frontiers | Frontiers in Education

TYPE Original Research
PUBLISHED 07 January 2026
DOI 10.3389/feduc.2025.1667398

OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY
Maria Luísa Branco,
University of Beira Interior, Portugal

REVIEWED BY
Sibongile Mahan,
University of South Africa, South Africa
Sboniso Praisegod Zondi,
University of the Free State, South Africa

*CORRESPONDENCE
Shuaib Abolakale Muhammed
✉ shuaib.muhammed@up.ac.za

RECEIVED 16 July 2025
REVISED 14 December 2025
ACCEPTED 15 December 2025
PUBLISHED 07 January 2026

CITATION
Omidire MF and Muhammed SA (2026) Narratives of teachers' innovative multilingual learning and learner support strategies in sub-Saharan Africa.
Front. Educ. 10:1667398.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2025.1667398

Narratives of teachers' innovative multilingual learning and learner support strategies in sub-Saharan Africa

Margaret Funke Omidire and Shuaib Abolakale Muhammed*

Department of Educational Psychology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Introduction: This study investigates how teachers in sub-Saharan Africa innovatively navigate multilingual classroom settings to promote inclusive learning and learner support in Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon, and Botswana, within the context of colonial linguistic legacies and systemic underresourcing.
Methods: Data were gathered from 26 purposefully selected primary and secondary school teachers using a phenomenological qualitative approach through interviews and focus group discussions.
Results: The findings reveal that the strategies adopted by teachers include activity-inspired lesson planning, structured questioning incorporating home languages, attributing value to linguistic diversity, translanguaging, and play-based methods such as skits that incorporate various cultures and languages. The findings suggest that the innovative practices used vary, with no universally accepted practice. The results further indicate that although English serves as the official language of education, it frequently hinders student participation and understanding. In response, teachers utilise students' home languages, implement culturally responsive teaching methods, and employ multimodal strategies.
Discussion: Despite these innovations, teachers' efforts are constrained by insufficient professional training, rigid assessment practices, inadequate infrastructure, and limited institutional support. The study recommends systemic investment in teacher training to develop and promote the use of multilingual pedagogies, improved resource allocation, and the adoption of inclusive language policies to strengthen multilingual education.

KEYWORDS

inclusive pedagogy, language policy, multilingual education, sub-Saharan Africa, teacher agency, translanguaging

Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to an extraordinary wealth of linguistic diversity. According to Ethnologue (2020), nearly one-third of the world's languages are spoken on the African continent, many of which coexist within individual national borders. This linguistic complexity presents opportunities and challenges for educational systems seeking to foster inclusive, equitable, and high-quality learning environments. In postcolonial African contexts, language plays a central role in mediating access to education, knowledge production and identity formation (Heugh, 2012; Seroto and Higgs, 2024). Despite national and international commitments to mother tongue-based multilingual education, many education systems in sub-Saharan Africa remain structured around colonial languages such as English, French and Portuguese, which are often not the first languages of learners or teachers (Brock-Utne and Nota, 2010).

This linguistic disjuncture continues to contribute to educational inequalities and low learning outcomes, particularly in foundational literacy. For example, recent data from UNICEF (2022) indicate that more than 80% of grade 3 learners in low-income African countries cannot read with comprehension in any language. These challenges are compounded by systemic under-resourcing, large class sizes, and a shortage of culturally and linguistically relevant teaching materials (Ouane and Glanz, 2010; Sizwe and Thokozani, 2024). Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the need to explore innovative, context-sensitive multilingual learning approaches that draw on local linguistic repertoires and empower both teachers and learners.

The relevance of multilingual education is not only pedagogical but also deeply social and political in nature. Language use in classrooms reflects broader societal hierarchies and power relations (Makoni and Pennycook, 2012; Okal, 2014). In many African contexts, indigenous languages are marginalised in favour of former colonial languages, which are often seen as gateways to economic opportunity and social mobility. However, this privileging of ex-colonial languages frequently undermines learners' linguistic identities and creates cognitive and emotional barriers to learning (Heugh, 2013). Recent studies have shown that when learners are taught in their home language, they understand best, particularly in early childhood and the foundation phase, and they perform better academically and exhibit higher levels of self-confidence and engagement (Trudell, 2018). In response, an increasing number of teachers are embracing multilingual pedagogies that acknowledge and validate learners' home languages and cultural backgrounds. These approaches align with global educational discourses on inclusion, diversity, and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018). However, there remains a dearth of empirical research capturing how such practices are enacted, particularly from the perspective of teachers in under-resourced African classrooms.

The rationale for this study was twofold. First, it responds to the urgent need to document and understand how teachers in linguistically diverse African settings craft and sustain multilingual teaching practices, often in the absence of formal policy support or adequate resources. Second, this study contributes to broader conversations about teacher agency, professional learning, and educational innovation in the Global South. Importantly, this study adopts a decolonial lens to interrogate how language practices in education can either reproduce or challenge colonial legacies. The privileging of European languages in African schooling systems is not a neutral choice; it reflects enduring colonial ideologies that position Indigenous knowledge systems as inferior or irrelevant (Ngũgĩ wa, 1986; Mahlomaholo, 2013). In contrast, multilingual pedagogies that centre on Indigenous languages can serve as acts of resistance and affirmation, both culturally and pedagogically.

This study focuses on primary and lower-secondary schools across select sub-Saharan African countries, where multilingualism is a defining feature of everyday life. In many of these contexts, learners speak two to three languages by the time they enter school, including local, regional, and national ones. However, formal education continues to prioritise proficiency in ex-colonial languages, often at the expense of foundational literacy in mother tongues. Teachers operating in these settings face unique challenges, including reconciling language policy with classroom realities, addressing linguistic diversity among learners, navigating a lack of multilingual teaching materials, and managing systemic pressures to deliver curriculum content in English or French. Yet many of these same teachers are also innovating in powerful ways, drawing on community resources, incorporating translanguaging practices, and creating safe spaces for linguistic and cultural affirmation. This study seeks to understand and document these innovations through the personal and professional narratives of the teachers who led them.

Aims and objectives of the study

The overarching aim of this research is to explore how teachers in sub-Saharan Africa use innovative multilingual strategies to enhance learning and learner support in linguistically diverse classrooms. More specifically, this study seeks to identify the types of innovative multilingual strategies used by teachers and examine how these strategies affect learners' participation, engagement, and academic outcomes and contribute to theoretical and policy discussions on multilingual education and teacher agency in Africa.

Research questions

To achieve this, the following questions were raised to guide the study:

1) What multilingual teaching practices do teachers use to enhance learners' comprehension and participation in diverse classrooms?
2) How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of multilingual strategies in improving learner engagement and understanding?
3) What challenges do teachers experience in navigating linguistic diversity and implementing multilingual pedagogies in their classrooms?
4) What forms of support (or lack thereof) influence teachers' efforts to implement multilingual teaching and learning strategies?

