the international standards of their discourse.

The future of Uganda's education system depends on its ability to embrace linguistic diversity. Indigenous language training offers an opportunity to transform the lives of individuals by enabling them to engage fully with their cultural heritage and contribute meaningfully to society. In doing so, Uganda can set a powerful example for other multilingual nations, showing that the prioritization of linguistic diversity is not just a matter of cultural pride but also a foundation for sustainable development. This will facilitate localization of knowledge and effective utilization of local resources for socioeconomic, geopolitical, and technological development.

The inclusion of Indigenous languages in higher education is a transformative initiative that holds the potential to reshape Uganda's education system and foster national unity. Despite the challenges faced by institutions such as NCDC and UNEB, individuals and organizations, including the mass media, have made significant strides in bringing these languages into the public domain, ensuring their preservation and accessibility. Providing for the teaching and study of Indigenous languages at primary and secondary school levels since 2000 has created a large resource yearning for university education in these languages.

In the next step into university research in/about Indigenous languages, Uganda can create a more inclusive society where every citizen feels a sense of belonging and pride in their linguistic and cultural heritage. Ultimately, the promotion of Indigenous languages is not just about preserving the past but about creating a more inclusive, equitable, and vibrant future for all Ugandans and the people of the world in general. The curriculum design should, therefore, reflect these constitutional values by ensuring that Indigenous languages are treated with the same respect and importance as other languages such as English, Chinese, Arabic, French, German, and Kiswahili. In doing so, Uganda can develop a more equitable and just education system that provides equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their linguistic background.

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1. Also known as the Swahili language. This article uses prefixes in the naming of Bantu languages.
2. Luganda serves as a lingua franca in certain regions of Uganda, while Kiswahili is recognized as a regional and international language. Both languages have a long history of inclusion in education, and their continued presence in university curricula supports broader national language-in-education policies.

Multilingualism and Inclusion: Examining Tibetan Students' Experiences in China's Higher Education

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Summary
Ethnic language programs within China's Minzu (nationalities) universities for ethnic minorities have increasingly prioritized a Mandarin-focused curriculum. This focus has limited the use of Tibetan in university classrooms and poses significant academic and social barriers for Tibetan students. China's approach to managing ethnic diversity and multilingualism in education offers a unique example of ethnolinguistic governance in the Global South.

Keywords
Language policy
Minoritized groups
Multilingualism
Higher education
China

The Role of Multilingual Education in China's Higher Education System

Established after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Minzu (nationalities) universities aimed to integrate ethnic minorities such as Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Mongols into national education by promoting bilingual degree programs. While outwardly supporting linguistic diversity, bilingual education at China's Minzu universities often served as a tool for assimilation (Leibold & Grose, 2019). In theory, students were expected to become proficient in Mandarin while maintaining access to and proficiency in their minoritized languages. This bilingual approach was intended to continue throughout their undergraduate and graduate degree programs at approximately a dozen Minzu universities in China. In practice, the state's sociopolitical goals prioritized Mandarin as a marker of national unity over linguistic diversity (Clothey, 2005). As a result, the implementation of the language policy in education has marginalized speakers of minoritized languages within a competitive job market.

From their inception, Chinese-Tibetan bilingual degree programs at Minzu universities had dual, often conflicting, objectives: integrating ethnic minorities into a unified Chinese nation while preserving minority cultures. However, state policies have consistently prioritized national unity over linguistic diversity (Bulag, 2011). Bass (2008) notes that the state uses bilingual education as a tool to reshape minority cultures to align with its socialist ideals. She argues that China's educational policies have been aimed at remolding the cultures of China's 55 designated ethnic minorities into "a unitary modern socialist culture" (Bass, 2008, p. 39). The preservation of languages and cultures of minoritized groups has been secondary to the political project of national unity.

Policies such as the 1984 Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy (National People's Congress, 1984) supported minoritized languages but were implemented within a framework of national integration. The use of minoritized languages, such as Tibetan, in higher education has been limited to specialized fields, such as Tibetan studies or religious texts, while most academic disciplines are taught in Mandarin.

Despite a brief expansion of Tibetan-language programs in Minzu universities during the early 2000s, a period some scholars refer to as "Tibetanization" (Zenz, 2013), it had little lasting impact on higher education, and the broader trend has been one of limitation and marginalization for minoritized languages (Lhagyal, 2021).

Since around 2019, there has been a shift toward stricter ethnic policies (Leibold, 2019) that made Mandarin the dominant language of instruction in Minzu universities. As a result, Tibetan students who previously attended Tibetan primary and secondary schools found themselves in a higher education environment where Mandarin proficiency was essential for academic success. This shift has exposed the limitations of China's bi- and multilingual education policies, which, while appearing to support ethnic diversity on paper, have in practice prioritized the state's goals of national unity (Leibold & Chen, 2014). China's governance of Tibetan education, within this broader context, offers a unique Global South case. China's nation-building process in the 20th century, while different from traditional postcolonial contexts, has similarly involved managing ethnic diversity within a centralized framework of governance.

Bass (2008) argues that bilingualism was more about promoting the state's political goals than genuine linguistic equality. The expansion of Tibetan-language programs in certain areas was not translated into a comprehensive support system for Tibetan-language instruction across disciplines. These limitations highlight the broader tensions in China's multilingual education policies, where the promotion of national unity often comes at the expense of genuine linguistic and cultural pluralism.

The Competing Goals of Bilingual Programs: Balancing Integration and Cultural Preservation

Roche (2017) contends that Mandarin has been imposed as a necessary skill for upward social mobility in China, which puts minority language speakers at a disadvantage. As Mandarin dominates higher education, with limited space for instruction in minoritized languages, Tibetan students in bilingual degree programs face significant academic and social challenges. Yang (2017) points to the broader issue of cultural dominance of the Han ethnic majority within educational institutions, arguing that this dominance perpetuates a form of "Han chauvinism" that systematically marginalizes ethnic minorities. Gladney (1994) similarly critiques the state's focus on Han-centric education, noting that the prioritization of Mandarin and Han culture marginalizes the languages and cultures of ethnic minority groups.

In Tibetan schools, students start learning both Tibetan and Chinese from first grade in the mandatory nine-year education system. However, their Mandarin skills often fall behind those of their Han peers, as most teachers are Tibetan, and students primarily speak Tibetan with classmates and at home. For many Tibetan students, the shift from Tibetan to Mandarin as the medium of instruction undermines their ability to fully engage in higher education, both academically and socially. Despite a brief expansion of Tibetan-language programs during the "Tibetanization" period, higher education remains overwhelmingly dominated by Mandarin. Consequently, students who are more proficient in Tibetan face significant challenges when they encounter university coursework conducted primarily in Mandarin. The misalignment between state policies and students' needs has created a disconnect between assimilationist goals and students' academic success in their own languages.

Language plays a critical role in education, especially in contexts where students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Benson & Kosonen, 2013). In addition to academic challenges, language policies also affect students' future career prospects. In recent research, I found that Tibetan students' learning outcomes and career pathways are often restricted due to the limited availability of specialized study areas in bilingual programs (Lajiadou, 2022). In their 2016 working paper, Fischer and Zenz found that proficiency in Mandarin has become a prerequisite for employment, particularly in China's public sector, where fluency is viewed as a marker of competence. Tibetan students who received their primary and secondary school education predominantly in the Tibetan language are at a disadvantage when competing for these positions, as their weaker command of Mandarin makes them less competitive in the job market. This creates a situation where students are penalized for their linguistic background, effectively reinforcing existing social and economic inequalities.

The impacts of China's language policies on Tibetan students reveal a deep misalignment between state educational goals that aim to integrate minority students and address the lived realities of minority students—such as difficulties Tibetan students face in academic assessments or employment. While the state promotes Mandarin as a tool for national unity and economic development, this focus on linguistic uniformity undermines the academic success and cultural identity of Tibetan students.

The Ideological Impact of Monolingualism: Challenges for Linguistic Diversity

The perceived need for linguistic uniformity, reflected in the state's "one nation, one language" approach, and a "monolingual habitus" on language acquisition (Gogolin, 1997) has shaped language policies that prioritize Mandarin acquisition over minority languages. This narrow linguistic focus on a national language and a deficit mindset regarding students' language acquisition overlooks the value of

linguistic diversity for social inclusion (Thurston, 2018). China's Minzu higher education, while promoting "Minzu diversity education" (Yuan et al., 2020), often focuses on superficial representations of diversity such as showcasing ethnic minority festivals and featuring images of minority students in traditional clothing on university websites and promotional materials (Lajiadou, 2022). However, more substantive support for minoritized languages, such as offering courses taught in these languages or developing curriculum materials that incorporate minority groups' linguistic and cultural perspectives, has always been limited and is now even more restricted (Lajiadou, 2022). The state's emphasis on Mandarin reinforces broader social inequalities, privileging students who are proficient in Mandarin while disadvantaging those whose linguistic skills are rooted in their minoritized languages.

Language is not merely a means of communication; it is also a fundamental right and a critical component of cultural identity, influencing how students see themselves and draw the "ethnic boundaries" in China's higher education (Yang, 2017). Although Tibetan is included in Minzu universities' curricula, insufficient institutional support creates barriers to minority students' success. This weakens their cultural connection and fosters alienation and disengagement. Skuttnab-Kangas and Phillipson (1997) argue that linguistic human rights, including the right to receive education in one's first or main language, are essential for maintaining cultural identity. They warn that policies favoring linguistic assimilation over diversity can have lasting negative consequences for minority groups. When education does not accommodate the linguistic and cultural needs of its students, it risks alienating them from both the academic community and their own heritage.

The emphasis on Mandarin in language policies extends beyond the classroom and influences societal views on linguistic diversity. Minority languages are often seen as backward or irrelevant to modern economic progress, further marginalizing communities that rely on these languages for cultural continuity. By reinforcing these hierarchies, the higher education system perpetuates social inequalities and limits the opportunities available to minority students, not only in academia but also in broader social and professional contexts.

The marginalization of minority languages such as Tibetan undermines the rich diversity that is crucial for fostering an inclusive and cohesive society. The Minzu university system's management of linguistic diversity highlights the broader global dynamics of how bi- and multilingual education policies are framed in rising economies, shaping international discussions on ethnolinguistic governance as China's influence expands across the Global South. Addressing these challenges requires a shift in perspective, one that recognizes the value of bi- and multilingual education not just for academic success but for preserving cultural identity and promoting social justice.

Barriers to Success: The Impact of Language Policies on Tibetan Students

The challenges encountered by Tibetan students at Minzu universities highlight the complexities of China's bilingual education policies and their implementation. For example, several Tibetan university students I interviewed described the difficult choice they faced when applying for university: opting for a bilingual program with limited Tibetan instruction at a Minzu university or a Mandarin-only program that offered stronger academic training but no mother-tongue instruction (Lajiadou, 2022). The reduction of Tibetan language instruction reflects the tension between promoting the national language of Mandarin and supporting minority languages.

China's bilingual education policies have always operated within a broader framework of national integration, and this framework shapes how minority languages are supported in higher education. The inclusion of Tibetan-language instruction, while intended to preserve heritage, has not led to comprehensive support across disciplines. The lack of comprehensive institutional support for minority language programs reinforces a hierarchy where Mandarin proficiency is tied to success, while proficiency in minority languages is undervalued.

In conclusion, China's approach to ethnic education, while framed as promoting diversity and inclusion, has led to uneven outcomes, such as lower academic performance and fewer career opportunities for students from minoritized ethnic groups. The perceived need for linguistic uniformity, driven by the broader goals of national unity, has contributed to a system where minoritized languages are present but not sufficiently supported, creating a sense of marginalization amongst first-language speakers of those languages. The experience of Tibetan students in China's Minzu universities underscores the difficult balance between maintaining linguistic diversity and advancing the state's objectives of national unity and cohesion.

