Promoting multilingualism through translanguaging in South African classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Multilingualism has become a 'buzz' term in the academic fora in South Africa and the world at large. Research on multilingualism in South Africa has become ubiquitous, however, academic policies have rendered multilingualism a concealed reality. This paper aims to highlight findings of an inquiry into the existence of multilingual students in an academic literacy class. The paper also intends to bring out how multilingual students utilise their language practices in their mission to understand academic concepts. In this study, students' perceptions about their multilingual nature are brought to the fore using a qualitative statistical analysis approach. A questionnaire was administered to solicit multilingual students' views regarding the use of all the languages in their repertoire for academic purposes. The outcome shows that multilingual students benefit more from using a translingual approach to understand academic concepts as opposed to using the code-switching approach. Finally, the study shows that students yearn for the recognition and utilisation of their multilingual nature in their academic endeavours. The paper will respond by suggesting ways in which translingual pedagogy can be used to leverage students' multilingual habitus.

Keywords: translanguaging; multilingualism; translingual pedagogy; multilingual habitus

1. **Introduction**

The world today has proven to be multilingual. Evidence shows that out of 196 countries in the world there are seven billion inhabitants who speak 7000 languages (Lewis, Jones and Baker 2012). With evidence growing pointing to the shift in the world order where multilingualism has become the norm, the academic arena insists on monolingual academic standard practices (Garcia and Wei 2014). The South African context would seem at face value to view multilingualism with significance, but the reality is that a monolingual ideology is still being upheld.

The Language Policy of Higher Education (2020) emanated because of the 2012 report that was commissioned by the Minister of Higher Education to assess the success of the use of African languages as mediums of instruction. The report unveiled that there was little to no success on the exploration of African languages to facilitate access and success at institutions of higher learning (Department of Higher Education 2020:7). Notably, the department acknowledges and confesses to recognising the elevation of the English language over other languages:

> Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT): Recognising the de facto status of English as the language of learning and teaching across South African higher education institutions, this policy calls upon universities to adopt a flexible approach in the implementation of English as the language of learning and teaching. Necessary support must be provided to students for whom English is not their first language or mother tongue, in order to ensure academic success (Department of Higher Education 2020: 17, Article 29).

Given this backdrop, even when states recognise and acknowledge the multilingual nature of their citizens, they place the English language as the standard academic language (Garcia and Wei 2014). Ndlhovu and Makalela (2021) view the unilingual status of the English language in institutions of higher learning as an alignment with colonial policies. In fact, Ndlhovu and Makalela (2021) insist that higher education currently, is not linguistically different from the apartheid period in South Africa.

The purpose of this paper is to explore multilingualism from a multilingual student's point of view. The paper will unveil what needs to be considered when teaching multilinguals, considering their backgrounds and language practices.

A monolingual view in a multilingual context

As far back as the 20th century, Oksaar (1982) defines multilingualism as any degree of linguistic ability from an equally good command of two or more languages. Multilingualism is

the study of the social contract in which two or more languages are known and used by the speakers (Moore and Gajo, 2009). As mentioned earlier on, multilingualism has grabbed the attention of many scholars as well as governments. However, multilingualism from an African point of view, has been mishandled and along the way, its true meaning seems to be wearing away. Ndlhovu (2015) problematises a multilingual view that focuses on counting languages but ignoring other language practices inherent when languages are used . In most cases, languages are enumerated as autonomous languages that exist separately in the mind of a multilingual (Heller 2007). Garcia (2009) explains that multilingualism should be considered from a dynamic conceptualisation where the naming of languages as first language (L1) and a second language (L2) is superseded by the speaker's language practices. Thus, when one considers multilingualism, it should not be a consideration of how many languages one can speak, but there should be a reflection on the various language practices that are related to the different languages that one possesses in their linguistic repertoire. In explaining the different language practices possessed by African people, Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021) emphasise the need to examine the different language practices that multilinguals have in their repertoires. Ndlhovu and Makalela (2021) explain that language practices possessed by multilinguals have with or without being formally educated.

Mainstream views of multilingualism favour a monolingual ideology and are validated by educational policies where languages are enumerated as stand-alone commodities that may or may not be used for academic purposes as the educational institutions deem fit. In addition, even multilingual research in academia continues to be obscured (Piller 2016). Piller (2016) explains that when multilingualism is researched, in most cases, it is benchmarked against a 'language' and the language is English. In other words, multilingualism is seen as a combination of serial or parallel monolingualism due to the hegemony given to the English language, especially for purposes of research (Heller 2007). One aspect that needs to be considered and I wish to also problematise is that multilingualism is researched and theorised from a context free perspective. This results in a misconstrued nature of multilingualism where it is viewed as enumerated languages that exist in a speaker's mind (Ndhlovu 2017). Evidence from a survey that was conducted by Liddicoat cited by Piller (2016) shows that several research articles that were published on multilingualism were not anchored in any polity of region. This aspect problematises multilingualism from a global South point of view because it theorises multilingualism that does not exist. In other words, multilingualism is viewed from an abstract point of view. It also negates the nature of multilinguals and various aspects of their nature that accompany them regardless of the language they speak.