Literature review

Multilingual education: global and African perspectives

Multilingual education refers to the use of two or more languages in teaching and learning. Globally, it is increasingly viewed as a pathway to inclusion, equity, and cognitive development, particularly in diverse and multilingual societies. Research from diverse regions shows that multilingual learners who are taught in their home languages during the early years perform better academically and develop stronger cognitive and metalinguistic skills than those taught in a foreign language from the outset (Heugh, 2013; Garcia and Wei, 2014).

Africa has a complex and contested history of multilingual education. While the benefits of mother-tongue-based education are widely recognised, its implementation remains inconsistent and under-resourced. The colonial legacy plays a significant role. During colonial rule, education systems were structured to prioritise European languages as the medium of instruction, often relegating Indigenous languages to the private or informal sphere (Heugh, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). These colonial language policies were largely

inherited and continued by post-independence governments, despite their rhetorical commitments to linguistic and cultural revitalisation. The result is a pervasive "subtractive bilingualism" model, where Indigenous languages are used minimally, if at all, and learners are expected to transition quickly to a dominant colonial language (usually English or French) (Seroto and Higgs, 2024). Such models have been shown to be pedagogically ineffective, especially for learners from rural and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Ouane and Glanz, 2010). However, despite these findings, political, economic, and ideological factors continue to shape resistance to multilingual policies in education.

Multilingual education in sub-Saharan Africa

The literature also reveals country-specific trajectories that are directly relevant to the present study. In South Africa, for example, translanguaging is increasingly recognised as a practical response to entrenched language inequalities, with classroom-based studies demonstrating how teachers draw on learners' languages to scaffold genre knowledge, comprehension, and participation (Kerfoot and Van Heerden, 2015; Mahan et al., 2024; Machimana and Genis, 2024). However, despite progressive policy provisions for mother-tongue instruction in early grades, implementation remains uneven, especially in under-resourced township schools (Heugh, 2013; Sizwe and Thokozani, 2024).

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education endorses mother-tongue instruction in the early years, yet its application is inconsistent due to the multiplicity of languages and inadequate supply of instructional resources (Trudell, 2018; Ouane and Glanz, 2010). Teachers therefore rely heavily on code-switching and improvised multilingual supports to bridge comprehension gaps strategies that align closely with the findings emerging from this study. In Kenya, Kiswahili has a stronger presence as a lingua franca, but learners often speak diverse vernaculars at home. Research notes that teachers negotiate these linguistic ecologies by alternating among English, Kiswahili, and local languages to ensure participation, despite policy pressures favouring English-medium instruction, particularly in upper grades (Trudell, 2016, 2018).

Similarly, in Botswana, Setswana is the dominant language, yet multilingualism persists due to the presence of Kalanga, Kgalagadi, and other regional languages. Studies report that learners who do not have Setswana as a home language face disadvantages in the early years, prompting teachers to use informal multilingual strategies despite the official monolingual orientation of schooling (Probyn, 2024; Ouane and Glanz, 2010). Across these contexts, the literature reveals that teachers' multilingual practices often emerge from necessity and professional intuition rather than policy enactment. This underscores the need for empirical work such as the present study that captures teachers' situated innovations within multilingual realities across different sub-Saharan African countries.

Language policy and implementation gaps

Several African countries have adopted language-in-education policies that support mother tongue instruction in the early grades, followed by a gradual transition to a second or third language. For example, Ethiopia, South Africa, and Kenya have policies promoting the use of local languages in the foundation phase (Trudell, 2016). However, implementation remains patchy due to a range of systemic and socio-political barriers.

First, there is a lack of sufficient teaching and learning materials in indigenous languages. Second, teacher education programmes often do not prepare teachers to teach multilingual classrooms or use culturally responsive pedagogies. Third, language ideologies among parents, teachers, and policymakers continue to favour European languages as symbols of modernity, prestige, and upward mobility (Makalela, 2016). These attitudes often result in parents rejecting mother-tongues instruction in favour of English or French, believing it will give their children better chances in life. Furthermore, the politics of language in education are shaped by broader issues such as identity, power, and postcolonial nationalism. Many African states are home to dozens of languages, and decisions about which languages to prioritise can become deeply politicised in the process. Consequently, even well-intentioned multilingual policies can generate resistance, especially when they are perceived to favour certain ethnic or linguistic groups over others (Seroto and Higgs, 2024).

Translanguaging and culturally sustaining pedagogy

In response to these challenges, scholars and practitioners have increasingly turned to translanguaging as a framework for understanding and supporting multilingual learning (Garcia and Wei, 2014; Makalela, 2015). Translanguaging refers to the flexible and dynamic use of a full linguistic repertoire by multilingual speakers. In classrooms, translanguaging involves allowing learners to draw upon all their languages to create meaning, express understanding, and participate in learning activities. Translanguaging challenges the traditional boundaries between languages and views multilingualism not as a problem to be managed but as a resource to be harnessed. This perspective aligns with the theory of "culturally sustaining pedagogy" (Paris and Alim, 2017), which calls for educational practices that not only acknowledge but also actively sustain learners' linguistic and cultural identities. These approaches reject the deficit models of bilingualism and instead position multilingual learners as linguistically creative, cognitively capable, and culturally rich.

Empirical studies in African contexts have shown that translanguaging can promote learner engagement, enhance comprehension, and foster inclusive classroom environments (Janks, 2010; Kerfoot and Van Heerden, 2015). In South Africa, for example, research in township schools has demonstrated how teachers use code-switching and translanguaging to scaffold learning and maintain classroom participation (Mahan et al., 2024; Machimana and Genis, 2024). Similarly, studies in Kenya and Tanzania have highlighted how teachers and learners negotiate multilingual repertoires in ways that reflect everyday language practices in their communities (Trudell, 2018). Despite these promising findings, translanguaging remains marginalised in mainstream curricula and teacher training programmes. There is also limited research on how teachers in resource-constrained settings adopt and adapt these strategies, especially in the absence of formal policy support or materials. This study seeks to address this gap by foregrounding teachers' narratives of innovation and resistance within multilingual classrooms.

Teacher agency and professional learning in multilingual contexts

Teachers play a critical role in shaping language practices in classrooms. Their beliefs, identities, and professional experiences influence how they interpret and implement language policies and pedagogical innovations (Johnson and Freeman, 2010). In multilingual African classrooms, teachers often find themselves navigating competing demands, such as national curriculum standards, language policy mandates, parental expectations, and the realities of learner diversity. In doing so, they exercise what scholars refer to as "teacher agency," the capacity to make intentional choices and enact change within constrained environments (Priestley et al., 2015). Emerging research has shown that teacher agency is a key factor in the success of multilingual education initiatives. Teachers who are empowered, reflective, and professionally supported are more likely to adopt inclusive practices and respond creatively to classroom challenges (Alidou et al., 2011). However, many African teachers lack adequate support for professional learning in this area. Pre-service training often focuses on monolingual instructional models, and in-service development opportunities are sporadic or non-existent.