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Multilingual Education for Sustainable Futures: Learning from an International Teacher Development Project

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Summary
Multilingual education is vital for more fair and sustainable futures as a means to increase educational access, participation, and achievement, and drive educational transformation. This article explores how engaging teachers with multilingual education can foster understanding and practice of education for sustainable futures, drawing on the example of an Erasmus+ Teacher Academy.

Keywords
Multilingual education
Sustainability
Teacher education
Transgressive learning

Introduction

"(H)igh quality and inclusive education and lifelong learning for all", the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) (UN, 2015), is fundamental to the achievement of all 17 SDGs (UNESCO, 2020). Worldwide, the education of hundreds of millions of learners is undermined by monolingual language in education policy (World Bank, 2021). Thus, monolingual policies not only restrict individual rights to education but also undermine our collective transition to more fair and sustainable futures. Transformation is needed if education is to fulfill its potential as a catalyst for sustainability, and this must be founded on addressing inequities in education (Orr, 2004; UNESCO, 2021).

In this article, I argue that multilingual education can support the transformation of education for sustainable futures (ESF), where educators engage in critical thinking and praxis to challenge established norms and systemic socioecological injustices (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2016). I draw on learning from the Erasmus+ Teacher Academy "Teaching Sustainability"[1] (TAP-TS). Data and analysis are taken from the project's evaluation (K&R Education, 2023, 2024), a study exploring teacher educators' understandings of ESF, and my personal reflections.

Multilingual Education and Education for Sustainable Futures

Monolingual language in education policies have severe, negative impacts on educational access, participation, and achievement for millions of learners worldwide (World Bank, 2021). Monolingual policies are rooted in the colonial era, including the definition and separation of global/European languages from non-European, of standardized over non-standardized language, of verbal from non-verbal language, and the view of language as a neutral, technical tool rather than a political, situated form of human behavior (McKinney & Christie, 2022; Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021). Arguably, these assumptions are related to ongoing processes of "modernization," which have had disastrous socioecological impacts (Latour, 2018; Stein et al., 2020).

Engaging educators with multilingual education can make explicit and challenge such assumptions, foster sustainability competences such as critical thinking and systems thinking

(UNESCO, 2017), and catalyze transgressive learning for socioecological transformation (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2016). On a practical level, multilingual education is something that teachers can do—in their classes, and with colleagues and school communities—to develop pedagogically sound and socially just alternatives.

Responding to complex sustainability challenges calls for diverse ways of understanding and acting in the world (Tikly, 2023). This is supported by multilingual education, which values diverse knowledge systems and enables dialogue between them (Barrett & Bainton, 2016). Multilingual education also ensures that more people with diverse knowledge and experiences succeed in and through education, expanding our collective ability to respond to sustainability crises (Gunn-Wright, 2023).

Teacher Academy Project—Teaching Sustainability

The Teacher Academy Project–Teaching Sustainability (TAP-TS) runs from June 2022 until July 2025. The project aims to strengthen the sustainability education competences of European primary- and secondary-level student teachers, teacher educators, and teachers through the co-production, piloting, and use of learning and teaching materials (learning teaching packages; LTP)[2] and participation in teacher development courses as part of an interdisciplinary and international community of practice.[3] The evaluation team have been with the project from the inception stage and aim to:

> *(…) ensure the quality of project activities and outputs, in line with desired impact and outcomes, contribute to the ongoing learning and adaption of project activities toward greatest impact, within and beyond the duration of the project.* (K&R Education, 2024, p. 6)

Evaluation methods include participant observation, document analysis, and surveys and focus groups with project partners and participants. Regular feedback has been provided to the project following each activity, and through annual written reports (K&R Education, 2023, 2024).

Teacher Education Resources and Professional Learning Events

TAP-TS has provided valuable opportunities to explore the connections between multilingual education and ESF through the development of teacher education resources and communication strategies as part of events. The unit "Multilingual education for sustainability," from the LTP "A sustainable Europe," includes activities that elicit understandings of multilingualism , and engage with theoretical and empirical research. Other activities explore connections between language ideology, orientations to multilingualism, and educational practices. In addition, the unit includes opportunities to research and try out multilingual education approaches and strategies, including: whole school approaches to multilingual education; language learning and teaching in subject lessons; translanguaging, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

The materials were developed together with over 140 TAP-TS participants through a series of online and face-to-face professional learning events over a period of two years. In the process, a further unit "Education for Sustainable Futures" was produced for the same LTP to explore discrimination in education and decolonial responses, which provides an important conceptual bridge between multilingual education and ESF.

Learning from the Process

An early iteration of the multilingual education unit was developed through a blended learning course, with webinars, self-study activities, and face-to-face workshops. This early version explored the importance of multilingualism in sustainability, as well as strategies for language teaching and learning within and across curriculum subjects. Results from piloting suggest that educators could see connections between multilingual education and ESF:

> *Participants also recognized the significance of understanding the connections between multilingualism and education for sustainability, which many found interesting. One participant writes, 'I liked the activities, reflection activity on the guiding questions, the connections between linguistic and cultural diversity and sustainability; the implications of sustainability for our teaching work in schools.'* (K&R Education, 2023, ALE2 p. 34)

During face-to-face workshops, participants explored different narratives of sustainability (Tikly, 2023), debated the potential of education to transform society and/or reinforce inequalities, and explored discrimination in education in relation to personal and social identities including linguistic and cultural resources (for further details, see, Bowden and Hornig's (2023) blog). Following the workshops, educators requested more practical ways of enabling linguistic and cultural diversity in schools, and this was seen as an indicator of motivation, which (…) "demonstrates the participants' interest and curiosity in the content, as they are eager to learn more" (K&R Education, 2023, ALE2 pp. 34–35). As a result, more emphasis was given to practical strategies for multilingual education in the final LTP unit and in teacher professional learning events in the second year of the project.

Multilingualism was also explored as part of the project, where the default was to use "English only" for communication between partners and participants, although English is an additional language for most. We began tentatively, at the start of the first summer school, by discussing the linguistic inequalities in our community

of practice. We invited participants to use their languages creatively and sensitively to support each other to participate and learn. This statement was well received and led to critical consideration of links between language and participation (K&R Education, 2023). During a final feedback session, a group of student teachers said they welcomed the recognition that English can be exclusive, and the invitation to use other languages. Nevertheless, they reported feeling frustrated and wanted more practical strategies and support.

> *Often I still wanted to contribute points but hardly had the chance to get involved in the discussions.* (K&R Education, 2023, Appendix 1 p. 12)

Although their frustration was uncomfortable, these future teachers could articulate the linguistic injustice they had experienced and could imagine further possible support strategies. In a subsequent event, participants identified a menu of possible multilingual strategies, and this led to more strategies being used. As the evaluation team noted:

> *Different languages were used in various groups, mostly English, but also German and Portuguese. Some spoke slowly. In one group, it was discovered that everyone spoke both English and German, so they used both languages. Someone used their phone for translation.*
> (K&R Education, 2024, ALE3 p. 7)

Reflection activities encouraged participants to consider how they felt being able to use familiar or unfamiliar languages, and how this might inform their future work as teachers in schools.

The link between transforming language in education and transformative learning for more equitable and sustainable futures was made more explicit in the second year of the project. The evaluation report suggests this was to some extent successful:

> *What participants particularly appreciated about this session was learning how multilingualism can be understood in different ways. They liked the discussion about multilingualism and transformative learning, working in different groups, and meeting new people. (…) They thought the message was clear: for sustainable futures to take place, we need transformative education, and for transformative education to take place, we need diverse voices, opinions, and perspectives.*
> (K&R Education, 2024, ALE3 p. 12)

There is also evidence that the process of developing these units supported transformative learning. In a focus group with teacher educators at Technical University Dresden, one member who was closely involved in TAP-TS described her experience as follows:

> *So, what has opened up for me is the confrontation with Eurocentric thinking. Which is totally inherent in my educational biography and in my personal biography. It is cracking. And I can look outwards more and more, and that is absolutely my learning process and of course I'm still at the very beginning and totally in it.*

Conclusions

As sustainability crises are increasingly felt, ESF is of growing concern and importance. This is an opportunity for multilingual education, which is too often sidelined as a matter for language teachers. Where ESF risks being reduced to environmental education, or global injustice happening elsewhere, multilingual education can drive critical examination of assumptions and practices in classrooms and schools. Multilingual education also provides a practical opportunity for educators to respond to sustainability crises by developing more inclusive and pedagogically sound practices, alone, with colleagues, and/or as a whole school.

This article shares the learning of a group of European educators, informed by language policy perspectives and practices developed by communities and scholars in the Global South. The vision of TAP-TS was to engage a diverse group of European educators, which we have only partially achieved. We are grateful for the patience and insights of participants and critical reviewers in the process of material and project development.

Endnotes

1. Erasmus+ is a European funding program from the European Commission. Erasmus+ Teacher Academies aim to support the internationalization of teacher education and the testing of different models of mobility, in addition to strengthening teacher education policies and practices and building sustainable partnerships between teacher education providers (European Commission, 2024).
2. Learning teaching packages (LTPs) are high-quality, open access digital and printed materials for teacher education and primary and secondary school education. Free to download from the TAP-TS Moodle platform, the seven LTPs are:
   - A sustainable Europe for teacher education and secondary teachers;
   - Sustainability and digitality for primary teachers;
   - Environmental education and science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) for primary teachers;
   - Climate crisis resilience through serious games for secondary teachers;
   - Dealing with climate disinformation for secondary teachers;
   - Green citizenship in/for Europe and whole school approaches for secondary teachers; and
   - Sustainable entrepreneurship education (SEE) for primary and secondary teachers.
3. The TAP-TS Consortium comprises 11 teacher education organizations across seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, and Sweden), and includes schools, universities, and pedagogical institutes; a government agency; an educational enterprise; and a civil society organization.

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The Role of Multilingualism in Online Peer Teaching and Learning: A Typology of Functions

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Summary
In this article we argue for the benefits of a multilingual approach to peer teaching and learning (PTL). Using evidence from learners' forum contributions to an online language course, we develop a typology of functions for multilingual PTL. We conclude by inviting educators to enable multilingual PTL to emerge across diverse pedagogic contexts.

Keywords
Peer teaching and learning
Multilingualism
Online language learning
Typology of functions
Learning community

Introduction

Peer teaching and learning (PTL) has long been recognized as a valuable element of group-based educational environments. In this article we argue that the benefits of PTL can be enhanced if learners feel able to draw fully on their multilingual repertoires. We evidence our argument with extracts from learners' written contributions to the discussion forums on an open online German language course. By classifying these in a typology of functions, we demonstrate how, under certain conditions, learners will defy monolingual institutional norms to express themselves and connect with one another, drawing spontaneously and creatively on their multilingual resources to support their own learning and that of their peers. We conclude by inviting educational leaders to incorporate opportunities for these productive learner-generated multilingual practices to emerge across diverse instructional settings.

Multilingual Peer Teaching and Learning

PTL is generally understood as learners "helping each other to learn and by so doing, learning themselves" (Topping & Ehly, 1998, p. 1). It can take several forms, from cooperative learning and peer modeling to more formalized peer tutoring. Although some students remain resistant to these practices, research points to the gains associated with this form of peer interaction, including enhanced content recall, critical thinking skills, autonomy, and overall learner satisfaction. Studies also suggest that online learning environments may be more conducive to effective PTL than in-person contexts, partly because video recordings and forum discussions permit the subsequent revisiting of learner contributions (Topping, 2023), thereby enhancing opportunities for learning vicariously from others (Pleines, 2020).

Recent years have also seen increasing recognition and promotion of multilingual learning environments. Commonly associated with deliberate in-person pedagogic interventions, these reveal several constructive learner practices (e.g., García & Kleyn, 2016; Paulsrud et al., 2017).

However, to date these have been described with little reference to any systematic framework. In this article we capture the pedagogic and social functions of learners' multilingual practices in an emergent typology to enable a better understanding of their contribution to PTL and hence to improved educational participation and outcomes.