On the other hand, Piller (2016 :28) poses multilingualism to be viewed as an umbrella term that views language as a variety of linguistic contexts and practices. These linguistic contexts and practices include speaker social status, individual proficiencies and institutional contexts are some of the main variables that shape a great diversity of multilingualism. A view of

multilingualism from an individual's linguistic context fits snugly and explains multilingualism appropriately in the global south where diversity and unity play a significant role in recognising multilinguals. This view is supported by Gogolin (2002) who was inspired by Bourdieu's (1996) notion of linguistic habitus, where Gogolin refers to multilingual habitus. According to Ndhlovu (2015), a multilingual habitus perspective seeks to accommodate and recognise those language practices that are generally ignored, marginalised and consigned to the peripheries of educational epistemologies and pedagogies. When a multilingual habitus is employed in an educational setting, it allows for students' language practices to be considered as students make meaning of learning material. (Lewis et al 2012; Heugh 2019; Garcia & Wei 2014). In explaining how multilingual habitus may be employed in multilingual academic contexts. Benson (2014: 293) identified at least five key contours and educational benefits of a multilingual habitus. First, it allows for the negotiation of language(s) of literacy and interaction among classroom participants. Second, a multilingual habitus approach allows for the design of learning goals in terms of the quality and usefulness of the competences of learners. Third, it provides opportunities for building on students' knowledge and experiences, thus promoting a systematic and holistic approach to engaging various types or forms of knowledge. The fourth benefit is about promoting the development of metalinguistic awareness among both educators and students as an integral part of conducting research and disseminating research outcomes. Fifth, a multilingual habitus approach encourages scaffolding meaning and using methods and other language types appropriate to students' needs and experiences. In short, a multilingual habitus perspective draws the attention of educators and policymakers to students' pre-existing strengths such as intellectual abilities, communication skills, language abilities, interpersonal skills, capacities, dispositions, interests and motivations.

Multilingualism in educational settings should be viewed from a diversity lens where cultural practices and historical perspectives are considered for it to have meaning and to be used and construed from an unambiguous stance. This undertaking requires the adoption of teaching and learning at a high level of acceptance of students' linguistic repertoires with a constant disruption of linguistic boundaries (Makalela 2015). The next section of this paper will look into the realities of multilingualism from the South African standpoint, using a historical context.

Multilingualism from the reality

There is historical evidence available in Africa in general and in South Africa in particular, that shows that the early inhabitants shared common language practices that kept them together in unity and harmony more than 120 000 years ago (Makalela 2018). As that far back, historical corroboration asserts that the Khoe and the San people interacted with each other using a variety of languages (Cox 1996, Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000). In addition, the Bantu languages speakers settled in around 600 BC across the whole of Southern African states in what became

the Monomutapa empire (Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000). According to Kemezis (2010), Monomutapa included the entire Zambezi River Valley (modern day Angola, Zambia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe) from Zumbo in what is now North Central Mozambique to the Indian Ocean. In addition, contemporary historians such as Bourdillon (1998) explain that the empire stretched:

> *"*between the Lake Ro and the Ethiopick Sea, together with the mountains of the moon, Cluverius reckons to be four hundred Dutch miles: and the Breadth, between the Head-Fountain of Nilus and the Cape of Good Hope, three hundred Dutch miles. For all the little Kingdoms, from the river Magnice [*Zambesi]* to the Cape of Good Hope are said to acknowledge the Prince of Monomotapa for their supreme Lord.

In short, the Monomutapa empire may have covered the greater part of Southern Africa.

Makalela (2015) advocated for the recognition of the African way of life where the guiding principle is the interconnectedness explained by the 'Ubuntu' found among the people. Africans are not divided according to languages, and neither is their cohabitation in communities judged by their linguistic differences, rather it is the mantra "I am because of you" that guides them" (Makalela 2015; Ndhlovu & Makalela 2021). This nature is revealed in the way the Monomutapa empire was run between 1623 and 1902. According to Chinaiwa (1972: 431), the Monomutapa economy depended on agriculture as well as trade with the Portuguese. However, this economy was a noncash economy whereby all the surplus agricultural produce was shared with other members of the kingdom as a way of maintaining social relations. What was important to these people was the relations among themselves and not which languages they spoke. It is also important to cite that, sharing as well as knowing that the neighbour has eaten is a cultural aspect of the African people. Knowing that one's existence relied on the other person's existence formed part of the culture of the Monomutapa dwellers.

When one searches further, the Monomutapa kingdom was made up of Bantu speakers who are situated in Southern and Central regions of present day Africa (Klíma, Růžička & Zima 1976).