Innovative, teacher-led initiatives have begun to fill this gap. In some cases, teachers have collaborated informally to develop contextually appropriate materials, share best practices, and build communities of practice around multilingual learning (Mahlomaholo, 2013; Makalela, 2016). These grassroots efforts highlight the resilience and ingenuity of teachers in the Global South who often work under challenging conditions with limited resources. Capturing and analysing their narratives can offer valuable insights into what effective multilingual education looks like in practice and how it can be scaled and sustained in the long term.

Limitations and contextual constraints in implementing multilingual pedagogies

Although multilingual and translanguaging pedagogies demonstrate clear benefits for comprehension, identity affirmation, and learner participation, several limitations hinder their effective implementation across African classrooms. A recurrent challenge documented in the literature relates to the persistent dominance of colonial languages in schooling, which restricts the systematic use of learners' home languages despite evidence supporting their pedagogical value (Heugh, 2012; Brock-Utne and Nota, 2010). Teachers frequently operate within policy environments that mandate English or French as the sole medium of instruction, resulting in what Trudell (2016) and Soreto (2024) describe as subtractive bilingualism, a model that sidelines Indigenous languages and positions them as temporary scaffolds rather than legitimate academic resources.

In practice, teachers' willingness to employ multilingual pedagogies is often constrained by limited training, inadequate materials, and large class sizes, which reduce their ability to differentiate instruction or integrate multilingual strategies consistently (Ouane and Glanz, 2010; Kerfoot and Van Heerden, 2015). Even where teachers recognise the value of translanguaging, they lack institutional support, curriculum guidance, or assessment models aligned with multilingual practice (Probyn, 2024). Parents' language ideologies which often privilege English or French for perceived economic mobility also influence the extent to which multilingual approaches are accepted or resisted (Makalela, 2016; Okal, 2014). These systemic constraints highlight that multilingual pedagogies require not only teacher agency but also structural and ideological shifts at school and policy levels.

Gaps in the literature

Despite the growing interest in multilingual education in Africa, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, there is a scarcity of qualitative studies that centre on the lived experiences and voices of teachers. Much of the existing research is policy-focused or quantitative, often overlooking the nuanced, context-dependent ways in which multilingual strategies are enacted on the ground. Second, there is limited research on how multilingual pedagogies intersect with broader issues of identity, power, and cultural affirmation, particularly from a decolonial perspective. Third, few studies have examined the specific strategies that teachers use to support learners emotionally, socially, and cognitively in multilingual environments. Given the well-established links between language, identity, and wellbeing, research is needed to explore how multilingual learning can foster not only academic achievement but also emotional resilience and social inclusion (Ollerhead, 2019). Finally, longitudinal and cross-national research capturing the diversity of multilingual education practices across different African contexts is lacking.

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in two intersecting theoretical lenses: Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and Decolonial Theory (Mignolo, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007), both of which offer critical insights into the role of language, identity, and pedagogy in multilingual educational contexts. Together, these frameworks provide a conceptual scaffold for understanding the complexities of teaching and learning in linguistically diverse African classrooms, where historical legacies, social hierarchies, and cultural meanings are deeply entangled in everyday educational practice.

Sociocultural theory and mediated learning experience (MLE)

Sociocultural theory (SCT), rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky, posits that learning is a fundamentally social process mediated by cultural tools, with language being the most significant of these tools (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Within this framework, knowledge is not transmitted in a vacuum but co-constructed through interaction within a culturally and linguistically situated context. Therefore, learning is not only cognitive but also inherently social and cultural. In multilingual classrooms, SCT underscores the importance of leveraging learners' full linguistic repertoire as a mediational tool for cognitive development. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development is especially relevant here, suggesting that learners can perform more complex tasks when guided by more knowledgeable others—often peers or teachers using familiar linguistic and cultural resources (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). From this perspective, denying

learners access to their home languages or community knowledge denies them the most accessible and meaningful tools for learning.

SCT also informs our understanding of teacher's agency. Teachers, as cultural agents, mediate learning by interpreting the curriculum, selecting instructional strategies, and shaping classroom interactions. Their decisions are informed by sociocultural histories, values, and professional identities. Thus, multilingual education is not simply about language choice but about how teachers and learners engage in meaning-making processes that are culturally and historically grounded (Rogoff, 2024).

A key concept arising from SCT relevant to this study is translanguaging, the practice of using multiple languages fluidly and strategically within a single learning context. Translanguaging aligns with SCT in viewing language use as dynamic, context-dependent, and purpose-driven, rather than fixed or compartmentalised (Garcia and Wei, 2014; Creese and Blackledge, 2010). In multilingual African classrooms, translanguaging allows learners and teachers to make meaning across languages, negotiate identity, and co-construct knowledge using their full linguistic repertoire. This approach reframes multilingualism as a resource to be valued and harnessed rather than a barrier to overcome. Within the classroom, translanguaging practices include code-switching, language mixing, and using one language to scaffold understanding in another language. For teachers, this means engaging with learners in ways that reflect community language practices, rather than imposing artificial language boundaries.

SCT helps position translanguaging as a legitimate pedagogical practice, especially in contexts where learners navigate between home, school, and societal language norms. It also reinforces the idea that innovative multilingual strategies emerge from culturally embedded and contextually responsive pedagogical choices, not merely from adherence to policy mandates or standardised curricula.

Decolonial theory and the politics of language

While SCT offers a powerful lens for understanding the cognitive and social dimensions of multilingual learning, it does not fully address the historical and ideological dimensions of language in African education. In this regard, decolonial theory offers a critical complement. Decolonial theory is concerned with dismantling the lingering effects of colonialism on knowledge, identity, and power, particularly in the Global South (Mignolo, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

From a decolonial perspective, language is not a neutral medium of instruction but rather a site of struggle and resistance. In many African contexts, the dominance of European languages in formal education is a legacy of colonial rule, which positioned indigenous languages and the knowledge systems they carry as inferior or irrelevant (Ngũgĩ wa, 1986; Prah, 2009). This linguistic hierarchy continues to marginalise learners who speak African languages and reinforces colonial patterns of knowledge production and social stratification. Decolonial theory calls for the epistemic disobedience necessary to recover Indigenous languages, knowledge, and pedagogies as valid and valuable. This includes centring the voices and experiences of teachers and learners who resist dominant language ideologies and create alternative pedagogical spaces rooted in local linguistic and cultural resources (Mignolo, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

In this study, teacher narratives are analysed not only as accounts of pedagogical practice but also as acts of resistance and affirmations. By exploring how teachers navigate, contest, and reimagine language use in their classrooms, this study seeks to surface the decolonial potential of multilingual pedagogies. This includes understanding how teachers challenge the epistemic dominance of English or French, validate learners' linguistic identities, and create spaces for Indigenous knowledge to flourish. An important intersection between sociocultural and decolonial theory lies in the concepts of teacher identity and critical language awareness. Teachers do not simply implement policies; they interpret and enact them based on their professional beliefs, personal experiences, and socio-political contexts. Teacher identity is shaped by discourses of language, power, and professionalism, which can either constrain or enable the development of innovative multilingual practices (Norton, 2013).