Online Learning Platforms

Evidence of the benefits of a multilingual approach to PTL stems from our long-term engagement with a suite of language learning courses available on FutureLearn, a free mass-scale online educational platform designed around the principle of "conversation as learning" (Sharples & Ferguson, 2019). The courses consist of activities involving short readings, audio or video clips, and quizzes, each of which is accompanied by a discussion forum in which learners are encouraged to share responses and interact. Such online courses align with current ambitions to expand and increase internationalization in higher education.

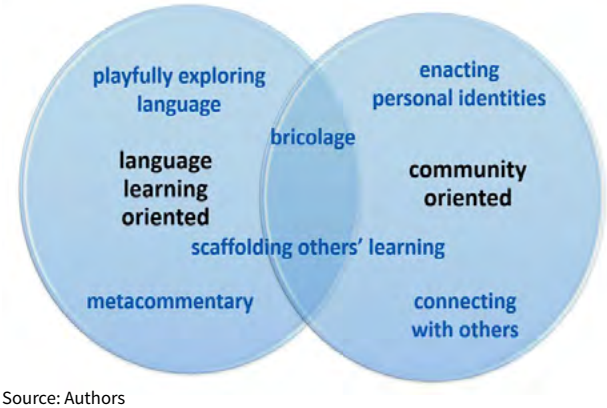
Of the 6,422 adult learners from 150 countries registered on the four-week post-beginners German language course under study, 1,487 posted at least one contribution in Week 1, and 682 were actively studying by the final week.[1] While the activity instructions were in English—the course's "lingua franca"—learners were generally assumed to use the target language, German, in their outputs, an approach common to most language learning environments. Nonetheless, in addition to sharing resources from both German and English, some learners also used or referred to other languages within their repertoire, as illustrated below.

Crucially, these forums are less regulated than formalized online learning environments as, although they are monitored, there is no identifiable instructor. As is typical of online interactive writing contexts, learners can plan, edit, and reflect on the language that they and others use to express themselves in the absence of facial expressions and modulations of tone. These affordances of open online learning platforms can empower learners to experiment with their expanding multilingual repertoires and defy the normative monolingual practices typically expected in language learning contexts by fluidly drawing on their full range of linguistic resources in making contributions and connecting with others. We propose that, through these multilingual practices, learners scaffold their own learning and that of others, both those "co-present" in the forum and the vicarious learners who may later access their comments.

Evidencing Our Claim

Below, we illustrate the functions of multilingualism for PTL that we have identified in our data. Some functions are language learning oriented, including bricolage, metacommentary, and language play. Others are community oriented, namely connecting with others, scaffolding others' learning, and enacting personal identities. Figure 1 highlights how the two orientations overlap.

Figure 1. Emergent typology of functions fulfilled by multilingual PTL in online language learning contexts



Source: Authors

Although we illustrate each function in turn, most excerpts fulfill more than one function simultaneously. All names are pseudonyms.

Bricolage

This first example illustrates the function of bricolage, in which learners draw fully on their available language resources to complete an activity. The practice of starting in the target language before moving to English—the course lingua franca—occurred frequently, often in "communicative runs," with learners adopting the same strategy used in their peers' earlier posts.

> *Ich denke, Stress am Arbeitsplatz ist hier ein großes Problem. Viele Leute arbeiten sehr lange. I couldn't figure out a way to say this next part in German ... It's hard for a lot of people to strike a good work/life balance when they work long hours.*
> (Gail, Activity 4.6)

Gail responds to the language learning activity with her German-language resources ("I think workplace stress is a big problem here. Many people work long hours"), drawing on expressions provided within the course or deployed in other comments. She then uses her English-language resources to express a stance about work/life balance which (she claims) she is not able to communicate in German. Her multilingual response enables her to complete the activity while engaging in meaningful participation and fully expressing her ideas. It also renders her comment an accessible resource for both co-present and vicarious learners, reassuring them that others also struggle to express themselves in a target language.

Metacommentary

Another frequent pattern in the forums is for learners to respond to an activity in German and then use English to comment on what they have written, as in the following example.

> *Guten Tag! Englisch ist meine Muttersprache. Ich spreche Französisch als Zweitsprache. Ich habe auch Deutsch in der Schule gelernt aber jetzt kann ich nur ein kleines Bisschen sprechen! Have not yet got to grips with limited keyboard use in this application, normally I can create the necessary characters. Ich habe viele Moeglichkeiten mein Deutsch zu euben – ich arbeite auf Teilzeitbasis wie Foersterin am Nationalpark hier in Schottland. Das Video hat einen guten Eindruck auf mich gemacht. Correct me please!*
> (Moira, Activity 1.3)

This is what we call metacommentary. The two most frequent motivations behind metacommentary in the learner posts are:

- to elicit peer feedback (as in "Correct me please!")
- to reflect on or justify the quality of the target language used.

We see the second form of metacommentary in "Have not yet got to grips with limited keyboard use in this application, normally I can create the necessary characters." Such justifications shore up the writer's identity as a competent and aware language user, whilst also signaling their limitations in modeling good practice.

Language Play

This next comment responds to an initial activity requesting that learners introduce themselves and explain their motivations for language learning, using whichever linguistic resources they wish. While many engage in practices of bricolage, Gabriella writes primarily in English.

> *Hi!!! I'm Gabriella. I'm from Argentina. As many of you, I learnt Deutsch in the past but now I don't remember much ... I can understand it yet, but I have lots of doubts when I have to speak it ... I hope we all Viel Spass while learning have it!!!*
> (Gabriella, Activity 1.1)

In her last sentence, however, she uses the German phrase "Viel Spass" to playfully emphasize the fun she hopes they will have learning German. The first letter of both words is capitalized, which reflects, somewhat inaccurately, the German convention of capitalizing nouns such as Spass ("fun"). Gabriella also adopts a mock German word order by placing the English verb toward the end of the sentence, thereby highlighting the differences between English and German—an instance of metacommentary—drawing on an assumed shared knowledge of German within the learning community while indexing a playful identity. Learners frequently employ language play to explore the target language in relation to other languages, exploiting their similarities and differences for others to consider.

Scaffolding Others' Learning

Learners also draw on multiple languages to scaffold their peers' learning directly. One way is by spontaneously providing parallel translations. In the following, Sandra responds to Winston's post about his fabric shop, part of an activity about describing one's workplace.

> *Guten Tag Winston, Hallo!*
> *Ich bin an Ihrem Stoffgeschäft interessiert. Hast du eine Website? Translation ...*
> *I am interested in your shop of fabrics. Do you have a website?*
> *Auf Wiedersehen*
> *Sandra*
> (Sandra, Activity 2.5)

Sandra writes a statement and question in German, before providing an explicitly labeled translation in English. She may wish to ensure Winston's understanding of her request for information, but the practice serves simultaneously to scaffold his learning and that of any vicarious learners viewing their exchange. The fact that Sandra begins and ends her turn in German shows her orientation to the language learning community, while her other linguistic choices enable her to engage in an authentic information-seeking move.

Enacting Personal Identities

Most instances of multilingual PTL allow learners to express their identities. Some learners draw on other languages, alongside German and English, to do this. In the next example, a learner introduces himself as being an English-language speaker who also speaks a little Russian and German and is keen to learn more, adding a Russian expression in Cyrillic script, which affirms his Russian-speaking identity.

> *Hallo! Meine Muttersprache ist Englisch. Ich spreche Russisch (по Русски) ein bisschen, und Deutsch ein bisschen. Ich will mehr lernen!*
> (Warren, Activity 1.3)

Connecting with Others

While all instances of multilingual peer learning involve some attempt to reach out to others, in certain instances this orientation is foregrounded. In the following exchange, part of an activity about travel, Dylan responds to an earlier post, explaining that his Austrian wife had booked a hotel room, adding that she has since died. This final sentence prompts a response from Adil.

Dylan: *Nein. Meine Frau hat das gemacht. Sie ist ins Österreich geboren. Leider sie is jetzt tot.*

Adil: *I'd like to express my sincere condolences for your wife. Ich konnte nicht in Deutsch sagen. Ich konnte nicht jetzt in Deutsch gut sprechen. Tut mir leid.*
(Dylan and Adil, Activity 3.13)

Adil's response is formal, using a conventional English phrase to express sympathy, "I'd like to express my sincere condolences for your wife." He then explains that his use of English is motivated by a lack of adequate linguistic knowledge to say this in German, before proceeding to express his condolences in German anyway with "Tut mir leid." His response serves an affective function outside the remit of the language learning activity, a conscious use of resources from across languages and registers to express a sincere and heartfelt message.

Bringing It Together

Below, we show how multiple functions are fulfilled in extended instances of multilingual peer learning. Eva's initial post responds to an activity inviting learners to watch a video and then list the languages they hear. Many learners, like Eva, use the opportunity to express their identities by also mentioning the languages they speak, in this case Portuguese, Eva's dominant language, and Spanish.

Eva: *Ich spreche Portuguiesch, meine Mutterspache, Englisch, ein bisschen Spanisch, und Deutsch also. Die spachen sind: Franzosisch, Deutsch, Arabisch, Englisch, Italienisch, Slowenisch, Latein, Kroatisch, Japanisch.*

Sofie: *Hallo Eva!*
Sind diese Sprachen: Portuguiesch und Spanisch ähnlich? Are Portuguese and Spanish similar to each other, or are these two languages not very similar? All I know is bom dia, and Buenos dias.

Eva: *Nein, sind verschiedene Sprachen.*
No, they are very different. If we are talking about Spanish that is spoken in the North of Spain it has some similarities to Portuguese. Sehr Gut!
Bom dia is Good Morning in Portuguese. e Olá, is Hi.

Sofie: *Danke!*
(Eva and Sofie, Activity 1.3)

In her reply, Sofie not only shows an interest in Eva's languages but also draws on all the relevant linguistic resources that she herself can muster, including "bom dia" and "buenos dias," to make a personal connection. They learn from each other as they explore similarities and differences between languages—not only Spanish and Portuguese but also English and German—through the parallel translations that they provide. Their use of German—including "Sehr gut" and "Danke"—reflects their desire to affiliate with each other and the learning community as fellow German learners.

This interaction represents another fleeting moment of authentically interpersonal communication in which learners are motivated to use their linguistic repertoires flexibly to create social meanings.

Concluding Remarks

Our evidence illustrates how adult language learners engage spontaneously in informal acts of PTL when interacting in relatively unregulated socio-educational online spaces. It also shows how multilingual practices are central to these acts of peer support, enabling learners to express themselves, reach out to others, model language use, request feedback, and exploit differences between languages, as well as scaffolding others' learning more directly.

While we recognize the growing global importance of online learning, we believe that it is not the online pedagogic environment per se that prompts these beneficial practices but rather that they emerge when learners feel able to express themselves authentically and meaningfully in cooperative interpersonal communication, while also fulfilling specified educational activities. Our proposed typology of multilingual learning and community-focused functions thus has wider relevance than online language learning contexts alone and may also be applied to in-person learner interactions and the learning of other subjects. We thus urge educators to consider the potential value of creating informal spaces for multilingual PTL to emerge across a range of instructional contexts, age groups, and subject areas.

Endnote

1. Figures reported in the Praxis Project Final Report authored by Clifford et al. (2019). https://university.open.ac.uk/scholarship-and-innovation/praxis/sites/www.open.ac.uk.scholarship-and-innovation.praxis/files/files/Christine%20Pleines.pdf

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Part 5

Policy and Planning for Multilingual Education

National language in education policy both shapes and relies on classroom implementation. Social, linguistic, and political contexts may either strengthen policy implementation or weaken it to the point of failure.