Klíma et al. (1976) further explain that Bantu languages are harmonious and share some grammatical structures. This aspect explains that African languages spoken across Africa were shared and spoken as people communicated and traded during the Monomutapa civilisation and many other civilisations, including the Mapungubwe civilization of the Limpopo valley in the 13th century (Chinaiwa 1972). It is important to note that Klima et al. (1976) observe that speakers of Bantu languages are characterised by storytelling as well as common proverbs that are used in their speech. Needless to say, most stories recounted as well as poetry that is recited have the same themes though they are told in different languages. This historical fact

corroborates Makalela's (2015) assertion of the fuzziness and interconnectedness of African languages which makes their speakers to be multilingual. The fuzziness in African indigenous languages allows many speakers to become multilingual and their multilinguality is not only determined by the count of languages but by traditional and cultural beliefs. In the same vein, Mbirimi-Hungwe (2021a) has disputed the placing of languages in hierarchical order as first language (L1) and second language (L2), due to the interrelatedness of the languages but most importantly, the practices and ways of knowing accompanied by the languages as they are spoken.

Given their background, students whom we find in classrooms are multilinguals in the true sense of possessing a blend of language practices that are influenced by various languages that they have acquired during socialization (Mbirimi-Hungwe 2021a). It is therefore important for researchers in the field of multilingualism to conduct research from a context-based view where one size of multilingualism does not fit all. Rather, multilingualism from an African point of view requires taking into consideration Ubuntu as part of multilinguals' nature and their ways of knowing. The question that remains is how can that be employed in South African classrooms? How can lecturers make multilingualism an unveiled reality in South African classrooms? The next section will explain how a translingual approach to teaching can be used to leverage students' multilingual nature, thereby recognizing the various sources and funds of knowledge they possess.

2. Translanguaging theory in a multilingual classroom (Theoretical framework)

Translanguaging is a concept that was first coined by Cen Williams in the 1980s to describe planned and systematic use of two languages for teaching and learning inside the same classroom (Lewis et al. 2012). It was created as a Welsh word '*trawsieithu*'. Cen Williams coined the term in order to name a pedagogical practice, which deliberately switches the language mode of input and output in bilingual classrooms (Lewis et al. 2012).

Translanguaging grants multilinguals, in this case students, the right to use their linguistic resources to understand concepts. Understanding of concepts from a translanguaging point of view is dependent on the speaker and not the teacher's point of view (Garcia and Wei, 2014). Translanguaging differs from code-switching in that the latter separates languages into distinct codes or systems which are switched on and off for communicative purposes (Velasco and Garcia, 2014), whereas translanguaging poses that all languages in a multilingual's mind are active and can be used all at once as and when the speaker requires them for meaning-making (Garcia, Flores & Woodley, 2012).

Translanguaging challenges the conventional understanding of language boundaries between culturally and politically labelled languages e.g. English, isiZulu, Sepedi, Chinese etc. (Wei,

2016). Instead, translanguaging posits that multilinguals have one linguistic repertoire from which they select linguistic features strategically to communicate effectively (Garcia and Wei, 2014; Garcia, Flores & Woodley, 2012). In this sense, when translanguaging is used in the classroom, bilingual students receive information through the medium of one language e.g. in English and use it for themselves through the medium of the other language e.g. in isiZulu, isiXhosa, Tshivenda, Afrikaans, Xitsonga, Sepedi, Setswana, isiNdebele, Sesotho etc. for meaning making and deeper understanding of academic concepts. Therefore, unlike code-switching, translanguaging is student centred; its emphasis is on meaning-making by students using their repertoires, cultural practices and ways of knowing (Ndhlovu 2017; Makalela 2015; Mbirimi-Hungwe 2021b) and not on the teachers' understanding. Baker (2011) explains that translanguaging can be both pupil directed and teacher centred. However, the main focus is for students to make meaning of learning material by using the linguistic resources at their disposal. In the same manner, this study adopts a student centred approach to the use of translanguaging where the lecturer is responsible for the design of classroom activities and allows students to use their linguistic resources to understand the academic material.

The translanguaging pedagogic theory is underpinned by a cognitive process involving a two or more-language interchange, meaning that students can receive information in the language of teaching and learning and they can make meaning in their language(s) through discussion while writing in the language of teaching and learning (Baker, 2011: 289). According to Williams (1996), translanguaging uses various cognitive processing skills in listening and reading, as well as the assimilation and accommodation of information. Garcia and Wei (2014) emphasise that translanguaging builds flexibly within strict language education policies to enable students to make meaning by engaging their entire linguistic repertoire. Thus, translanguaging promotes meaning making and a deeper understanding of the academic material using all languages at the students' disposal.