In African contexts, many teachers are multilingual and have experienced both the benefits and limitations of dominant language ideologies. Their lived experiences often inform their teaching practices in ways that challenge official policies or curriculum standards. Developing a critical awareness of how language functions in society as a marker of power, identity, and access is essential for fostering transformative pedagogy. This awareness enables teachers to move beyond the technical implementation of language policies toward more reflective, ethical, and justice-oriented practices (Janks, 2010; Makalela, 2016).

This study therefore used teacher narratives to explore how identity, ideology, and critical reflection inform pedagogical innovation. It views teachers as cultural workers engaged in the daily labour of negotiating linguistic diversity, resisting marginalisation, and constructing inclusive learning environments. Together, sociocultural and decolonial theories offer a robust analytical framework for this study. While SCT helps explain how learning is mediated through language in social contexts, decolonial theory addresses the historical and ideological dimensions of language use in education. The integration of these frameworks enables a more holistic understanding of multilingual pedagogy as both a socio-cognitive process and a socio-political act.

Methodology

Research design

This study utilised a qualitative phenomenological research approach. Phenomenology, as a methodological framework, focuses on comprehending persons' lived experiences and the significance they ascribe to those experiences (Alhazmi and Kaufmann, 2022). This approach is especially suitable for investigating intricate, culturally ingrained phenomena like language utilisation in education, as it enables a thorough analysis of how individuals interpret their social and linguistic contexts. The qualitative approach was selected to emphasise participants' voices and subjective experiences, rather than to generalise findings scientifically.

Participants and sampling

Participants were drawn from four countries, Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon, and Botswana, to reflect a broad range of linguistic and

educational contexts. Table 1 below summarises the demographic information of the participants.

A total of 26 participants were purposively chosen from multilingual primary and secondary schools in four Sub-Saharan African nations: Nigeria ($n = 15$), Cameroon ($n = 4$), Botswana ($n = 4$), and Kenya ($n = 2$). Attempts were undertaken to incorporate individuals from both rural and urban environments, public and private educational institutions, and various locations within each nation. The sample technique also took into account diversity in linguistic background, gender, and years of professional experience. Recruitment was conducted by local research collaborators with existing links with schools and communities, facilitating a culturally appropriate and trust-based access to research sites. The individuals engaged in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) exhibited a spectrum of teaching experiences, ranging from 2 to 30 years, primarily at the primary level. A prevalent feature in all scenarios was the composition of multilingual classrooms. The teachers were multilingual, all proficient in English (100%), with several being fluent in regional African languages like Yoruba, Kiswahili, Setswana, Kalanga, and French. Most classrooms exhibited 3–5 languages among students, indicating linguistic diversity and complexity within the educational setting. The intentional selection guaranteed representation across gender (predominantly female), educational level, and linguistic diversity, hence facilitating the study's objective to investigate language-use techniques and challenges in varied multilingual classrooms.

Data collection procedure

Data were gathered via semi-structured FGDs. FGDs were selected to promote dynamic dialogues among members, fostering the creation of common experiences, divergent viewpoints, and collective

TABLE 1 Demographic information.

ID	Country	FGD	Yrs Exp	Grade(s) taught	Learners	Languages spoken	Language representation in class
P1C1	Cameroon	C1	4	Form 5	85	English	English and French
P2C1	Cameroon	C1	4	Form 2–4	105	French and English	English, Pidgin
P3C1	Cameroon	C1	10	Secondary	30	French and English	English
P4C1	Cameroon	C1	2	Form 1–3	100	English	English
P1N1	Nigeria	N1	15	Primary 6	22	English, Yoruba	Yoruba, Igbo
P2N1	Nigeria	N1	20	Primary 3 & 6	14	English, Yoruba	Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa
P3N1	Nigeria	N1	5	Primary 1	15	English, Yoruba	Yoruba, Igbo
P4N1	Nigeria	N1	3	Primary 4	22	English, Yoruba	Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa
P5N1	Nigeria	N1	10	Primary 5	12	English, Igbo, Calabar	Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa
P6N1	Nigeria	N1	–	–	–	–	–
P1N2	Nigeria	N2	20	All Primary	–	English, Yoruba, Hausa	Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo
P2N2	Nigeria	N2	17	Primary 2	21	English, Yoruba	Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Ibibio
P3N2	Nigeria	N2	9	Primary 5	15	English, Yoruba	Mostly Yoruba
P4N2	Nigeria	N2	12	Primary 4	10	English, Yoruba	Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa
P5N2	Nigeria	N2	9	Nursery	12	Igbira, English	Yoruba, Igbo, Igbira
P6N2	Nigeria	N2	10	Primary 5	12	English, Yoruba	Yoruba
P1N3	Nigeria	N3	14	University	140	English, Yoruba	Major Languages (unspecified)
P2N3	Nigeria	N3	10	High School	58	Igbo, English	Yoruba, Igbo
P3N3	Nigeria	N3	30	Primary	20	English, Yoruba	Diverse (from every region)
P1B1	Botswana	B1	24	Form 1–3	30	Setswana, English	Setswana learners
P2B2	Botswana	B2	18	Form 1–3	20	Kalanga, Setswana, English	Setswana, Kgalagadi, Kalanga, Zimbabwean languages
P3B3	Botswana	B3	16	Form 4–5	24	Setswana, English	Setswana, Kgalagadi
P4B3	Botswana	B3	7	Form 1–3	20	Setswana, English	Kalanga, Kgalagadi, 3–4 total languages
P1K2	Kenya	K2	16	Grade 7 & 8	69	Kiswahili, English, Vernacular	Kiswahili, English, Vernacular
P2K2	Kenya	K2	23	Form 4	–	Kiswahili, English, Luhya	Kiswahili, English, Luhya, Luo, Kikuyu

reflections. This strategy proved very effective in revealing the social aspects of language use and educational practices, which are frequently influenced by interpersonal interactions. Distinct focus groups were organised for teachers in each nation. Each FGD lasted between 30 and 45 min and included from four to seven people. Discussions were directed by thematic prompts based on the research objectives and theoretical frameworks. The enquiries focused on language variety in educational settings, instructional difficulties, available support systems, and novel approaches. All FGDs were audio-recorded with the informed consent of participants, and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were additionally recorded to document non-verbal signals and contextual details.