The papers in this section examine the links between MLE policy, planning, and curricular implementation. Biseko and Barrett examine the gap between the English skills acquired in Tanzanian primary education and those needed for secondary subject learning. Acharya et al. describe the “critical crossroads” of MLE in Nepal, in terms of technical and ideological challenges for classroom implementation. Colicol makes a case for local initiatives to challenge negative perspectives on MLE in the Philippines. Sharma and Pattanayak argue that multilingualism is an integral feature of Indian culture, and they offer practical suggestions for the effective classroom implementation of MLE. Malebranch et al. highlight UNESCO-IBE’s initiative in Haiti to democratize learning, promote social cohesion, and bridge local and global knowledge systems.

Curriculum Coherence and Language Transition: The Case of Tanzania

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Summary
This paper examines language transition challenges in Tanzania's education system, focusing on the gap between English skills acquired in primary education and those needed in secondary subject learning. Our analysis of curriculum documents reveals significant discrepancies and provides recommendations for improving curriculum coherence to enhance effective language transition and inclusive education.

Keywords
Language transition
Multilingual education
Secondary education
Science education
Curriculum

Introduction

SDG4 sets a target of inclusive and equitable quality education for all children up to and including lower secondary. Across much of the Global South, secondary education uses an internationally dominant language as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT). It is important, therefore, to understand the challenges of language transition in the lower secondary phase of the basic education cycle. Tanzania Mainland[1] is one of a handful of countries with an education system that introduces a new LOLT at the beginning of lower secondary education. The language transition may partly contribute to about half of young people being kept out of secondary school.[2] To better understand why language transition is so challenging for learners, we conducted an analysis of Tanzanian curriculum documents. Our analysis compared the language skills targeted in the subject English Language in primary school with the linguistic demand of the science curriculum for the first year of secondary education. This article presents a brief overview of the research, its methodology, and the key findings. The full report is published as Language learning across transition in the language of learning and teaching (Barrett et al., 2024).[3]

Language in the Secondary School Curriculum

Within state education, most multilingual education programs are designed for primary education (see the Editorial for this NSI). It is assumed that once learners have achieved foundational literacy in L1, they are well prepared to acquire literacy in L2. However, literacy acquisition is an ongoing process. Learners master ever more complex literacy skills as they progress through basic and post-compulsory education. A large part of learning an academic subject is learning the literacy practices of its modes of inquiry. In lower secondary education, the curriculum typically fragments into many subjects. In Tanzania, first-year secondary students study nine core subjects in English, with some schools offering up to twelve, compared to seven subjects taught in Kiswahili[4] in primary schools. Science subjects use language in ways that diverge from humanities subjects and literature (Christie, 2012). In secondary school science, students learn

to use technical vocabulary with precision, to communicate objectivity through use of the passive voice, and to use nominalization to indicate generalization (for example, respiration rather than breathing). The literacy practices of secondary school science are also multimodal. Scientific texts combine written text with diagrams, tables, graphs, and symbols (for example chemical formulae) (Polias, 2016).

Integrating explicit language instruction into subject teaching helps learners develop these literacy practices (Christie, 2012). Multilingual learners benefit from acquiring more advanced and complex literacy skills in L1 before developing them in L2 (Cummins, 2017). Hence, even at the secondary level, the use of L1 supports learning across curriculum subjects and makes secondary education more inclusive and equitable.

Language Transition in the Tanzanian Curriculum

Kiswahili is the LOLT throughout all seven years of state-funded primary education in Tanzania, but it is displaced by English at the beginning of lower secondary education (Grade 8). English-medium primary education is, with a very few exceptions, fee-based and only available to a privileged minority living in urban centres (Kamakulu, 2023). Research has consistently shown that lower secondary school students in Tanzania do not have the language skills in English to engage meaningfully with the curriculum (Brock-Utne et al., 2006). This is often attributed to problems with the quality of primary education.[5] Research has paid little attention to curriculum design.

It is useful to distinguish between the intended and practiced curriculum (Fomunyam & Bheki Khoza, 2021). The intended curriculum refers to the curriculum as specified by national education authorities through documents such as the curriculum framework or syllabi. Where a single set of textbooks is authorized for use across the whole education system, these also elaborate the intended curriculum. The practiced curriculum refers to the teaching, learning, and assessment activities of teachers and learners. The research reported here concerned the intended curriculum.

There is always some divergence between intended and practiced curriculum. In Tanzania, language transition creates a dramatic misalignment. In the intended curriculum, transition is abrupt and absolute. English entirely replaces Kiswahili as the LOLT. The only support for language transition is a recently introduced six-week language orientation program delivered by subject teachers at the beginning of Grade 8. In practice, however, lower secondary school classrooms, particularly for non-language subjects, are bilingual. The low levels of English proficiency amongst students obliges teachers of non-language subjects to shift back and forth between English and Kiswahili (see Sane's contribution to this NSI).

Analysis

To understand why there is a major misalignment between the intended and practiced curriculum, we focused our analysis on the intended curriculum. We compared the English language learning outcomes specified in curriculum documents for Grade 7 (the last year of Kiswahili-medium primary education) with the language skills expected in the Grade 8 biology curriculum documents (the first year of English-medium secondary education). Subject curricula are specified within two types of documents—the syllabus and the textbook—both published by the Tanzania Institute of Education. We analyzed both for Grade 7 English language and Grade 8 biology, comparing listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills through three different methods.

1. We matched the skills targeted in Grade 7 English language and those expected in Grade 8 biology to descriptors of proficiency levels within the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR).

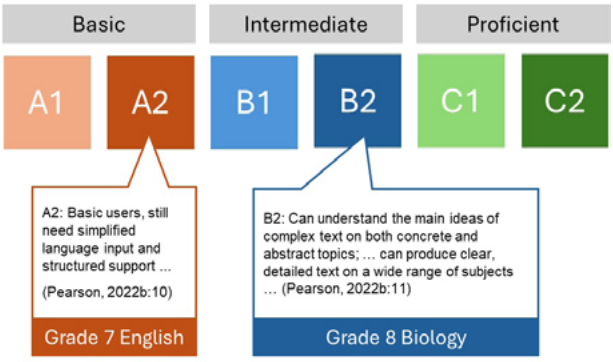
2. We compared the reading difficulty of the Grade 7 English language textbook with that of the Grade 8 biology textbook using lexical analysis software that calculates the vocabulary range and Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level (FKGL). Vocabulary range is an estimate of how many words in English a reader would need to know in order to read a book with ease or with support. FKGL is a measure of reading difficulty that takes into account other linguistic features.

3. We analyzed activities and exercises in the Grade 8 biology textbook to see what support they offered to second language learners and counted other features that support learners to engage with text and interpret meaning (e.g., glossaries, pictures and charts, formatting that breaks text down into digestible chunks, etc.).

Findings

Learning outcomes specified for Grade 7 English language clustered around the CEFR level A2, whilst those needed to engage with Grade 8 biology clustered around B2 (Figure 1). Quantitative indicators of reading difficulty suggested that between two to four years of learning English would be necessary to close the gap (Table 1). The subject of biology was not an outlier. Lexical analysis of sample texts from four other Grade 8 textbooks yielded FKGL scores about the same or higher than biology (between 9 and 12). This suggests that the Grade 8 textbooks would be readable by upper secondary or degree level students.

Figure 1. Grade 7 English language and Grade 8 biology compared using CEFR levels



Source: Authors, adapted from Barrett et al. (2024, p. 21)

Table 1. Comparison of reading difficulty of Grade 7 English language and Grade 8 biology textbooks

Indicator	Grade 7 English	Grade 8 biology
Flesch-Kincaid Grade level of textbook	5-6	9-10
Vocabulary range required to read with support	3000 words	7000 words
Vocabulary range require to read fluently	5000 words	13000 words
Readability CEFR level	A2 – B1	C1-C2

Source: Barrett et al. (2024, p. 22)

Grammatical features should be introduced and rehearsed through language subjects before learners are expected to use them in non-language subjects (Cummins, 2017). Therefore, we looked at grammar across the Grade 7 English language and Kiswahili curriculum documents. The English language curriculum focuses on basic communicative, but not academic, language skills. It does not rehearse the passive voice and does not introduce nominalization. The Kiswahili curriculum introduces a range of oral and written literary genres, involving extensive rehearsal of both the passive voice and nominalization. Kiswahili scientific vocabulary is formally introduced through the subject of science.

The biology textbook did have features that support readers to engage with and interpret the text: pictures supported interpretation of the text, formatting broke down long pieces of text into shorter chunks, and a glossary provided short definitions of key scientific vocabulary. Features that would support multilingual learners with basic proficiency in English, such as those described by Clegg in this special issue, were absent. The glossary was monolingual. With few exceptions, tasks did not provide structured support for writing and talking (e.g., sentence starters, fill in the blank, label diagrams).

Discussion

The intended curriculum does not set out a coherent language learning journey across the transition between primary and secondary education and across English and non-language subjects. The intended curriculum for primary education targets the language skills learners would need for secondary education if it were in Kiswahili. The curriculum for secondary education assumes students have these skills in English. It is unsurprising, therefore, that in practice, teachers and students draw on L1 to support science learning. Students have not yet mastered the grammatical features of English needed to express scientific principles and conduct scientific inquiry at the lower secondary level because these are well beyond the scope of the English language primary school curriculum.

The Grade 8 subject textbooks are harder to read than is necessary. Previous research found that first-year undergraduate students in one Tanzanian university only knew around 4,000 words in English (Biseko, 2023), indicating that even they would find the Grade 8 textbooks hard to read. One reason for the wide vocabulary range in biology is the large numbers of examples of scientific phenomena given in the textbook. For example, the chapter on disease lists 16 different diseases with risk factors, symptoms, and prevention. This overload may arise from poor specification of expected learning objectives in the syllabus, which do not place an upper limit on the number of examples. Without this guidance, textbook authors are inclined to include too much content in order to demonstrate comprehensive coverage of the curriculum.

The grammatical features of the Grade 8 biology textbook conform to the scientific literacy practices associated with secondary school. However, students need a gradual introduction to more complex texts (Polias, 2016). There is a case for avoiding more complex grammar altogether in secondary school textbooks designed for second language learners. Siyavula has published a set of science textbooks for South Africa that use the active voice only up to and including Grade 12. Previous research on textbook design in Tanzania (Mtana & O-saki, 2017; William & Ndabakurane, 2017) also demonstrated that it is possible to reduce the vocabulary range and use simpler language. The same research has also generated materials that provide explicit language support for students who are not proficient in English (see Clegg in this Special Issue).

Recommendations

Currently, Tanzania is beginning to implement an ambitious curriculum reform. However, with no change to the language-in-education policy, it will hardly bring the target of equitable and inclusive universal secondary education closer. We recommend the following for Tanzania and other education systems with a transition in LOLT:

1. Curriculum documents should set out a gradual language learning journey, coherently planned across educational phases and across language and non-language subjects. Grammatical features should be introduced and rehearsed within language subjects before learners are expected to use them in non-language subjects. Explicit instruction in disciplinary literacy practices should be integrated into non-language subjects.

2. Avoiding curriculum overload is especially important for multilingual learners. Syllabi and other curriculum documents should carefully specify learning outcomes to achieve a balance between the development of fundamental concepts and specific illustrative examples.

3. Teaching and learning materials should be designed for multilingual learners. They should use simplified grammar and provide explicit support for acquiring subject-specific literacy practices. Where possible, they should include bilingual features to help learners connect to and build on prior learning in L1.

Subtractive transition to English or another internationally dominant language is often justified as an effective way to develop proficiency in that language. However, it incurs a substantial cost to subject learning. Learners are at risk of never developing academic literacy practices in either L1 or L2. Completely excluding the use of L1 in lower secondary education is not compatible with the SDG4 target of quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education for all.

