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Evaluating the Language-in-Education Policy of 1997: Advancing inclusivity and multilingual education

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a critical analysis of the Norms and Standards for Language Policy in Public Schools in terms of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. The evaluation focuses on its objectives, implementation, and impact on promoting inclusivity and linguistic diversity in education. The study was prompted by the persisting disparities in access to quality education based on linguistic backgrounds in post-apartheid South Africa. Using a conceptual framework based on theories of inclusive education, translanguaging pedagogy, and policy implementation, this study explores the policy's objectives, scope, and how it addresses equity and access for diverse language groups.

Additionally, it assesses implementation strategies and evaluates the policy's strengths and weaknesses in promoting inclusive education and multilingualism.

The article recommends establishing specific, measurable objectives and targets, formulating an action plan for consistent implementation, prioritising teacher training and support programs, and encouraging community involvement. By addressing these shortcomings, South Africa can advance inclusivity and multilingualism in its public schools, fostering an equitable and enriching learning environment for all learners.

Keywords: policy implementation; multilingual education; equity; inclusive education; diversity; translanguaging

1. Introduction

South Africa has remarkable diversity, with over 20 indigenous spoken languages and 11 official languages (Chitapi, 2018; Simons & Fennig, 2017; The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 – hereafter Constitution). In addition, South African Sign Language (SASL) was recognised as the twelfth official language of South Africa in July 2023 (Constitution Eighteenth Amendment Act, 3 of 2023 [CEAA]). This inclusion emphasises the country's commitment to inclusivity and the recognition of the rights of the Deaf community. Thus, South Africa will have 12 official languages, pending the promulgation of the CEAA. Therefore, authors such as Khan (2016) and Juvonen et al. (2019) argue that education should foster cohesion and build an inclusive society (Khan, 2016; Juvonen et al., 2019).

In South Africa's post-apartheid era, the Norms and Standards for Language Policy in Public Schools – hereafter *Norms and Standards* – (Department of Education, 1997) emerged during a significant historical period of societal transition as a crucial document when South Africa sought to dismantle apartheid and address the linguistic disparities inherent in the education system (Khan, 2016; Juvonen et al., 2019; Wildsmith-Cromarty, & Balfour, 2019).

The Norms and Standards (Department of Education, 1997) are made up of two policies, the

- Language in Education Policy (LiEP) in terms of the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 (section IV)

- Norms and Standards Regarding Language Policy (NSRLP) in terms of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (section V).

The two policies differ in their objectives but must be studied concurrently as they complement each other (Department of Education, 1997, section II). The Norms and Standards aim to protect and promote individual language rights and communication in education, facilitate national and international communication through bi- or multilingualism, and address the neglect of historically disadvantaged languages in school education through cost-efficient and effective mechanisms (Department of Education, 1997, section V, A[1-3]). According to two Department of Basic Education reports on the status of the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in South African public schools(2010; 2023), bi- or multilingualism "refers to the ability to communicate effectively in two or more languages, with more or less the same degree of proficiency

in both languages. The two terms are often used interchangeably in the literature" (Department of Basic Education, 2010, p.3; 2023, p. 8).

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, provide the foundation for the language policy in schools (Department of Basic Education, 2010). Apartheid policies marginalised certain linguistic communities, leading to unequal access to quality education. Hence, when entering the new constitutional democracy, education policies had to change. The language policy had to change because according to section 6.1 of the Constitution "[t]he official languages of the Republic are, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, South African Sign Language, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu". The state must take measures to advance the use of, specifically the historically marginalized languages, by promoting equitability of use and esteem. In addition, the Constitution (1996, section 29.2) also states that *"*Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable", and the South African School Act (SASA) (section 5.1) adds that "A public school must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way". SASA section 6.23 also states that "No form of racial discrimination may be practised in implementing policy determined under this section". This Act also declared SASL as an official language for the purposes of learning and teaching in a public school. In actuality, a lot of students might not have just one favourite language – rather, they might have several. Thus, multilingual education is a reality in South African schools, one that has been gradually addressed since 1994 (Department of Basic Education, 2023). As such, the language policy responded to historical injustices and represented a transformative effort to embrace linguistic diversity and multilingualism and promote equitable access to quality education for all language communities (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019).