Data analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using a rigorous and systematic approach grounded in thematic analysis. The researchers adopted the six-phase framework articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006), which is well-suited for examining complex, qualitative data derived from participants' lived experiences. This analytical approach allowed for the identification of meaningful patterns and themes within the data while preserving the richness and depth of participants' narratives. The process began with *familiarisation with the data*, during which members of the research team immersed themselves in the raw data by reading and re-reading the transcriptions of the focus group discussions. This phase allowed researchers to become intimately acquainted with the content, nuances, and tone of participants' voices, enabling them to develop an intuitive understanding of the data's breadth and depth. Transcripts were reviewed alongside the original audio recordings and field notes to ensure accuracy and to capture any emotive or contextual cues that may not have been reflected fully in the textual data.

Following this, the researchers proceeded to *generate initial codes*, systematically identifying and tagging key ideas, phrases, and recurring expressions that were relevant to the research questions. These codes reflected both semantic content the explicit statements made by participants and latent meanings, underlying beliefs, assumptions, and emotions that emerged through participants' stories. Coding was performed manually by multiple members of the research team to encourage reflexivity and to minimise interpretive bias. This collaborative approach helped to surface diverse perspectives and ensured that the coding process remained grounded in participants' voices rather than researcher assumptions. Once a comprehensive set of codes had been developed, the research team engaged in *searching for themes*. This involved grouping similar codes together into broader conceptual categories that captured recurring patterns of meaning across the dataset. At this stage, the analysis began to take a more interpretive turn, moving beyond surface-level descriptions to uncover deeper insights about participants' experiences and the social and educational contexts in which those experiences were situated.

The fourth phase, *reviewing themes*, was both iterative and dialogic. Themes were examined for internal coherence, consistency, and distinctiveness. The team scrutinised whether each theme accurately represented the data it was intended to capture and whether there was sufficient evidence across the dataset to support its inclusion. Themes were refined or collapsed where necessary, and outlier data that challenged initial interpretations were critically considered rather than dismissed. This step also involved re-engaging with the original transcripts to ensure that the thematic structure remained grounded in participants' actual language and experiences, rather than merely reflecting the researchers' conceptual frameworks. Once the thematic architecture had been finalised, the next step was *defining and naming the themes*. Each theme was given a clear definition and scope, and subthemes were identified where applicable to reflect nuances or variations in the data. For example, under the broader theme of "Teacher Pedagogical Innovation," subthemes emerged around specific strategies such as "code-switching," "use of visual aids," "peer learning," and "translanguaging practices." These subthemes helped to highlight the diversity of practices across different national and institutional contexts while also revealing shared pedagogical commitments.

The final phase of analysis involved *producing the thematic narrative*, which entailed synthesising the themes into coherent and compelling prose. This narrative was structured around the original research questions and theoretical frameworks and was illustrated with verbatim quotations from participants. These excerpts served to preserve the authenticity of participant voices and to anchor analytic claims in the data. Quotations were selected not merely for their rhetorical value but for their representativeness and explanatory power in relation to the themes they illustrated.

Throughout the analytical process, the research team remained mindful of their positionality as scholars working within and across different African contexts. Reflexivity was a key element of the analytic approach, with team members engaging in regular debriefing sessions to question their interpretations, reflect on power dynamics, and consider the influence of their cultural and disciplinary backgrounds on the meaning-making process. In addition to generating country-specific insights, the analysis allowed for *cross-national comparisons*, revealing both context-specific challenges and regionally shared concerns in relation to multilingual education. For instance, while teachers across all five countries reported difficulties related to the exclusive use of English as the language of instruction, the extent and form of these challenges varied based on local policies, community language ecologies, and available support structures.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Faculty of Educational Psychology Research Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria (Reference No: UP180301). Data collection took place through focus group discussions with teachers who participated voluntarily in their personal capacity. All participants received detailed information about the study including the study's goal, procedures, risks, and benefits. Informed consent was acquired either in writing or verbally, contingent upon participant contextual suitability. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through the use of pseudonyms and secure data handling procedures. Cultural sensitivity and language inclusivity were emphasised during the research process, with local researchers significantly contributing to fostering polite and equitable interactions with participants.

Findings

The analysis generated five major themes capturing teachers' experiences in multilingual classrooms and the innovative strategies they use to support learners as well as the constraint of using multilingual pedagogies and suggestions for professional development. These themes reflect both the structural realities of multilingual schooling environments and the creative pedagogical responses teachers enact within these constraints.

Theme 1: teachers experience with language diversity

Participants consistently described English mandated as the language of instruction as a significant learning barrier for many learners. In most classrooms, learners relied heavily on their home languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Setswana, Kalanga, Luhya, or Pidgin, with limited functional exposure to English outside school. This mismatch created substantial comprehension challenges, particularly in early-grade and rural settings.

Teachers narrated how the use of English alone sometimes made lessons inaccessible. One participant explained: *"Most of them keep repeating the same thing, they still do not understand"* (P4N1), highlighting how English-only instruction often resulted in superficial repetition rather than genuine learning. Another added that learners "*prefer being taught in Setswana than English*" (P4B1), reflecting the emotional comfort and cognitive ease associated with home-language use.

Although curriculum policy requires English, participants noted that these policies seldom align with the linguistic realities of their classrooms. As one teacher put it: *"They speak their dialect… like some are Hausa, they hardly understand English"* (P1N1). This demonstrates a recurrent tension between policy imperatives and pedagogical demands.

The patterns summarised in Table 2 below capture the range of language challenges described.

Theme 2: innovative multilingual support strategies

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated strong agency and creativity in deploying multilingual practices to bridge comprehension gaps. The most prominent strategy across all study sites was translanguaging, where teachers fluidly integrated English with learners' home languages. Participants emphasised that even limited code-switching significantly increased learner understanding. As one teacher stated: *"Sometimes… I will use Yoruba to explain… though it's not allowed"* (P3N2). This quote shows the tension between official policy restrictions and classroom-based needs, yet also illustrates teachers' willingness to take pedagogical risks when necessary.

Teachers also relied extensively on multimodal tools such as flashcards, pictures, digital videos, gestures, and dramatization. P2N2 explained: "*We use body language… flashcards… videos,*" suggesting how visual and auditory aids help learners interpret meaning beyond English text.

Play-based and oral learning strategies such as songs, rhymes, and role-play were particularly effective for younger learners. One participant described using culturally familiar songs and interpreting them in the home language to support comprehension: *"I teach some songs… interpret for them in native language"* (P1N3). These methods were not only instructional but also emotionally supportive, fostering a safe environment for learners with limited English proficiency.

Group work and peer learning also emerged as meaningful strategies. Some teachers grouped learners deliberately to ensure linguistic diversity:*"I encourage students to work in heterogeneous groups"* (P2C1), enabling peer scaffolding.

The strategies identified are summarised in Table 3.