Endnotes

1. Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous region of Tanzania, follows a different language policy.
2. According to the World Bank's databank (https://databank.worldbank.org/), around 50% of children and young people of lower secondary age in Tanzania Mainland are out of school.
3. The research was part of the project "Evaluating Language Supportive Approaches to Transition at Scale," which was funded by the British Council through its Widening Participation grant scheme.
4. Also known as the Swahili language.
5. Uwezo's (2019) Are our children learning? report found that 47% of children in Grade 7 could not read a simple read or comprehend simple English texts. https://uwezotanzania.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Uwezo-Tanzania-Learning-Assessment-Report-2019.pdf

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Multilingual Education in Nepal: Misalignments, Challenges, and Local Realities

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Summary
This paper discusses Nepal's multilingual education (MLE) policy and practices in relation to the global education goals in the SDGs. It focuses on the challenges that MLE policy is facing to ensure inclusive and equitable education. Based on the analysis of qualitative interview data, we argue that curriculum, assessment, and educational plans need to be linguistically and culturally sensitive to the local context for a more inclusive and equitable quality education.

Keywords
Multilingual education (MLE)
Linguistic diversity
Educational policies
Curriculum development
Assessment

Introduction

In 2015, Nepal adopted three tiers of government: federal, provincial, and local. The 2015 Constitution (Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs, 2015) gives local governments jurisdiction over managing school education, including the development and implementation of multilingual education (MLE) plans and resources. Because of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity, multilingual education (MLE) not only holds profound cultural importance but also stands as a critical instrument for advancing inclusivity and equity in Nepal's education (Rai et al., 2011). However, despite being one of the major agendas in national policies since the 1990s, MLE has not yet been an integral component of education. In this paper, we discuss MLE as a necessary approach to achieving inclusive and equitable quality education as promised in SDG4 (Barrett et al., 2024) and critically examine how the national policies and plans align with these promises. We also examine the gaps between the SDG4 goals and the existing educational practices in the country. We contend that although SDG4 advocates for inclusive and equitable education, the prevalent monolingual educational models of the country pose a strong challenge to meeting this goal.

We employed an exploratory qualitative approach to analyze both empirical data and policy documents of MLE. We conducted 15 interviews with headteachers, officials from the Ministry of Education and local governments, educators, and community leaders. Secondary data sources included existing reports and publications focusing on educational outcomes and policy effectiveness, including MLE. The interviews were focused on the successes and challenges of implementing MLE in the existing educational system and governance.

History and Context of MLE in Nepal

MLE emerged as a major policy agenda in 1990. The

government formed the National Language Policy Recommendation Commission in 1993 to develop a national policy to promote the country's linguistic diversity in education and other public domains, such as the media. The Commission proposed a mother-tongue education policy to create space for Indigenous and minoritized languages in education. Building on this recommendation, the government included the teaching of mother tongues as an optional subject at the primary level. In 2007, the Ministry of Education introduced a "mother-tongue-based multilingual education" (MTB-MLE) program to improve educational accessibility and achievement of students whose mother tongue is not Nepali. According to this program, students should be taught in their mother tongues up to Grade 3.

The 2015 Constitution offers a solid foundation for the promotion of MLE by recognizing all mother tongues as national languages and ensures all children's right to obtain education in their mother tongue. The Constitution also upholds the right of every community to preserve their mother tongues and to establish and manage schools for that purpose. The government has also shown its commitment to reforming its education policies and plans to achieve SDG4. The Compulsory and Free Education Act (2018), the School Sector Development Plan (2016–2023), and the School Education Sector Plan (2022–2032) (MOEST, 2022), all designed to achieve SDG4, include MLE as one of their priorities. However, the historical dominance of Nepali-English bilingualism has posed serious challenges to realizing MLE in practice. There exists a profound disparity regarding learning achievement and access to education among students, particularly those from Indigenous and ethnic minority communities as they are deprived of enjoying educational opportunities in their mother languages (UNESCO, 2011).

Early Grade Reading Assessments (USAID, 2020), national assessments (Education Review Office, 2022), and citizen surveys (ASER Nepal, 2022) show that a majority of children at the foundational level are not meeting expected literacy and educational competencies due to a lack of effective MLE. The prevailing use of Nepali and English as the primary languages of instruction has been a major contributor to this problem in foundational learning. Similarly, Early Grade Reading Assessments (USAID, 2020) have shown that learners whose mother tongues are different from Nepali score approximately one full grade behind those of the learners with Nepali as first language.

Misalignment of Education Practices with SDGs in Nepal

In the changed government structure since 2015, multiple policy dilemmas have arisen concerning the implementation of MLE. The local government (municipalities) possesses the authority, as per the new constitution, to develop and implement policies on local languages in basic education (Grades 1–8). However, despite these legal powers, only a few municipalities have developed and implemented policies and plans, including curricula, for MLE. Most municipalities have opted to introduce both Nepali and English as the languages of instruction, posing barriers for effective learning for students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Phyak & Ojha, 2019; Rai, 2011). Gautam and Poudel (2022) observe that there is a gap between what the government promises and what actually happens in schools. Rather than putting efforts into implementing MLE, we found from the interviews that officials and elected leaders in local municipalities are encouraging schools to implement English as the medium of instruction from the early grades. One of the municipality chiefs shared that his priority is to offer English-medium education in all community schools.

The misalignment between current education practices and SDG4 has reinforced the power of English as a global medium of instruction. Despite the immense benefits of mother-tongue education for enhanced learning outcomes, school retention, and cultural relevance (Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning, World Bank, 2021), local municipalities are not paying serious attention to ensuring the rights of children to obtain education in their mother tongues. Despite clear policy provisions for MLE, the municipalities from Kathmandu Valley, for example, prefer English-medium education in the name of quality education. Talking to us, the officials from the municipalities argued that the promotion of English-medium instruction is necessary for quality education. This justification not only violates the right to mother-tongue education but also poses learning challenges for multilingual students.

There are efforts to teach mother tongues as subjects. For example, Kathmandu Metropolitan City has introduced Nepal Bhasa (Newar Indigenous language) as a local subject at the primary level. However, a dire shortage of qualified teachers in the Newari language and inadequate resources have become barriers to implementing the policy in all schools. Despite the development of curricula in thirty-one mother tongues by the Curriculum Development Center (CDC), their implementation falls short due to a lack of understanding about the importance of teaching mother tongues in school. The teaching of mother tongue as a subject has also creating some tension among people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. For example, the policy of Kathmandu Metropolitan City to introduce the Newari language in school is questioned by parents who speak different mother tongues, such as Tamang. As reported by school leaders consulted in the study, less than 5% of students in public schools in Kathmandu speak Newari as their mother tongue (Interviews, August 2024). While such efforts contribute to the

revitalization of Indigenous languages, they are inadequate for creating a space for multiple languages in schools.

Attraction toward English-Medium Schooling

The growing trend to adopt English-medium instruction in public schools contributes immensely to the misalignment between policy and practice. The perceived market value of English drives parents to choose English-medium schools. Hoping that their children's opportunities in a globalized and competitive world can be facilitated by English, parents—particularly middle-class ones—are opting to send their children to English-medium private schools. Public schools are borrowing the same policy to attract middle-class parents. The global trend of English-medium education (Dearden, 2014) has been perceived as a panacea for all kinds of education problems and quality issues in public schools (EMI a Panacea of Education Reform, Acharya, 2024). For example, Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu and a few other local governments have decided to implement English-medium policy in schools to compete with private schools (M. Subedi, personal communication, August 10, 2024). This tendency has created unfavorable situations for L1-based MLE in the local context.

Curriculum and Assessment

Curriculum and assessment policies are two other factors affecting the implementation of MLE. The CDC has designed mother-tongue curricula, but they promote one standard script and do not allow the incorporation of oracy, including dialects. The textbook in mother tongues adopts a one-size-fits-all model by focusing on a standard and written variety that does not make sense to mother-tongue speakers. For example, one official from the CDC told us that the textbook for the Tamang Indigenous language was not understood by Tamang students and teachers in some districts. The challenge also lies in the unavailability of teachers and experts to develop resources and implement them effectively in teaching. Poudel and Costley (2023) highlight the lack of technical capacity in schools and all tiers of the government as well as pre-service teacher education for MLE. In our interactions with the CDC officials, we were told that a lack of experts and teachers has been an issue in developing resources for MLE (P. Ghimire, personal communication, September 4, 2024). On the other hand, private schools are not very interested in MLE; rather, they are historically promoting English-medium policy, placing insurmountable pressure on public schools to adopt the same policy.

The existing assessment system is another barrier for implementing MLE. Traditional assessment tools, such as the paper-and-pencil test, remain limited to evaluating basic language skills (e.g., word matching, meaning, and sentence creation) and are not relevant for assessing the multifaceted nature of multilingual proficiencies. Rather than allowing children to use multiple languages to assess their educational achievement, the current practice forces children to use Nepali or English. Our discussions with the officials in local government revealed that policymakers are not aware of how multilingual assessment is designed and implemented. Because the students whose mother tongue is not Nepali have to take exams in Nepali, they cannot fully express their understanding in Nepali-only exams. When students learn effectively through their mother tongues, they do better in exams as well. ERO's studies have shown that students whose mother tongue is not Nepali perform lower in subjects such as Nepali, science, and social studies. This raises the question of whether multilingual pedagogies without reforming the assessment system are adequate to ensure MLE implementation.

Challenges on the Ground

The implementation of MLE faces numerous logistical and financial barriers. Our discussion with educators revealed that the most critical barriers include a lack of materials, ineffective pedagogical approaches, and non-comprehensive assessment modalities. One respondent from Rong Rural Municipality of Ilam district asserted, "we developed [a] Lepcha textbook and curriculum, but the teaching is limited to one school due to the shortage of qualified teachers as well as little interest [from] parents." Lalitpur Municipality has also implemented the Nepal Bhasa in all schools as a local subject. However, private schools where students do not speak Nepal Bhasa are reluctant to implement it (Interview, August 14, 2024). While the scarcity of materials and skilled teachers are technical issues that can be addressed, the reluctance of private schools is an ideological and systemic issue. Private schools in Nepal are historically English-medium schools, so they promote the teaching of and through English. As privately funded and managed institutions, they are not forced to implement government polices such as MLE.

Teacher preparation is another issue in MLE. The government focuses on developing curriculum and textbooks, but not on building an MLE teacher education program. The existing teacher education in the form of in-service teacher training focuses only on teaching of mother tongues as subjects but not using them as a medium of instruction. This practice is prevalent due to a lack of understanding about what counts as multilingual education. The officials in the municipalities understand MLE only as the teaching of mother tongues as language subjects but not as a medium of instruction in teaching content subjects such as social studies, science, and mathematics. MLE primarily is about medium of instruction and builds on the principle that mother-tongue knowledge helps learners strengthen their cognitive, social, and educational abilities. In Nepal, we see partial and inconsistent understanding about MLE. Most dominantly, it has been practiced as a textbook writing project and adopted as a local

subject. This practice does not ensure the right to obtain education in one's mother tongue.

Conclusion

This discussion highlights that MLE in Nepal is at a critical crossroads and faces both technical and ideological challenges to its implementation in schools. Although the country has shown its commitment to achieving SDG4 through a series of education reform plans and programs, the implementation of MLE has not received much attention from all tiers of the government. Schools and local government officials are engaged in the violation of language rights by promoting English as the medium of instruction. Although the case for mother-tongue education is strongly supported by research for enhanced learning outcomes of multilingual students, MLE has not yet become an integral component of education. What is more alarming is that municipalities are adopting a monolingual English-medium policy, which is driven by a global neoliberal ideology of English as the language of the labor market. Addressing these issues necessitates a multi-faceted approach that involves governments, communities, schools, and teachers to develop strong teacher education programs, support mechanisms, and resources for MLE.

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Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Policy and Its Implementation in the Philippines: Challenges, Advocacies, and Prospects

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Summary
Policymakers in the Philippines are set on discontinuing MTB-MLE, which they associate with poor performance in educational assessments. However, academics, local activists, and NGOs continue to advocate for MLE that respects the knowledge systems, cultures, and identities of minoritized peoples. They are also working to build and share theory and practice for MTB-MLE.