In South Africa, a translingual approach to teaching has been used at primary and secondary school level as well as at university. In all recorded instances, translanguaging has proven to be a useful pedagogic strategy that takes into consideration students' linguistic repertoires as well as their language practices. Ndlhovu and Makalela (2021) report on a study that shows that translanguaging plays an important role in academic literacy classrooms. The research conducted by Ndlhovu and Makalela (2021)also suggests that the use of more than one language is a cultural competence of students from African languages background. This can be enabled through translanguaging. Mbirimi-Hungwe (2021b) in her research, demonstrates the use of students' language practices to understand academic reading material using a translingual approach.

In the same vein, Yafele (2021) refers to the use of translanguaging among first year university students as a 'humanising' approach to teaching. Yafele (2021) shows that translanguaging as a humanising approach created a safe place for the validation and legitimisation of students' cultural repertoires in academic learning.

At the University of Cape Town, Nakhooda and Paxton (2021) explored the use of translanguaging to understand Biotechnology concepts. Nakhooda and Paxton (2021) illustrate that a translanguaging approach impacts on student identities. They elaborate on their finding by revealing that students felt that their languages were affirmed because they were being used in the classroom to understand concepts. These recent studies and many others that were published in South Africa, show that translanguaging can be used as a way of acknowledging and recognising the different language practices that students bring to the classroom. In addition, translanguaging is a way of being responsive to cultural, linguistic and language practices diversity that is found in the classroom.

3. The study

This study was conducted using a questionnaire to solicit students' views after they had been exposed to a translanguaging treatment in order to leverage their understanding of the academic texts that they were supposed to use to write an essay. This group of participants consisted of 110 students who were enrolled as first year students in Medicine. There were 65 male participants and 45 female participants. The participants had a mean age of 19. Ten languages were spoken among the participants, namely, Sepedi, Setswana, Tshivenda, SiSwati, Afrikaans, Chishona, Xitsonga, English, isiXhosa, and IsiZulu.

Students were expected to read three different articles on 'Viruses' and from those three articles, they were required to write an expository essay explaining how viruses work in the human body and ways of preventing viruses from adverse manifestation in the human body. Before they embarked on the individual task of writing the expository essay, students were randomly grouped into groups of six. In these groups, they were supposed to divide themselves into three pairs. Each pair would read one of the three articles and become 'experts' such that they would play the role of the 'recaller' and explain in detail to the rest of the group aspects of the article. As the 'experts' recalled what they had understood from their article, the rest would be 'listeners'. In addition, each pair would also be asked questions by their group members based on the article they would have been 'experts' on. In essence, each group member had the opportunity of being a 'recaller' as well as a 'listener'. These discussions were conducted in any of the languages that the groups felt comfortable to use (translanguaging).

Furthermore, the participants were requested to respond to a questionnaire in order to find out their views on the experience of using translanguaging during a collaborative task. The questionnaire comprised 13 closed-ended questions with a five point Likert scale from one, (strongly agree) to five, (strongly disagree). In addition, the questionnaire was divided into three sections whereby the first section solicited students' views on translanguaging, the second section sought to find out their views on collaborative learning and lastly to find out how students felt about the 'recaller' and 'listener' roles they played during group discussions. The last section of the questionnaire solicited for participants' demographic profile, that is the languages they speak, the high school they attended as well as their age gender.

The questionnaire was designed as follows:

		Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
	Students' experience with Translanguaging						
1.	When I read I discuss with my friends in other languages besides English in order to test my understanding of what I would have read	1	2	3	4	5	V1
2.	I understand texts better when I discuss concepts with friends in other languages besides English	1	2	3	4	5	V2
3.	When I do not understand some concepts in English I try to ask my friends to explain to me in other language(s) that I can under stand	1	2	3	4	5	V3
4.	When assigned to do some group work we / I use other languages besides English to discuss the task	1	2	3	4	5	V4
5.	During class discussions the lecturer encourages us to express ourselves in other languages besides English.	1	2	3	4	5	V5
	Students' views on collaborative learning						
6.	Discussing ideas from a text with group members helps me to understand concepts better.						V6
7.	The group discussions gave me the opportunity to express my understanding of the text in my own language						V7
8.	My group members worked well and always tried to help each other to understand the texts						V8
9.	Reading academic texts has become interesting because I can discuss with my group members using other languages besides English						V9
10.	My group discussed the texts using different languages besides English						V10

For purposes of this paper, I will present the results for questions one to ten.

4. Findings

Question 1: *After reading an academic text I discuss with my friends in other languages to test my understanding of what I would have read.*

This question sought to confirm whether participants discussed what they would have read with their friends in a language that they understood better. The results indicate that 51 (46.3%) strongly agreed, 41(37.2%) agreed, 12 (10.9%) were uncertain, two disagreed (1.8%) and 4 (3.6 %) strongly disagreed.