Theme 3: effectiveness of multilingual support strategies

Participants evaluated the effectiveness of their strategies by observing improved learner participation, confidence, and comprehension. Visual and auditory tools were particularly valued for making abstract content accessible. As P2N3 shared: *"I play a video in English and another in Yoruba…,"* demonstrating how bilingual multimedia resources promote deeper understanding.

Teachers also emphasised scaffolding breaking content into smaller steps, simplifying vocabulary, or providing demonstrations. P5N1 illustrated this well: *"I break it down to smaller syllables for them…."*

Inclusive and differentiated pedagogy also emerged strongly. As one teacher explained: *"I simplify them… so all students are catered for"* (P1B1), reflecting deliberate attempts to recognise linguistic diversity and ensure no learner is left behind.

These patterns are summarised in Table 4.

Theme 4: support received by teachers

Although teachers demonstrated significant innovation, their efforts were often hindered by systemic challenges. Participants described a lack of government support, inadequate infrastructure, limited training in multilingual teaching, and low parental involvement. One teacher stated bluntly: *"The government is not doing anything for us…"* (P3N1). Infrastructure deficits especially electricity,

TABLE 2 Teachers experience with language diversity.

Theme 1: Teachers' experiences with language diversity	% participants	Illustrative quotes
English as a foreign/s language	68% (18/26)	"They speak their dialect… like some are Hausa, they hardly understand English." – P1N1
English as a mandated policy requirement	50% (13/26)	"All the students understand English… I do not have any problem with that." – P2N3
English as a barrier to comprehension	73% (19/26)	"Most of them… keep repeating the same thing, they still do not understand." – P4N1

computers, and teaching materials further restricted teachers' ability to implement multimodal strategies. As noted by P2N2: *"We need more computers… the electricity is nothing to write home about…."*

Parental disengagement was also highlighted as a major barrier, especially when parents were illiterate or unable to assist with homework: *"Parents… find it difficult to help them"* (P1N1).

These challenges are summarised in Table 5.

Theme 5: professional development needs

In light of these challenges, teachers strongly advocated for professional development and capacity building. They supported the idea of in-service training, workshops, and refresher courses that could help them respond better to language barriers in classrooms. For instance,a teacher said *"In-service training is very important for teachers" (P1B1).* Others recommended online courses, noting that digital learning platforms could help teachers improve their ICT skills and instructional design, especially in the context of linguistically diverse classrooms. A teacher from Nigeria emphatically said "*We can develop ourselves through online courses…" (P1N1).* Notably, some teachers called for targeted language acquisition programmes, arguing that teachers should be encouraged to learn local languages to facilitate classroom communication in multilingual contexts (Table 6).

Overall, this study reveals a deeply complex interplay between language policy, pedagogy, and lived classroom realities in Sub-Saharan Africa. While English remains the official medium of instruction, its dominance often undermines learner participation and understanding in diverse linguistic settings. Teachers have responded with contextual ingenuity and practical innovations, but their efforts are constrained by lack of systemic support and professional development. These findings underscore the urgent need for multilingual education policies that are context-sensitive, teacher-inclusive, and backed by institutional support systems. Teachers cannot continue to shoulder the responsibility for bridging language gaps alone; governments, school managements, and communities must collaboratively act to promote linguistically inclusive education in Africa.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a rich, multidimensional picture of how teachers in sub-Saharan Africa are navigating multilingual classroom environments through pedagogical inventiveness, cultural responsiveness, and resistance to exclusionary language policies. Based on sociocultural and decolonial theoretical frameworks, the findings identify both structural barriers and proactive approaches used by teachers to create inclusive and meaningful learning experiences.

Teachers experience with language diversity

A key finding of this study is the tension between the mandatory use of English (or other former colonial languages) and learners'

TABLE 3 Innovative multilingual support strategies.

Theme 2: innovative multilingual support strategies	% participants	Illustrative quotes
Code-switching and translanguaging	82% (21/26)	"Sometimes… I will use Yoruba to explain… though it's not allowed." – P3N2
Teaching aids and multimodal tools	77% (20/26)	"We use body language… flashcards… videos." – P2N2
Group work and peer learning	55% (14/26)	"Encourage students to work in heterogeneous groups…" – P2C1
Oral literacy/play-based methods	41% (11/26)	"I teach some songs… interpret for them in native language." – P1N3

TABLE 4 Effectiveness of multilingual support strategies.

Theme 3: effectiveness of multilingual support strategies	% participants	Illustrative quotes
Scaffolding and differentiation	50% (13/26)	"I break it down to smaller syllables for them…" – P5N1
Visual and audio tools	59% (15/26)	"I play a video in English and another in Yoruba…" – P2N3
Inclusive pedagogy	45% (12/26)	"I simplify them… so all students are catered for." – P1B1

TABLE 5 Support received by teachers.

Theme 4: support received by teachers	% Participants	Illustrative quotes
Lack of government support	86% (23/26)	"The government is not doing anything for us…" – P3N1
Need for ICT and infrastructure	64% (17/26)	"We need more computers… the electricity is nothing to write home about…" – P2N2
Lack of parental involvement	64% (17/26)	"Parents believe paying school fees is enough…" – P3N2
Parental literacy challenges	32% (8/26)	"Parents… find it difficult to help them." – P1N1

TABLE 6 Professional development needs.

Theme 5: professional development needs	% Participants	Illustrative quotes
Need for in-service training	73% (19/26)	"In-service training is very important for teachers." – P1B1
Online learning and self-paced development	50% (13/26)	"We can develop ourselves through online courses…" – P1N1
Learning local languages	41% (11/26)	"You should be able to speak their language…" – P2N3

linguistic realities. According to data, 73% of instructors believe that English is a barrier to understanding, particularly among early-grade children and those in rural or linguistically homogeneous contexts. This is consistent with previous research demonstrating that learning a foreign language impedes conceptual comprehension and academic advancement (Heugh, 2013; UNESCO, 2014). Rather than accept this limitation passively, teachers have adopted multilingual strategies such as code-switching and translanguaging. These techniques represent a recontextualisation of language from a problem to be solved to an asset to be used. According to SCT (Vygotsky, 1978), teachers recognise that language enhances learning, and that using students' home languages enriches comprehension and connects current knowledge to new concepts. Translanguaging empowers learners to use their entire linguistic resources, enhancing their identity and comprehension (Garcia and Wei, 2014; Makalela, 2015).

Innovative multilingual support strategies

The result shows teachers' pedagogical agency and adaptive expertise in responding to multilingual classroom realities. Despite operating within policy environments that privilege English as the sole medium of instruction, teachers actively deployed multilingual strategies to mediate learning and ensure comprehension. The use of translanguaging and code-switching across all study sites demonstrates that teachers view learners' home languages not as obstacles, but as essential cognitive and pedagogical resources. This is in line with translanguaging theory, which positions multilingual learners' full linguistic repertoires as central to meaning-making and knowledge construction (Makalela, 2015). Teachers' willingness to contravene monolingual policies reflects a form of professional judgement grounded in learners' immediate needs rather than abstract policy ideals. From a sociocultural perspective, these practices can be understood as scaffolding strategies that connect new academic concepts to learners' prior linguistic knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). In this sense, teachers' multilingual practices function as mediational tools that support comprehension, participation, and learner confidence.