Keywords
MTB-MLE
Multilingual education
Language
Language ideology
Neoliberal education

Recent Developments on Multilingual Education in the Philippines

The use of the mother tongue as medium of instruction in the Philippines was discontinued on October 10, 2024, by an Act of Congress.[1] The Act provided for a reversion to Filipino and English as languages of instruction, with regional languages serving as auxiliary media of instruction. Previously, on July 23, 2024, the Philippine Senate approved a Bill that pushed toward discontinuing the use of the mother tongue as medium of instruction in kindergarten to Grade 3 in most linguistically diverse schools of the Philippines.[2] An earlier major basic education reform implemented in 2023, the MATATAG Curriculum, had already sought the removal of the mother tongue as a subject from K-12 basic education. The use of the mother tongue in kindergarten through to Grade 3 in basic education was part of the mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) program in the Philippines for the K-12 Curriculum,[3] introduced in 2009.

The latest actions of the government and education leaders in the Philippines toward MTB-MLE show a lack of support and commitment to multilingual education, despite the multitude of studies supporting and attesting to the program's significance in terms of pedagogy, inclusion, and equity in education. The main reasons given for suspending MTB-MLE relate to inadequate teacher training and materials and lack of support in the community (Colicol, 2024). This article demonstrates that the government leaders' actions to suspend rather than support MTB-MLE are based on a narrow understanding of multilingual education, mainly driven by market-oriented education reforms, privileging a global economic agenda over significant local sociocultural factors and narrowing down education quality into mere quantifiable outcomes based on international and national assessments (Blasco & Vargas, 2011; Tupas, 2015).

Alternatives That Challenge English Dominance in Education

An alternative view is to consider qualitative indicators based on local scenarios or voices and the aspirations of people at the grassroots level to promote social justice and avoid imposing the beliefs and values of top-level government leaders (Kosonen & Benson, 2021). This article shows promising directions for multilingual education in the country based on studies conducted in the Philippine setting. It supports the view that multilingualism should be perceived as a resource and sets out multilingual education as the means for educational development.

Education policymakers should learn from the past before deciding to revert to Filipino and English as the primary languages of instruction in the linguistically diverse schools of the Philippines. Arzadon (2021) noted the crucial role that language plays as medium of instruction in school institutions in the perpetuation of social inequalities. For instance, the dominance of English as a medium of instruction in the Philippines, beginning in the 20th century following American rule, created unintended consequences for Filipinos. It alienated most of them from their cultural heritage and exposed a "colonial mentality," which signifies Western dominance with relation to culture and language development (Tenorio, 2024). This colonial mentality reflects a Filipino belief about language in education, which sees English as the most appropriate language of school learning. This belief was held despite the use of Filipino and regional languages for classroom instruction alongside English in the years following the American occupation of the country.

English dominance is evident in international and national assessments. For example, in the 2018 and 2022 PISA assessments, the Filipino participants took the tests in English, demonstrating a very strong English influence on Filipino education. Moreover, one of the challenges in MTB-MLE implementation in linguistically diverse contexts is the perception of Filipino learners that their mother tongue is less formal than English and, hence, not suitable for academic teaching and learning (Colicol, 2024). Upbringing at home influences this mindset of children. Many parents prefer English and Filipino as languages of instruction because proficiency in these languages gives their children advantages in the job market. These views of the status of languages and their appropriateness as media of instruction are influenced by learners' home experiences.

Neoliberal Influences on Filipino Language Ideology

In crafting policies for education, policymakers tend to equate education quality with producing graduates equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to compete globally, which is a neoliberal or market-oriented ideology (Blasco & Vargas, 2011; Fong & Kim, 2011; Gustafsson, 2008). This tends to go hand-in-hand with universalization in education, aligning education policymaking to the economic priorities of the world economies with the help of international organizations such as the OECD, the World Bank, and UNESCO. Education reforms are assumed to promote global competition. Consequently, higher education systems are ranked according to the quality and quantity of their outputs. Students then choose, from ranked universities, the institution they judge will provide them with the best training to enable them to become job-ready and marketable in the future.

Global trends and the country's social conditions put pressure on politicians, forcing them to devise practical solutions for the country's education system and the economy, such as the shift to the K-12 education system. As regards MTB-MLE, reversion to the previous system (e.g., the use of English and Filipino) is perceived as the most feasible means to increase the gains of educational investments in the country, even if this is not contextually and socially acceptable to many Filipinos, such as the Indigenous people and Muslims in the southern Philippines, whose cultures and languages are crucial to their identities[4] (Muslim, 2006). In a market-oriented education system, many linguistic and cultural minorities as well as many disadvantaged nations are left out and inequality is increased between developed and developing nations (Blasco & Vargas, 2011; Mensah, 2019).

This situation shapes the response of some politicians to multilingual education in the Philippines. It is sad to note that when most politicians are pressed to act and fulfill their mandate, they choose the practical, narrow, and easier means. That is, they are prepared to compromise the Filipino cultural heritage and language identities by privileging external influences such as the use of English as a primary language for classroom instruction in school institutions.

Evidence of Multilingual Education Effectiveness in the Philippines

In the course of the implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines, the Assessment, Curriculum and Technology Research Centre (ACTRC),[5] an Australian government-supported program, conducted a series of studies to support MTB-MLE implementation across four different language contexts in the Philippines: large language (schools use a mother tongue with more than two million speakers [excluding Tagalog]), Tagalog (schools use a Tagalog dialect), small language (schools use a mother tongue with fewer than two million speakers), and linguistically diverse (schools and communities use several mother tongues). The ACTRC noted in a mixed-methods study on a linguistically diverse context that students under matched conditions by language (i.e., assessments in Meranao and Tagalog) performed better in literacy than their mismatched counterparts. A matched condition occurs when a student's mother tongue is also the

language used as medium of instruction in the classroom as well as the language used in the assessments. In contrast, a mismatch occurs when a medium of instruction in the classroom is not the same as the student's mother tongue.

The research corroborated findings from previous studies. For example, the Lingua Franca (LF) program, implemented from 1999–2001, showed that the more familiar languages of Tagalog, Cebuano, and Ilocano, as compared to Filipino and English of the bilingual education policy, produced higher levels of active classroom engagement and higher achievement scores when used as languages of instruction in the classroom (Dekker, 2021).

Low Performance in Educational Assessments

The Philippines participates in international learning assessments alongside much wealthier OECD countries, such as TIMSS and PISA, and is consistently ranked at or near the bottom.[6] While many multilingual education advocates (e.g., Talaytayan MLE Inc., Linguistic Society of the Philippines, Faculty of Languages and Literature of the Philippine Normal University) consistently point to language issues in schools as one of the major concerns for Filipinos' poor educational performance, there has been no deliberate action among the government and education leaders to use at least Filipino as the language of assessment for Filipinos when participating in these assessments. With the implementation of MTB-MLE, teachers are concerned about the performance of learners taking national assessments conducted in English when the policy prescribes use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in schools (Colicol, 2024). This policy environment in the Philippine education system, characterized by inconsistency and contradictions in the policy, constrains many stakeholders, especially teachers, as primary policy implementers of MTB-MLE at the school level. The nuances or gaps in the actual MTB-MLE implementation hinder the achievement of expected educational outcomes.

Emancipation Through Advocacy, Community Voices, and Multilingual Education

Several studies show the active involvement of a variety of actors in MTB-MLE policy development. Dekker (2021) underscored the roles of academics and nongovernment organizations in MTB-MLE institutionalization in the Philippines. Arzadon (2021) documented how teachers in the Northern Philippines created large books to support MTB-MLE implementation. Bonior (2020) and Amparo (2022) highlighted the roles of MTB-MLE teachers as appropriators and co-constructors of language policies, while Colicol (2024) noted teachers' multilingual agency by providing language resources to non-dominant language speaker learners.

When government and education leaders listen to people at the grassroots level, such as teachers, learners, multilingual advocates, and cultural minorities, and justly represent them, they are likely to develop more effective education services. Community activists at the grassroots level, as well as academics and NGOs advocating for MLE, offer an informed perspective on the Filipino language ecology. Hence, they play a crucial role in challenging the hegemonies of top-level government as well as Western dominance in education that tend to sideline local cultures, knowledge, and languages. Education should lead to freedom and emancipation and not impose external epistemologies and methodologies that will result in the erosion of our identity as human beings with a sense of pride in our cultural heritage.

There is much opposition to the suspension of MTB-MLE. Advocacy groups and individuals express grave dismay toward the actions of government leaders. Position papers have been circulated online as a show of support for multilingual education. Many of these demand that the mother tongue should be retained as a medium of instruction at least up until Grade 3, as provided for in the MATATAG Curriculum. Leading organizations that oppose the Senate Bill to cease MTB-MLE in the early years include the Faculty of Languages and Literature, Philippine Normal University, the UP College of Education Student Council, the Linguistic Society of the Philippines, and Talaytayan MLE Inc.

Various local initiatives continue to promote multilingual education in the Philippines. In 2023, the Talaytayan MLE Inc., SIL International, the Philippine Normal University, ABC+, RTI, and USAID collaborated in hosting the 2023 Multilingual Education Leaders Program in Manila. Participants were trained to operationalize first language (L1)-based education, particularly at the classroom level. Theories of language learning and several strategies and techniques to develop academic language in the mother tongue, effective literacy instruction, and reading comprehension in L1 were introduced. Translanguaging as a potential strategy for an effective implementation of multilingual education was also explored.

In line with the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, conferences celebrating and promoting the Philippine languages are regularly held. For example, Talaytayan MLE Inc. regularly partners with universities in the country to hold academic conferences where scholars and practitioners from all parts of the country and abroad can share best practice in promoting minoritized languages, including through education. Universities also hold local seminars and conferences on multilingual education to raise the awareness of communities. Through such initiatives, the hope and means of advancing multilingual education in the Philippines is sustained. With continued scholarship and community discourse originating at the grassroots levels, multilingual education policy and practice will continue to evolve and prosper.

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Multilingualism: Teaching Learning and Pedagogic Innovation in the Indian Context

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Summary
This article provides practical guidance for implementing multilingual education in the classroom, drawing from experiences in India with linguistic mapping, bilingual and multilingual textbooks, teaching resources, and e-content in regional languages. We argue that multilingualism is an integral part of our culture and a significant asset for education rather than an impediment.

Keywords
India
NEP 2020
NCFSE 2023
Multilingualism
MLE
Linguistic mapping

The Context of Linguistic Diversity

This article explores the influence of India's extensive linguistic diversity on school education, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which multilingualism fosters cultural comprehension, affects classroom learning, and presents both opportunities and challenges in the development of inclusive educational practices.

Children in most regions of the world are exposed to two or more languages during their upbringing and are increasingly being exposed to languages other than their mother tongue/ home language in their educational, social, and professional environments, necessitating their acquisition of bilingual or multilingual competency. In many regions worldwide, education systems shaped by colonial legacies often overlook the widespread reality of multilingualism. Given the relative universality of linguistic diversity, monolingualism must be seen as a disadvantage in the modern world (Crystal, 2006, p. 409).

India, a nation of over 1.4 billion people, is incredibly diverse in many ways. One notable example of this diversity is the variety of languages. The Language Atlas of India (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2022) identifies 121 languages spoken by more than 10,000 people at the time of the 2011 census. Only 22 of these are listed in India's Constitution (in the 8th Schedule). This vast linguistic diversity presents significant challenges for educational institutions as they must cater to the diverse language needs of students.

As pointed out by Mohanty, in multilingual societies, children encounter "concentric layers of societal multilingualism" (Mohanty, 2006, p. 263) quite early in development. As children widen their domains of social interaction, they move into zones of other languages as part of their multilingual exposure and learn to communicate using the language(s) they encounter in their sociocultural contexts. Across diverse Indian

classrooms, many children arrive as linguistic outsiders, encountering the language of instruction for the first time. This sudden transition can hinder their learning (ibid.).