Question 2: *I understand texts better when I discuss concepts with my friends in other languages besides English.*

The second question aimed to elicit responses on whether the participants understood the texts better when they discussed concepts with friends in other languages besides English. The responses to this question show that 47 (42.7%) strongly agreed, 46 (41.85) agreed, 9 (8.1) were uncertain, 4 (3.6%) disagreed and 4 (3.6) strongly disagreed.

Question 3: *When I do not understand concepts in English, I ask my friends to explain to me in other languages besides English.*

The third question was designed to ascertain whether the participants sought clarification from friends on difficult concepts in other languages that they understood besides English. Forty-nine participants (44.5%) strongly agreed, 41 (37.2%) agreed, 16(14.5%) were not certain, 2 (1.8%) disagreed and 2 (1.8%) disagreed.

Question 4: *When assigned to do some group work I/ we use other languages besides English to make sure that we understand the assignment.*
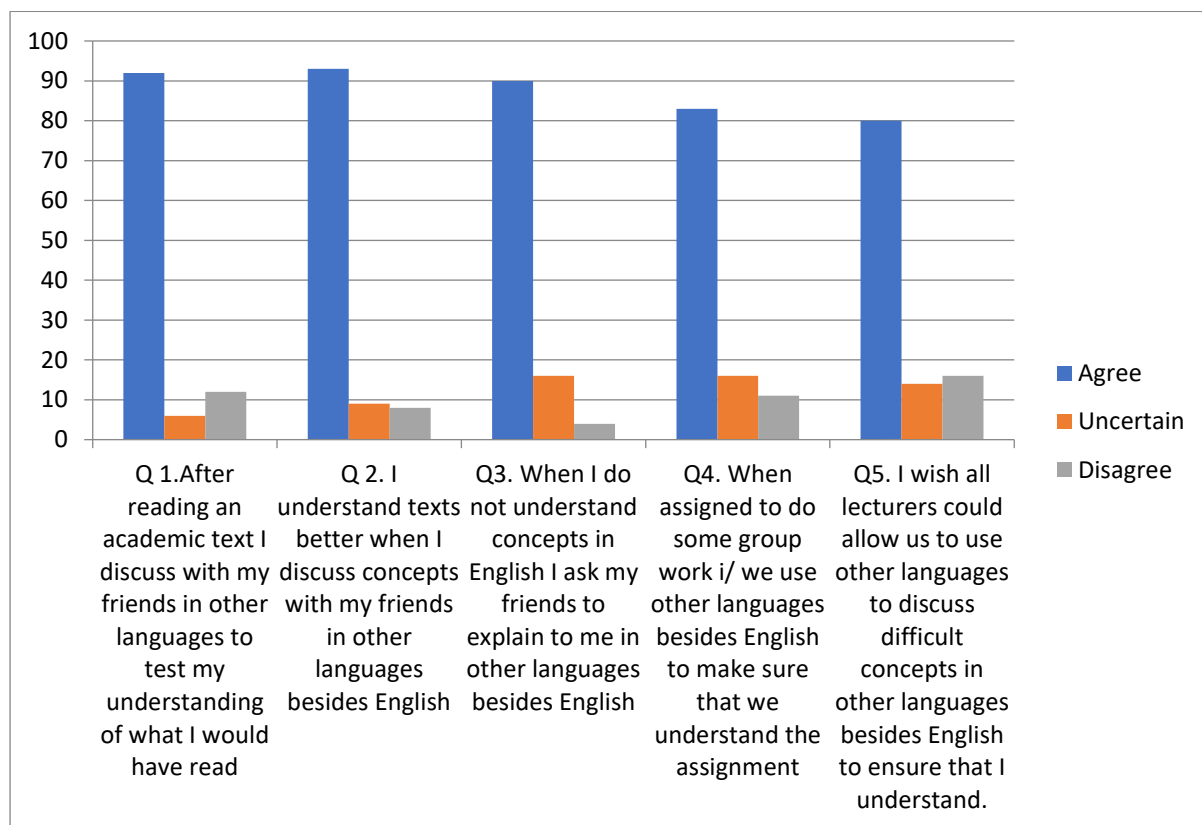
The fourth question required the respondents to ascertain whether they discussed the assigned group work tasks in other languages. The responses show that 32 (29%) strongly agreed, 51 (46.3%) agreed, 16 (14.5%), 11 (10%) disagreed 0 strongly disagreed and 0 was uncertain.

Question 5: *I wish all lecturers could allow us to use other languages to discuss difficult concepts in other languages besides English to ensure that I understand.*

The last statement under this section was question 5, which intended to find out if students wished they could be allowed, during class and group discussions, to express themselves in any language that they were comfortable in. Responses show that 42 (38.1%) strongly agreed, 38 (34.5%), 14 (12.7%) was uncertain, 7 (6.3%) disagreed and 9 (8.1%) strongly disagreed.