Another noteworthy finding is the use of multimodal and play-based pedagogies. Instructional aids such as flashcards, movies, gestures oral literacy and play-based methods were used by teachers to improve verbal instruction. These strategies are consistent with the ideas of culturally sustaining education (Paris and Alim, 2017), emphasising the need of engaging learners through familiar cultural expressions and sensory modalities. These approaches are both developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant, particularly in under-resourced settings where printed resources may be restricted. SCT is once again relevant, as these strategies reveal how teachers assist learning by employing the resources and symbols available in their sociocultural contexts. The use of music, nonverbal communication, and narrative demonstrates the collective knowledge systems and educational norms embedded in African societies. These strategies serve cognitive and emotional functions, enhancing retention and fostering an emotional connection with the learning experience.

Effectiveness of multilingual support strategies

Teachers evaluated the effectiveness of their methods by measuring student engagement and comprehension. Approximately 59% found visual and auditory assistance to be particularly beneficial, while 50% cited scaffolding tactics such as information segmentation. These findings emphasise the importance of personalised instruction, especially in linguistically diverse educational contexts. Inclusive pedagogy has also become an important component of good teaching. Teachers actively tailored instruction to students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, often drawing on their own multilingual identities in the process. This is consistent with Janks' (2010) argument that critical language awareness enables teachers to engage in reflective discourse about language, power, and pedagogy. It supports Cummins' (2001) theory that instructors who recognise students' identities through inclusive practices may reduce the negative effects of subtractive bilingualism.

Support received by teachers

The importance of teacher agency is one of the study's key findings. Despite systematic neglect, with 86% of teachers reporting a lack of government support, teachers demonstrated exceptional ingenuity and resilience. This is consistent with research stressing the importance of teacher agency in implementing inclusive pedagogies in challenging settings (Johnson and Freeman, 2010; Priestley et al., 2015). Teachers suggested modifying class plans, creating original resources, and learning local languages to improve student support. According to decolonial theorists (Mignolo, 2007; Ngũgĩ wa, 1986), these actions are examples of resistance. By rejecting the limits of standardised curricula and monolingual ideologies, teachers are expressing their pedagogical autonomy and reinventing language education in accordance with their own beliefs. Their efforts demonstrate "epistemic disobedience" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), which challenges the coloniality of language that regards indigenous languages and knowledge as inferior.

Professional development needs

The study emphasises the limitations of individual initiative in the lack of structural support, notwithstanding the admirable nature of teacher creativity. The majority of participants expressed unhappiness with insufficient training, a lack of resources, and policy inconsistencies. This discovery is consistent with prior critiques of disparities in the implementation of language-in-education programmes across Africa (Trudell, 2016). Teachers called for specialised professional development, including workshops, online courses, and language acquisition teaching. Such approaches could improve their ability to deal with linguistic diversity and integrate practices into new pedagogical frameworks, such as translanguaging and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Furthermore, the need for teachers to learn indigenous languages reflects a decolonial change in professional identity. Teachers are increasingly seeing proficiency in indigenous languages as a career advantage, rather than simply aspiring to mastery of English or French. This transformation represents a comprehensive reassessment of linguistic capital and supports the inclusion of decolonial concepts in teacher education (Makalela, 2016).

The study also sheds light on the limited but critical role of parents and communities. Nearly two-thirds of teachers reported parental disengagement, citing illiteracy, economic hardship, or cultural deference to schools. Despite this, some teachers expressed optimism about the potential for community-based support, including scholarships and home language reinforcement. This points to a need for more holistic, ecosystemic approaches to multilingual education, where schools, families, and communities collaborate to support learners. Culturally sustaining pedagogy encourages such partnerships, viewing education as a collective endeavour rather than a top-down transmission of knowledge (Gay, 2018; Paris and Alim, 2017).

Limitations of the study

While the study provides rich, contextual insights into language use and multilingual pedagogy in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The focus group format may have limited individual expression on sensitive topics, and translation across various languages poses a risk of meaning loss or distortion, despite meticulous transcribing and validation processes. Furthermore, as a qualitative investigation, the results are not statistically generalisable but are designed to contribute to theory development, professional practice, and policy discourse in similar circumstances.

Conclusion

This study provides a dynamic and culturally informed representation of multilingual education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Teachers are proactive agents that navigate, reject, and transform linguistic frameworks through their daily educational judgements, rather than just enforcing legislation. Their strategies, which include code-switching, translanguaging, multimodal teaching, culturally appropriate examples, and targeted scaffolding, demonstrate a deep understanding of harmonising policy goals with learner realities. The study conceptually validates the use of SCT and decolonial frameworks to examine language education in African contexts. Language functions as both a mediating tool and a political construct. Instructing in linguistically diverse classrooms requires both methodological expertise and a critical awareness of identity, power, and epistemology.

The findings highlight the importance of comprehensive investment in multilingual education. Teachers cannot be expected to correct systemic inequities indefinitely. Educational ministries, teacher training institutes, and international partners must prioritise the development of policies, resources, and efforts to foster linguistically inclusive and culturally affirming pedagogy. Finally, the study contributes to the growing body of research that repositions African teachers as knowledge makers and change agents. By prioritising their voices, practices, and thoughts, we move closer to an educational paradigm that values Africa's language diversity as a cornerstone for cognitive growth, cultural fortitude, and social equality, rather than an impediment to overcome.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions in this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Educational institutions should prioritise both in-service and pre-service training in multilingual pedagogies, including translanguaging, inclusive teaching, and culturally sustaining practices, tailored to local classroom realities.
2. Ministries of education should invest in developing and distributing quality teaching materials in local languages, including textbooks, audio-visual tools, and digital content suited to regional linguistic contexts.
3. Language-in-education policies should be restructured to support sustained multilingual instruction beyond the early grades, formally recognising local languages as core instructional assets.
4. Schools should promote parental and community involvement in language development through literacy programmes, awareness campaigns, and home–school partnerships supporting mother tongue use.
5. Governments and research bodies should support cross-country collaboration to scale effective multilingual practices and drive teaching innovation grounded in African linguistic and cultural diversity.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Faculty of Educational Psychology Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

MO: Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Writing – review & editing. SM: Methodology, Writing – original draft, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declared that financial support was not received for this work and/or its publication.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Generative AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Any alternative text (alt text) provided alongside figures in this article has been generated by Frontiers with the support of artificial intelligence and reasonable efforts have been made to ensure accuracy, including review by the authors wherever possible. If you identify any issues, please contact us.