The 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2016) indicates that a substantial segment of the global population, up to 40%, lacks access to education in a language they can comprehend or articulate. The language barrier significantly impedes the education of many children, especially those who are disadvantaged by poverty or rurality. The report emphasizes that a minimum of six years of education in a child's mother tongue is essential for mitigating learning disparities in multiethnic settings.

Multilingualism in India's National Education Policy 2020 and New Curriculum

The Government of India's National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) promotes multilingual learning to honor India's linguistic heritage and its cognitive benefits. As Mohanty (2019) notes, navigating the complexities of multilingual societies and linguistic diversity challenges young learners, requiring greater cognitive effort but leading to significant cognitive benefits. The Kothari Commission Report (1964–1966) advocated for the three-language formula, which became a part of education policy in 1968. As per the three-language formula, the first language should be the mother tongue or regional language. Hindi-speaking states use another modern Indian language or English for the second language, while non-Hindi-speaking states use Hindi or English. English or another modern Indian language not already chosen as the second language would be the third language in both Hindi-speaking and non-Hindi-speaking states.

The NEP 2020 retained the three-language formula outlined in the 1968 education policy, but with greater flexibility for States and Union Territories. It includes a provision ensuring that no language will be imposed on any state, allowing for greater adaptability in implementing the formula. Teachers are encouraged to use multilingual teaching-learning resources for students whose home language is not the medium of instruction in school.

The National Curriculum framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 (National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 2024) prescribes the process of learning three languages, denoted as R1, R2, and R3, at various stages of schooling. These are as follows:

R1: This is the language in which literacy is first learnt in school. R1 should preferably be the language most familiar to the students, which would be the mother tongue. If that is not possible because of practical considerations, then it should be the state language, which would be a familiar language. Also, since it is in R1 that literacy is first attained, it must be used as the medium of instruction (MOI) for other subjects, at least until literacy in another language is attained.

R2: This could be any other language, including English.

R3: This may be any Indian language that is not R1 or R2.

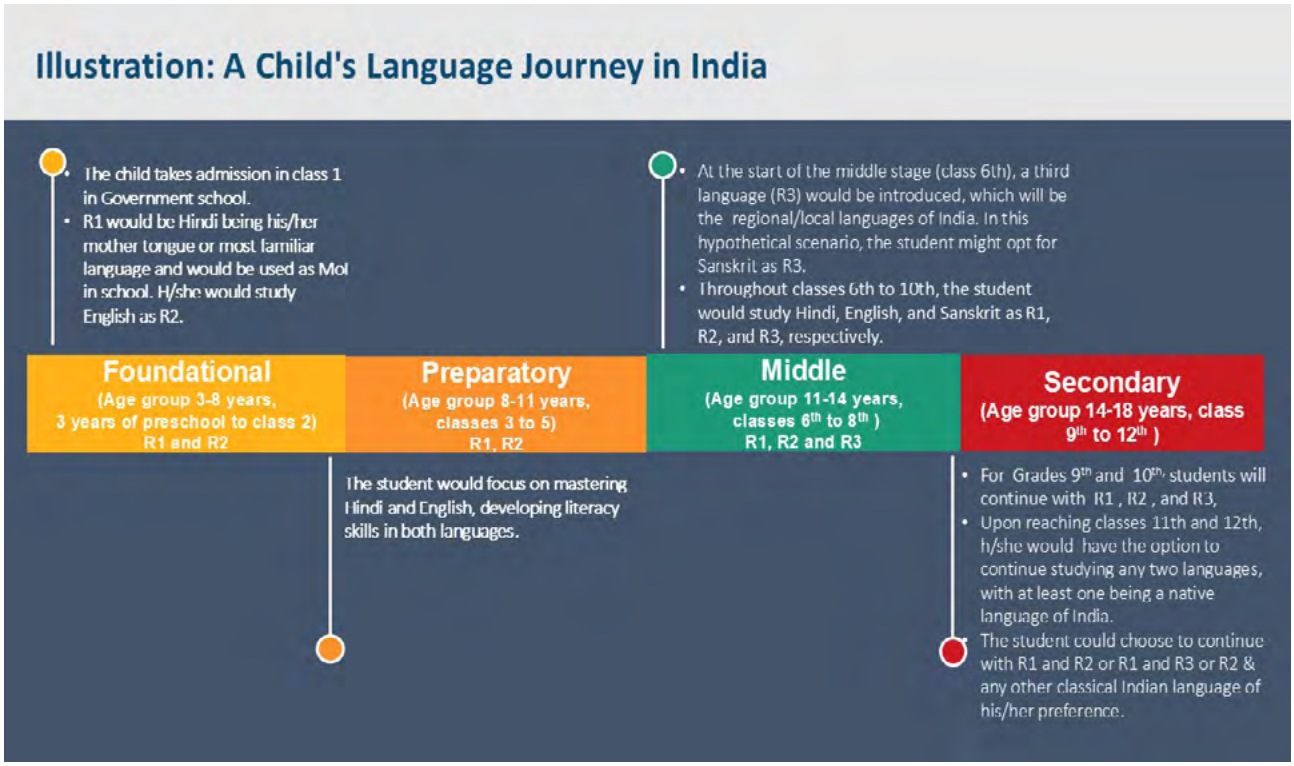
R1, R2, and R3 are determined by the state or other relevant bodies. The illustration in Figure 1 explains the process.

Table 1. Number of primary schools, using each language as medium of instruction

S.No.	Language as Medium of Instruction	'Number of primary schools, where each language used as Medium of Instruction
1	Hindi	557.220
2	English	190.768
3	Bengali	83.628
4	Marathi	81.105
5	Telugu	57.156
6	Odia	49.733
7	Kannada	47.457
8	Gujarati	39.237
9	Assamese	35.833
10	Tamil	32.476
11	Urdu	26.806
12	Punjabi	17.606
13	Malayalam	9.513
14	Khasi	3.689
15	Garo	3.419
16	Bodo	2.557
17	Mizo	898
18	Nepali	679
19	Sanskrit	457
20	Manipuri	237
21	Santhali	87
22	Konkani	79
23	Hmar	78
24	Others Indian Medium	75
25	Karbi	26
26	Bodhi(Ladakhi)	12
27	Sindhi	11
28	French	5
29	Purgi	3
30	Balti	2
31	Bhutia	1
32	Bishnupriya Manipuri	1

Source: Karwal et al. (2023)

Figure 1. A child's language journey as per NCFSE 2023



Source: Authors based on NCERT (2024)

Multilingualism in Reality

According to the government database Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2021–22, as referenced by Karwal et al. (2023), more than 30 languages, including English, are used as the primary language or medium of instruction in primary schools up to Grade 5 across all 36 Indian States and Union Territories. Table 1 shows enrollment trends by language nationwide.

Best Practices and Insights from Various States in Multilingual Education Across India

Mother-tongue-based Multilingual Education Program (MTB-MLE)

In 2005, Odisha launched an experimental mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) program with 70,000 pupils in 1,500 schools in 21 tribal[1] languages, as detailed in the Ministry of Education's guideline document, National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (Ministry of Education, 2021). The initiative used mother-tongue instruction in early grades to increase the literacy level of students belonging to Indigenous groups. MTB-MLE helped economically disadvantaged Indigenous children progress from their mother tongue (L1) to state language (L2) and then national or international language (L3) in elementary school. In this program, children begin with L1 (mother tongue) in Grades 1–3, transition to L2 (state language) in Grades 4–5, and introduce L3 (national language or English) from Grade 6 onwards, ensuring gradual language proficiency and smooth academic progression. MTB-MLE develops cognitive and reasoning skills to help children use their local, state, and national languages equally. A program evaluation (NCERT, 2011) found children in MTB-MLE schools performed better in language and mathematics compared to schools where only L2 was used for learning and teaching. It also found that the program improved children's attendance, participation, and self-confidence; teacher satisfaction; parental feedback; and community involvement. A similar MLE program in Andhra Pradesh was started in 2004 in eight tribal languages in 240 schools (Mohanty et al., 2009). In 1995, Karnataka designed an innovative teaching method called Nali Kali to support children to learn to read, write, and express themselves creatively in a fun and engaging setting. In 2016, Jharkhand implemented a multilingual classroom approach using different primary languages, including local tribal languages, as part of the MTB-MLE approach.

Linguistic Mapping

To address complex issues in multilingual classrooms, one of the crucial steps is to conduct language mapping and identify the different language situations in the classrooms. Language mapping activities are valuable in identifying the languages children use at home, including spoken and sign languages. This data helps schools decide which languages should be used for instruction. Furthermore, language mapping identifies gaps in existing teaching materials, guiding the creation of resources for underrepresented languages, thereby supporting effective teaching and learning strategies tailored to the linguistic needs of the community.

Chhattisgarh is one of the states where a systematic linguistic survey/mapping of schools was conducted in 2022 by the state government, with the help of the Language and Learning Foundation (LLF, 2022). The survey revealed that about 95% of students at the time of entry to primary school speak a home language that is different from Hindi, which is used as the medium of instruction in schools (LLF, 2022). To address this issue, the state has also developed bilingual textbooks to improve learning along with a teacher capacity building program for empowering teachers to cater to the diverse needs of the classrooms.

The Jharkhand research and innovation center M-TALL Akhra has focused on mitigating early-grade dropouts. A linguistic survey (Pattanayak, 2013) in the state of Jharkhand revealed that 96% of children spoke minoritized languages other than Hindi, which was the medium of instruction in schools. To bridge this language gap, M-TALL Akhra developed several innovative resources including bilingual graphic dictionaries in nine tribal languages for early graders, a pre-school language bridge program, and culture-sensitive primary textbooks in 16 minoritized languages (Pattanayak, 2023). These textbooks were used by children in around a thousand schools across the state. In 2022, a second linguistic survey was undertaken with the aim of developing a comprehensive foundational literacy and numeracy roadmap specifically tailored to the needs of these children.

Multilingual/Bilingual Textbooks and Materials

In order to support children with classroom learning, NCERT, in collaboration with the Central Institute of Indian Languages and Mysuru, developed 104 primers covering the alphabet and basic numerals in various Indian languages[2] for use in primary schools. Similarly, bilingual and multilingual textbooks of various subjects (i.e. maths, science, social sciences, etc.) have been developed in Assam, Nagaland, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Mizoram, Jharkhand, Goa, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh. The government of Assam published textbooks in different subjects in 10 languages. In one of its initiatives, the Assam government published story books on the life of Bir Lachit Borphukan in 24 regional languages. There has been a push for schools in Jharkhand to use the local languages in primary schools since 2015.

Integration with Technology

Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA), a national digital platform launched by the Ministry of Education, is designed to support teachers, students, and parents by providing a comprehensive repository of educational resources. Launched in 2017, DIKSHA offers free access to e-books, lesson plans, worksheets, and video lectures in multiple languages, covering school curricula from Grades 1 to 12. It serves as a hub for teacher training modules available in various Indian languages and supports personalized learning experiences. E-learning content for more than 30 languages, including Indian and foreign languages, is available on DIKSHA. In order to ensure inclusion, the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) have created a 10,000-word Indian Sign Language (ISL) video-dictionary on the DIKSHA portal to include and support hearing-impaired students. NCERT and ISLRTC incorporated new words and phrases based on the school curriculum. Over 1,000 curriculum-based ISL films for Grades 1 to 7 are available on DIKSHA for individuals with hearing impairments.

Conclusion

Recognizing the historical diversity of languages in India, the implementation of inclusive and adaptable approaches that acknowledge language diversity as a valuable resource rather than a barrier is essential. It is our contention that English alone as a medium of instruction in isolation from national, regional, and local languages is insufficient. In order to effectively manage multilingual classrooms, linguistic mapping of children, bilingual/multilingual textbooks, age-appropriate content, customized technology solutions, and capacity building of teachers are some of the key components. With these resources in place, educators can establish a setting in which every student feels appreciated and actively involved and sees the world from multiple perspectives, thus fostering a more connected and compassionate global community.