When the results are collapsed to represent responses where strongly agree and agree are combined to become agreed and strongly disagree as well as disagreed are represented as disagreed, the following were the ultimate findings:

Table 1.1: Questions 1-5

The results from the first section where the participants' views about translanguaging were solicited show that the responses by many of them generally were positive towards the use of translanguaging.

The next section of the questionnaire sought to determine student views on group activities through translanguaging. The intention under this section was to establish how students viewed the group activity that they had been assigned in a class where they had to use translanguaging as well as group activity as pedagogy.

Question 6: *When I discussed the articles with my group members in other languages besides English, I understood concepts better*

Thus, question 6 sought to find out if the group discussions where translanguaging was allowed helped them to understand concepts on viruses better. Seventy-two participants (65.4%)

strongly agreed, 30 (27.2%) agreed, 5 (4.5%) were uncertain, 1 (0.9%) strongly disagreed and 2 (1.8%) disagreed.

Question 7: *The group discussions gave me the opportunity to express my understanding of the text in languages that make me understand the articles better.*

In the same vein, question 7 intended to solicit information on whether translanguaging through group discussions gave the students the opportunity to express their understanding of the assigned texts: 59 participants (53.6%) strongly agreed, 42 (38.1%) agreed, 5 (4.5%) were uncertain whereas 4 (3.6%) disagreed and 0 strongly disagreed.

Question 8: *My group members worked well by assisting each other to understand the articles using other languages besides English.*

This question solicited for the respondents' views on whether their collaborative groups worked well to assist the participants to understand the articles. In addition, it required them to ascertain if their groups assisted each other to understand the texts using a translanguaging approach. 50 (45.4%) strongly agreed, 47(42.7%) agreed, 8 (7.2%) were uncertain, 3 (2.7 %) disagreed and 2 (1.8%) strongly disagreed.
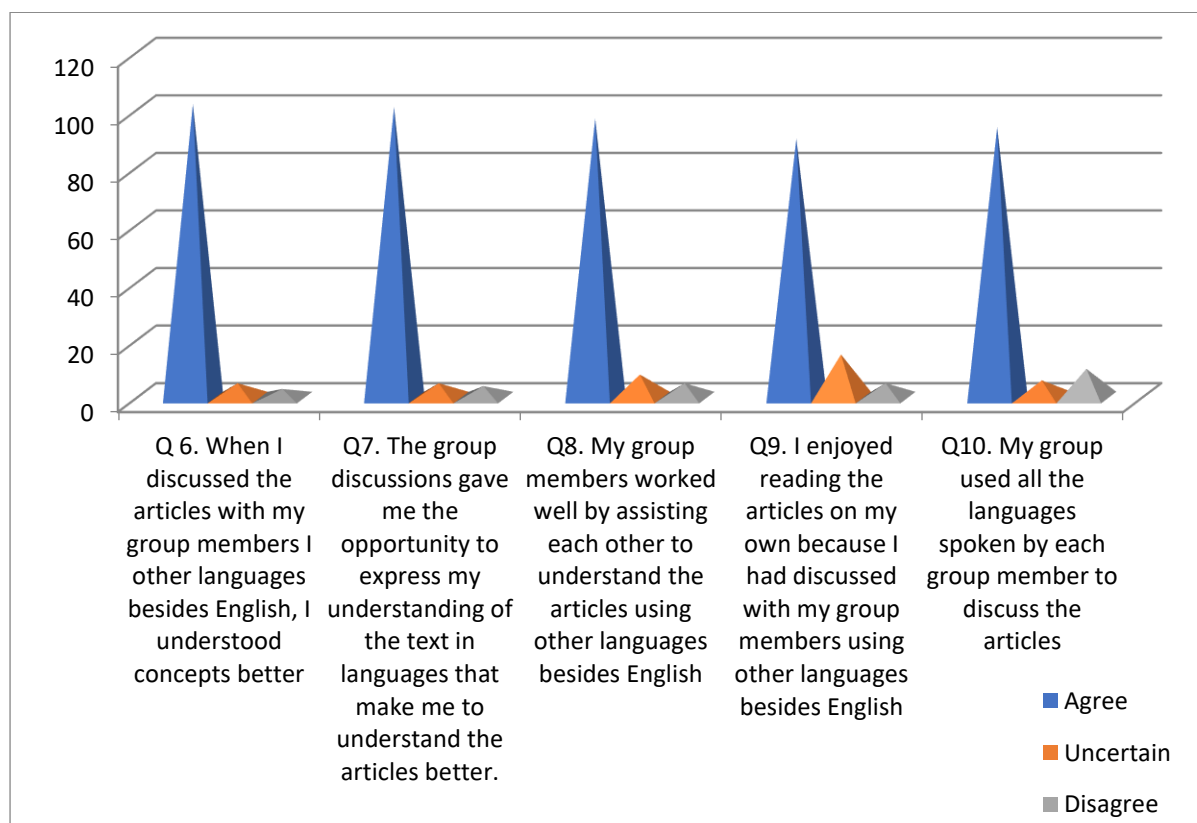
Question 9: *I enjoyed reading the articles on my own because I had discussed it with my group members using other languages besides English.*

The ninth question in this section intended to find out if students had become interested in reading because they were allowed to discuss and translanguage with their group members. The results from question 9 showed that 48 (43.6%) strongly agreed, 42 (34.5%) agreed, 15 (13.6%) were uncertain, 5 (4.5%) disagreed and 0 strongly disagreed.