Publisher's note

References

Alhazmi, A. A., and Kaufmann, A. (2022). Phenomenological qualitative methods applied to the analysis of cross-cultural experience in novel educational social contexts. *Front. Psychol.* 13, 1–12. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.785134

Alidou, H., Glanz, C., and Nikièma, N. (2011). Quality multilingual and multicultural education for lifelong learning. *Int. Rev. Educ.* 57, 529–539. doi: 10.1007/s11159-011-9259-z

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual. Res. Psychol.* 3, 77–101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brock-Utne, B., and Nota, F.. 2010. The economics of language of instruction in Africa: examples from Tanzania. *Paper presented at the Africa in the age of globalisation: conceptions and misconceptions conference, Ontario, Canada*, Routledge, Cambridge.

Creese, A., and Blackledge, A. (2010). Translanguaging in the bilingual classroom: a pedagogy for learning and teaching? *Mod. Lang. J.* 94, 103–115. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00986.x

Cummins, J. (2001). Bilingual children's mother tongue: why is it important for education? *Sprogforum* 13, 15–20.

Ethnologue. (2020). Languages of the world. Available online at: https://www.ethnologue.com/

Gay, G. (2018). Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice. 3rd Edn. Colombia University, New York: Teachers College Press.

Garcia, O., and Wei, L. (2014). Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Heugh, K. (2012). Multilingual education in Africa. Hoboken: Wiley.

Heugh, K. (2013). Multilingual education policy in South Africa constrained by theoretical and historical disconnections. *Annu. Rev. Appl. Linguist.* 33, 215–237. doi: 10.1017/S0267190513000135

Janks, H. (2010). Literacy and power. New York, NY: Routledge.

Johnson, D. C., and Freeman, R. (2010). "Appropriating language policy on the local level: working the spaces for bilingual education" in Negotiating language policies in schools: Educators as policymakers. eds. K. Menken and O. Garcia (New York and London: Routledge), 13–31.

Kerfoot, C., and Van Heerden, M. (2015). Testing the waters: exploring the teaching of genres in a cape flats primary school in South Africa. *Lang. Educ.* 29, 235–255. doi: 10.1080/09500782.2014.994526

Lantolf, J., and Thorne, S. L. (2006). Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Machimana, P. N. N., and Genis, G. (2024). Translanguaging in the classroom: a strategy for English first additional language learning. *South Afr. Linguist. Appl. Lang. Stud.* 42, 1–13. doi: 10.2989/16073614.2024.2387610

Mahan, S., Phatudi, N., and Modise, M. (2024). Translanguaging as a strategy for navigating multilingualism in peri-urban preschool classrooms. *South Afr. J. Childhood Educ.* 14, 1–10. doi: 10.4102/sajce.v14i1.1478

Mahlomaholo, S. M. G. (2013). "Creating sustainable learning environments through socially inclusive research" in A research report submitted to the discipline of psychology, faculty of the humanities (Bloemfontein, South Africa: University of the Free State).

Makalela, L. (2015). Translanguaging as a vehicle for epistemic access: cases for reading comprehension and multilingual interactions. *Per Linguam* 31, 15–29. doi: 10.5785/31-1-628

Makalela, L. (2016). "Translanguaging practices in a south African institution of higher learning: a case of Ubuntu multilingual return" in Translanguaging in higher education. Beyond monolingual ideologies. eds. C. M. Mazak and K. S. Carroll (Bristol: Multilingual Matters), 11–28.

Makoni, S., and Pennycook, A. (2012). "Disinventing multilingualism" in From monological multi-lingualism to multilingual francas. eds. M. Martin-Jones and A. Blackledge (Cambridge: Routledge).

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being. *Cult. Stud.* 21, 240–270. doi: 10.1080/09502380601162548

Mignolo, W. (2007). Coloniality: the darker side of modernity. *Cult. Stud.* 21, 155–167.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2013). Empire, global coloniality and African subjectivity. New York: Berghahn.

Ngũgĩ wa, T. (1986). Decolonising the mind: the language of African literature. London: James Currey.

Norton, B. (2013). "Identity, literacy and the multilingual classroom" in The multilingual turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL and bilingual education. ed. S. May (New York: Routledge), 103–122.

Okal, B. O. (2014). Benefit of multilingualism in education. *Universal J. Educ. Res.* 2, 223–229. doi: 10.13189/ujer.2014.020304

Ollerhead, S. (2019). Teaching across semiotic modes with multilingual learners: translanguaging in an Australian classroom. *Lang. Educ.* 33, 106–122. doi: 10.1080/09500782.2018.1516780

Ouane, A., and Glanz, C. (2010). Why and how Africa should invest in African languages and multilingual education: An evidence- and practice-based policy advocacy brief. Paris, Hamburg: UIL.

Paris, D., and Alim, H. S. (2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.

Prah, K. K. (2009). "Mother-tongue education in Africa for emancipation and development: towards the intellectualisation of African languages" in Languages and education in Africa: a comparative and transdisciplinary discussion. eds. B. Brock-Utne and I. Skattum (Oxford: Symposium Books).

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., and Robinson, S. (2015). Teacher agency: an ecological approach. London: Bloomsbury.

Probyn, M. J. (2024). Multilingual literacies for learning: shifting ideologies, developing praxis. *Read. Writ.* 15:a505. doi: 10.4102/rw.v15i1.505

Rogoff, B. (2024). Mutually constituting, fractal: individual and cultural aspects of holistic process. *Rev. Res. Educ.* 47, 60–83. doi: 10.3102/0091732X231224666

Seroto, J., and Higgs, P. (2024). African indigenous education in the postcolonial period: a critical reflection. *J. Educ.* 95, 147–168. doi: 10.17159/2520-9868/i95a08

Sizwe, M., and Thokozani, M. (2024). Factors contributing to poor literacy among grade 4 learners in Gauteng Province of South Africa. *Zhongguo Kuangye*

Daxue Xuebao/J. China Univ. Min. Technol. 29, 77–82. doi: 10.1654/zkdx.2024.29.2-6

Trudell, B. (2016). Language choice and education quality in eastern and southern Africa: a review. *Comp. Educ.* 52, 281–293. doi: 10.1080/03050068.2016.1185252

Trudell, B. (2018). Language and education in Nigeria: A review of policy and practice. Abuja: British Council and UNICEF.

UNESCO (2014). Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all. EFA global monitoring report 2014. Paris: UNESCO.

UNICEF. (2022). Are children really learning? Available online at: file:///C:/Users/u05295132/Downloads/UNICEF_Are-children-really-learning_Report_2022_English%20(1).pdf (Accessed March 12, 2024).

Vygotsky, L. (1978). Social development theory, Available online at: http://www.tip.psychology.org/vygotsky.html

Wertsch, J. V. (1991). "A sociocultural approach to socially shared cognition" in Perspectives on socially shared cognition. eds. L. B. Resnick, J. M. Levine and S. D. Teasley (Washington D.C, USA: American Psychological Association), 85–100.