Endnotes

1. "Tribal language" is an official designation used by some Indian states for Adivasi (Indigenous) languages.
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Multilingualism: Curriculum, Planning, and Assessment in Multilingual Education

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Summary
The transformative potential of a multilingual, endogenous curriculum to democratize learning, promote social cohesion, and bridge local and global knowledge systems is a key tool in the decolonization of education. Using the example of such an initiative in Haiti, and the UNESCO-IBE Step-by-Step Guide to Introducing Multilingualism into National Curricula, this article gives an overview of the process.

Keywords
Mother tongue
Endogenous
Decolonization
Curriculum
Systemic
Inclusion

Introduction

The use of mother tongues in primary and secondary school curricula represents a pivotal step toward inclusive education. By elevating these often marginalized languages to the primary language of instruction, countries can begin to address historical inequalities and foster a sense of national identity. However, despite the rewards, the process of a transition to a multilingual curriculum is resource intensive when the necessary elements of contextual analysis, education planning, teacher training, and materials development are taken into account. The example of UNESCO-IBE's support to Haiti's ongoing curriculum reform demonstrates this complex and nuanced journey.

Multilingual Curricula as a Decolonizing Move

Since gaining independence, many post-colonial nations have grappled with the challenge of adapting the colonial education systems they inherited to fit the cultural fabric of their communities. Concurrently, questions about how to incorporate endogenous knowledge into the curricula of these so-called modern educational frameworks persist. These challenges arise not only from a desire to enhance the efficiency and relevance of education systems but also reflect a deeper motivation to reinforce national cultural identities, legitimize state policies that promote intellectual and cultural autonomy, and prepare younger generations for a future that aligns with their vision.

A dynamic symbiosis is required between the endogenous knowledge passed down through generations and the exogenous knowledge introduced from the West and the East. Achieving this balance necessitates the integration of national languages into education systems in combination with a substantial improvement in the quality of education.

This integration is not limited to language; therefore, it requires a systemic approach. The decolonization of curriculum refers to the all-encompassing process of critically examining and restructuring educational content and practices to address and dismantle the lingering effects of colonialism in knowledge production and dissemination. Tikly (2024) and Mbembe (2023) offer just two examples of the extensive discourse on this subject. UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (IBE)[1] has been at the practical forefront of this effort, promoting a systemic, holistic, participatory, inclusive, and endogenous approach to curriculum transformation. This involves challenging Eurocentric perspectives, integrating diverse knowledge systems, and empowering marginalized voices and experiences. UNESCO-IBE's initiatives, including participation in UNESCO's General History of Africa project,[2] aim to reconstruct historical narratives free from racial prejudices and colonial biases, fostering a more balanced and inclusive understanding of global history and culture. By supporting the creation and implementation of curricula that value national languages, knowledge, and perspectives, UNESCO-IBE seeks to democratize education and promote sustainable development aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4).

Incorporating multilingualism into educational systems, especially in regions like Francophone Africa and Haiti where children are often taught in an official language they do not understand, demands a comprehensive transformation of curricula. This process affects the core components of national curricula, whether content- or competency-based. Introducing multilingualism in a previously monolingual system demands extensive human, material, and financial resources, along with careful time management for successful implementation. As such, rigorous planning of all actions and activities is essential, alongside the effective organization of a national technical team tasked with overseeing curricular transformation.

A Step-by-step Guide to Integrating Multilingualism into National Curricula

To support these transformative efforts, UNESCO-IBE has produced a step-by-step guide (UNESCO-IBE, 2024) to help countries integrate multilingualism into their national curricula. The guide provides comprehensive frameworks, practical tools, and answers to crucial questions, such as: What models of bilingual or multilingual education are possible? How can countries choose the most appropriate model? How can the selected model be integrated harmoniously into the current educational structure? And how can one ensure the conditions necessary for successful implementation?

This guide aligns with UNESCO-IBE's curriculum vision of incorporating local culture, values, national languages, and endogenous knowledge into educational frameworks. It emphasizes establishing guiding and operational frameworks for bilingual or multilingual education projects. Moreover, the guide underscores critical components of curriculum adaptation, including examples of pedagogical strategies, didactic guidelines, and lesson plans tailored to national languages.

The guide takes as its premise that the curriculum is one of the most effective tools for realizing development through education. In its normative role, UNESCO-IBE sets standards and guidelines for quality curricula. If countries are to benefit from the true developmental value of the curriculum, we must look beyond traditional conceptions, where the curriculum is viewed simply as a collection of syllabi, study plans, and textbooks. Instead, stakeholders must come to realize the more encompassing role of curricula at the heart of education systems.

UNESCO-IBE is a global intellectual leader in this regard, seeking to promote and support policy and technical dialogue on a renewed understanding of the curriculum. UNESCO-IBE's in-country work, therefore, involves deepening understanding and paradigm shifts in the curriculum by explicitly articulating the developmental value of curricula to democratize learning and create lifelong opportunities for all, as mandated by SDG4.

An Overview of UNESCO-IBE's Approach to Multilingualism

An essential component of integrating national languages into curricula is developing those languages themselves to be fully functional as teaching languages. This means expanding vocabulary to include specialized terms in various subjects, standardizing grammar and spelling where necessary, and ensuring the availability of high-quality instructional materials. Additionally, language development requires comprehensive teacher training programs to build proficiency in local languages and equip educators to deliver complex content effectively.

Decision-makers often overlook the considerable resources required to empower the national technical teams responsible for implementing a bilingual or multilingual program. Education planners must better gauge the scope and benefits of this educational revolution, which will anchor children firmly in their diverse societies while also preparing them for a globalized world. However, while integrating national languages into curricula is demanding financially, scientifically, and materially, the endeavor is achievable.

Multilingual education also demands comprehensive curriculum planning and assessment strategies. This includes mapping existing frameworks and standards to align them with national and local cultural values, ensuring linguistic diversity and cultural heritage are upheld, and strengthening instructional methodologies tailored to specific

language models. Additionally, designing effective assessment tools becomes crucial in evaluating students' progress in different languages and understanding their competencies in both mother tongues and acquired languages.

Countries must conduct comprehensive analyses to identify the most appropriate models for their unique educational contexts. Since implementation requires overcoming several challenges, this should include surveying the linguistic landscape to determine which national or regional languages are most widely spoken and could be viable as instructional languages. A well-executed bilingual or multilingual curriculum transformation can deeply transform education, strengthen societies, and empower students to engage meaningfully with the world.

Policymakers and curriculum specialists need to collaborate in crafting adaptable frameworks that accommodate varying educational needs while standardizing core principles. For instance, competency-based approaches can be adapted to national linguistic and cultural norms while remaining aligned with global education standards. Equally important is developing instructional materials that accurately reflect the cultural contexts of the languages used.

Teacher-training and capacity development also play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of multilingual curricula. Educators must be equipped to teach effectively in national languages and bridge the gap between local and global knowledge. This involves not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural sensitivity, ensuring that teachers understand the historical significance of mother tongues and how best to use them to facilitate learning.

Comprehensive assessment strategies further enhance the effectiveness of multilingual education. Formative assessments tailored to local languages can identify students' strengths and areas for improvement early, allowing educators to adjust instructional approaches. Summative assessments should likewise reflect the nuances of linguistic diversity, evaluating proficiency in both native and acquired languages.

Finally, the socioeconomic and cultural benefits of multilingual education cannot be understated. Children learning in their first language are more likely to thrive academically, strengthening their self-identity and sense of belonging. At the same time, exposure to global languages fosters cross-cultural understanding and empowers students to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. Multilingualism, thus, becomes a cornerstone of inclusive, high-quality education that serves as a bridge between local traditions and global opportunities.

Curriculum Reform and Integration of Creole in Haiti

As well as setting global standards for quality curricula and learning, UNESCO-IBE develops the capacity for curriculum transformation and systems alignment tailored to each country's unique needs. UNESCO-IBE works alongside Member States to strengthen their ability to transform contextualized curricula that reflect national aspirations and uphold universal values such as gender equality, inclusivity, freedom of choice, respect for the environment, and local contexts. In practice, UNESCO-IBE provides objective expertise in any curriculum change.

The systemic integration of multilingualism into curricula is exemplified by UNESCO-IBE's support to Haiti's Ministry of National Education and Professional Training. Since 2022, UNESCO-IBE has been guiding a comprehensive curriculum reform, initiated in 2018, to establish Creole as the primary language of instruction across all educational cycles. This initiative involves curriculum realignment, the development of instructional materials, and comprehensive teacher training to ensure a seamless transition to multilingual instruction.

Haiti's persistent challenges—political conflict, social instability, and natural disasters—have compounded its struggles to address governance issues, corruption and factional violence, and achieve sustainable development. The curriculum reform underscores the importance of multilingual education as part of a broader agenda reflecting the country's socioeconomic, cultural, and historical realities. Despite its official status alongside French, Haitian Creole has been historically marginalized in favor of French, the dominant language in government, education, and elite circles. By integrating Creole into the curriculum, Haiti seeks to create an inclusive, culturally relevant educational system that honors local heritage while equipping students with the skills to succeed in a globalized world. Furthermore, the reform aims to instill values such as solidarity, engagement, and inclusion, fostering a generation of more engaged and responsible citizens. It also addresses pressing contemporary issues, including environmental sustainability, aligning education with the need to confront modern challenges while promoting social cohesion and national unity.

This reform is grounded in several key principles. First, it recognizes the importance of using Creole, the language spoken by nearly all Haitians, as the main medium of instruction. This shift is essential for improving access to education, as it ensures that students can learn in a language they understand, thereby reducing barriers to learning and enhancing overall academic performance. French, traditionally the language of instruction in Haitian schools, will be taught as a second language from first grade onwards.

One of the major challenges in Haiti's education reform is reducing the stigma associated with Creole. Historically viewed as a less significant language compared to French, Creole's progressive institutionalization as the primary medium of instruction seeks to uplift its status and empower students by making education more accessible and culturally relevant. This approach not only reflects Haiti's linguistic reality but also honors the country's dual identity, recognizing both Creole and French as integral to the national culture. Encouragingly, Creole is increasingly used by government agencies and officials, for example in public communication campaigns for health, disaster response, and civic education, but despite this there is still some resistance by elite groups. One of the difficulties of integrating a non-dominant language into the curriculum is the lack of available content in that language; UNESCO-IBE is therefore partnering with the Akademi Kreyòl to standardize Creole for educational use, creating quality and culturally relevant instructional materials.

It must be noted that preparation before the integration of multilingualism into the curriculum requires much deeper analysis and understanding of language, culture, historical significance of languages, and modern-day needs than can be discussed here. Thus, as raised in an extensive curriculum analysis and report (UNESCO-IBE, 2023), additional factors to be considered include the necessity of a robust legal and governance framework for the education system, examination of existing policies and emerging issues (environment and sustainable development, health, nutrition, gender, diversity, inclusion, ICT, socioemotional skills), and the country's sociopolitical situation, among others.

Conclusion

In conclusion, multilingualism, when integrated into curriculum, planning, and assessment strategies, has the transformative power to shape future generations, enrich national identities, and propel educational systems forward. While the road to implementation is challenging and resource-intensive, the benefits are invaluable. With careful planning, committed resources, and a shared vision, countries can harness the potential of multilingual education to foster societies that are not only culturally grounded but also globally empowered.

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1. UNESCO-IBE is UNESCO's specialized institute for curriculum and related matters (https://www.ibe.unesco.org/en).
2. In 1964, UNESCO launched the elaboration of the General History of Africa with a view to remedying the general ignorance of Africa's history. The challenge consisted of reconstructing Africa's history, freeing it from the racial prejudices ensuing from the slave trade and colonization, and promoting an African perspective (https://www.unesco.org/en/general-history-africa).

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