The last question in this section, question 10, required an affirmation that translanguaging was used during group discussions that were conducted in preparation for the written essay assignment. Results were as follows: Strongly agree 59 (53.6%), agree 35(31.8%), uncertain 6 (5.4%), disagree 6 (5.4%) and strongly disagree 4 (3.6%).

Question 10: *My group used all the languages spoken by each group member to discuss the articles.*

When the results from this section were collapsed into agree, disagree and uncertain they looked as follows:

Table 1.2: Question 6-10

The results for questions 6 to 10 show that many students confirmed the benefits of using translanguaging during the group discussions that were conducted for this study. One of the benefits is confirmed by the responses to question six where many respondents agreed that group discussions conducted using translanguaging helped them to understand what they had read. The responses from question 8 show that many students found that their groups worked well together in order to assist each other to understand the articles. It is also important to mention that from the responses to question 10, many confirmed that all languages that were spoken by the group members were mostly used during group discussions. However, although many responses to question nine showed that they enjoyed reading the assigned article on their own because they were allowed to discuss it translingually with their group members, five respondents indicated that they did not enjoy reading the articles and 15 were uncertain about the matter.

5. **Discussion of findings**

The first five questions from the questionnaire elicited students' views on using translanguaging to understand the texts they had been given to read while the last five, intended to find out from them how they felt when supporting each other to understand concepts using other languages besides English. The results from the responses provided by the participants

resulted in one theme. This theme rests on the acceptance and acknowledgement of the multilingual nature of students by using translanguaging in teaching and what teachers/lecturers do with the multilingual resources that students bring. The identified theme is 'translanguaging embraces multilingual reality in classrooms'. I discuss this theme further in the section below.

Translanguaging embraces multilingual reality in classrooms

One of the characteristics of multilingualism is finding comfort in co-habiting in harmony and assisting each other. When one refers to the way the Monomutapa empire is described by historians, it is clear that the residents thrived mostly by sharing their agricultural produce among themselves (Chanaiwa 1972). The guiding principle was knowing that the welfare of the neighbour was taken care of. In addition, Fouché (1947) shows, that the pottery that is found in the Limpopo valley is similar to some pottery found in modern day Zimbabwe. This shows that these people must have dwelled together and shared pottery-making skills despite the language differences. In the same vein, the responses from the participants in this study show that they found that sharing ideas about the texts they were assigned to read assisted them to understand the texts better (Question six). Multilinguals have their own way of making meaning which is influenced by their cultural background that emphasises the importance of the community and the need to work, live and take care of each other. The responses to (Question eight) show that 82% agreed and strongly agreed that they worked well in their groups to assist each other to understand the texts. Based on their ways of knowing, collaboration forms part of the identity of multilinguals. They are aware of the need to assist and work together in a bid to see each other successful. The same way multilinguals cannot keep the languages that exist in their repertoires in 'silos' (Mbirimi-Hungwe 2021a) or in 'boxes' (Makalela 2015) they cannot be separated from working in collaboration for the success of everyone involved. Makalela (2015) as well as Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021) emphasise the importance of embracing the nature of multilinguals as people who are grounded in knowing that one exists because of the other person. The translanguaging pedagogy allows for all qualities to manifest in multilinguals without stifling their identity.

As pointed out several times in this article, translanguaging, allows students to bring all their linguistic resources to the learning platform as long as they are able to understand the concepts (Garcia 2019; Lewis et al.2012; Garcia and Wei 2014 ; Wei 2016). As mentioned earlier, translanguaging allows for students to move out of linguistic boxes (Makalela 2015) and further allows them to utilise any of the languages in their possession to make meaning of academic material. In the study conducted in this article, there were 10 languages that were spoken among the participants and when the participants were asked (Question 2) about their experience using all the languages at their disposal, a total of 83% agreed and strongly agreed that they benefitted from using other languages besides English in discussing the texts. These participants found it

beneficial to discuss the articles in other languages besides English. This means that the languages that students share among themselves did not hinder them from communicating amongst themselves as they endeavoured to understand the texts. This aspect brought about by translanguaging brings about the understanding that most Bantu languages possess some interconnectedness (Klíma et al. 1976), there are fuzzy boundaries differentiating these languages, and there is some mutual intelligibility (Makalela 2015; Mbirimi-Hungwe 2021a, 2021b) among them that makes speakers understand each other in their communication and ultimately in their collaborative academic activities.

In their responses, the majority of participants indicated that they used all the languages that were spoken by their group members to discuss the texts (see Question 10). This shows that students were not divided by their linguistic diversity during the group discussions. Rather, they stuck together and explained to each other their understanding of the texts despite the different languages that were being used. When one looks at the historical facts, both the Mapungubwe and Monomotapa civilisations had diversity in languages (Fouche 1934; Chinaiwa 1972). However, dwellers continued to trade and interethnic marriages continued to take place. Language differences did not deter their co-habitation. The same can be seen from the response given by the multilingual participants in this study. The languages that were spoken among the participants were used with the sole aim of understanding the text. Knowing that each of the languages that was spoken among them was equally important to be used during discussions is an aspect that translanguaging brings about. According to Garcia (2019), the English language was given a higher status by the English for selfish political gains. In fact, Garcia (2019) explains that there is nothing that accords the English language a higher status than other languages. A translanguaging approach to teaching allows all languages to be viewed at the same level of status and to be used equally for the sake of understanding academic concepts (Lewis et al 2012). I have said elsewhere, and I will continue to say that arranging or stacking and teaching students in languages that are labelled first language (L1) or second language (L2) is not a true reflection of a multilingual's mind (see Mbirimi-Hungwe 2021a, 2021b), it also distorts the true essence of languages and how they are used in a multilinguals' mind.

It is also important to note that, Chinaiwa (1972) mentions that during the reign of the Monomutapa Kingdom, the Portuguese traders tried to destroy the cohesion in the Kingdom for many years. The Kingdom remained strong and fought against any foreign intrusion despite the diversity in the languages articulated among the dwellers. This goes to show that despite differences in languages, multilinguals have a way of knowing that keeps them together for a common cause.

The Language Policy of Higher Education (2020) misses the point of the interdependence of languages. It is also important to note that to some extent, the implementation of the policy

also misses the reality of languages. The revised Language Policy of 2020 is well articulated and its focus is primarily to promote multilingualism in South African higher learning institutions. For example, Article 24 of the policy framework says:

> This policy framework recognises the important role of higher education in the promotion of multilingualism for social, cultural, intellectual and economic development.

The policy framework proceeds to provide its recommendations on how multilingualism should be enacted in the classroom as well as at policy level at institutions of higher learning:

> All institutions must develop strategies, policies and implementation plans for promoting multilingualism as defined by this policy framework. Such plans must indicate at least two official languages, other than the medium of instruction or language of teaching and learning, for development for scholarly discourse as well as official communication. (Department of Higher Education 2020: 14, Article 24).

This section of the policy statement formulates part of what Ndlhovu and Makalela (2021) classify as 'myths' of multilingualism. Out of several 'myths' that Ndlhovu and Makalela (2021) outline, one of them is a continuous propagation and understanding of languages as enumerable entities. The argument brought to the fore is as mentioned earlier that languages cannot be defined in an orderly manner where boundaries exist. Instead, languages possess undefined boundaries which make it untenable to regard them as enumerable.

The policy framework quoted above shows that languages are still being separated and can be counted and stipulated as the number of languages a multilingual may be allowed to use. Also, the policy does not take into consideration that a multilingual's mind does not consist of several monolinguals (Garcia & Wei 2014) but rather that the languages dwell in an interconnected manner where the speaker selects and utilizes various linguistic features as and when it fits them. If the policy framework stipulates that at least two languages be used for academic purposes, then multilingualism will become a stifled reality in the classrooms. However, if translanguaging is allowed to dominate , multilingualism will be embraced in its entirety for the academic benefit of students. If translanguaging is not embraced at policy level, multilingualism will continue to be viewed from a monolingual bias.

6. Conclusion

The study's main objective was to show that multilingualism, from a South Africa view, is concealed by the continued perpetuation of a monolingual ideology manifested in various educational settings. Researchers from the global north have been using multilingualism as an abstract idea ignoring the true aspects of multilingualism. The language policies that have been

enacted still view languages as enumerable entities that can be separated. The current and latest policy suggests how many languages a multilingual student may be allowed to use for academic purposes which unfortunately negates the essence of multilinguals. The study also solicited the views of the participants after they were allowed to use translanguaging as a resources to understand academic content. The participants responded showing that translanguaging allowed them to manifest themselves as multilinguals who are not defined only by languages but also by various cultural and traditional aspects that make them who they are. Aspects that have been seen through some historical research have assisted to situate multilingualism habitus as an integral part of teaching where students' abilities and pre-existing strengths that are brought about by them being multilingual are recognised and embraced. I recommend that lecturers as well as researchers continue to advocate for the recognition of multilingualism as a way of knowing for multilinguals not as a count of languages so that multilingualism will remain a reality in the classrooms. The prevalence of authentic multilingualism will demystify a monolingual ideology in multilingualism.

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