Savaera (2023) attests that multilingual education aims to help students become proficient in several languages by recognising and utilising linguistic diversity in educational environments. It highlights the use of many languages, including native tongues, in the educational process to improve language proficiency and comprehension of academic material. Hence, this article examines the policy's effectiveness in achieving its objectives and advancing inclusivity and multilingual education in South African public schools. Various studies have been conducted on the implementation and impact of the Norms and Standards (Department of Education, 1997). Ikwuemesim (2021) noted that foreign learners who could not cope with the school's language were

withdrawn from schools. The study showed the importance of understanding inclusivity, participation and the roles of teachers and learners in achieving and implementing a workable language policy. Graven and Robertson (2020) argued that allowing students to utilise their native language in addition to English aided their mathematical sense-making. Their recommendation is supported by the evaluation of data from an extensive development initiative investigating strategies to improve primary mathematics instruction and learning quality. They called for a more persistent and severe examination of multilingual approaches' pedagogical and epistemological usefulness in South African classrooms. Chitapi (2018) argued that public attitudes against the extended use of African languages and the inadequate resourcing of multilingual projects concerning teacher and materials development are constraints that limit the implementation of the LiEP (Department of Education,1997, section IV). He concluded that the solution lies in the completion of the LiEP, its integration into the Department of Basic Education's main programmes, and the overt promotion of African languages within and beyond education.

None of the studies mentioned has focused on the current state of implementation and the policy's impact since its inception in 1997. In multilingual societies, issues pertaining to the use of the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) in schools have become extremely significant, particularly for parents, educators, and policymakers (Department of Basic Education, 2010). Additionally, the emphasis on offering multilingual education in schools by offering numerous monolingual classes may need to be adjusted in light of the research, which demonstrates how more flexible language use can very successfully enhance learning in multilingual (Department of Basic Education, 2023). Hence, this study argues for a recent analysis of the overall umbrella Norms and Standards policy (Department of Education, 1997).

The study uses a conceptual framework to explore the effectiveness of the policy (Department of Education, 1997) in addressing emerging issues related to linguistic diversity, inclusive education, and access to quality education in South Africa. The conceptual framework used in the article combines theories of *inclusive education*, *linguistic diversity* and *policy implementation*. While the conceptual framework draws upon established theories, the specific application of these theories to the analysis of the language policy in the article is an original contribution to the critical analysis. The study aims to explore the policy's effectiveness in promoting equitable access to quality education for all language communities. Despite the policy's aspirations, persistent disparities in access to quality education based on linguistic backgrounds continue to

exist. There is a need to critically assess the policy's implementation, identify challenges, and explore opportunities for improvement.

2. Theoretical framing

The theories underpinning the study are the theories of *inclusive education*, *linguistic diversity*, and *policy implementation*. Since the study uses assumptions from the three theories, the study utilises a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework emphasises the significance of embracing multiple languages in education and recognises the value of mother tongue-based instruction in early grades. The major developers of the mentioned theories, together with the assumption of each theory, are discussed.

Inclusive pedagogy/education

Inclusive education has evolved through contributions from various researchers and practitioners. According to UNICEF (n.d.) The best approach to ensure that each child has an equal opportunity to attend school, study, and acquire the skills necessary for success is through inclusive education. All students should attend the same schools and classrooms to practice inclusive education. It entails actual educational possibilities for historically marginalised groups, including minority language speakers and children with disabilities. Diverse groups can flourish alongside one another in inclusive systems because they recognise and value the distinct contributions that students from different backgrounds make to the classroom. Notable pioneers in the field include Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and Maria Montessori (Al-Shammari et al., 2019). The Salamanca Statement also significantly promoted inclusive education globally (UNESCO, 1994), and this paper only focuses on the inclusive theory of inclusive education through the lens of the Salamanca Statement (1994).

The Salamanca Statement recognises that every child has a fundamental right to education and must be allowed to acquire and maintain an appropriate level of learning. Every child has unique features, interests, abilities, and learning requirements . Education services should take these features and requirements into account, and special education students must be able to attend mainstream schools (UNESCO, 1994, 3[VIII]). Schools with an inclusive mindset are the most effective in eliminating discriminatory attitudes, building inviting communities, and accomplishing education for all. Such schools deliver effective education to most children while increasing efficiency and cost-effectiveness (UNESCO, 1994, 3.VIII). In the context of the critical analysis of the language policy in South African public schools, the assumptions of the

Salamanca Statement are relevant in evaluating the policy's alignment with principles of inclusive education, equitable access, and recognition of linguistic diversity. It provides a valuable framework to assess the extent to which the policy promotes an inclusive learning environment and supports the educational rights of all learners, including those from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Translanguaging

Linguists, sociolinguists, and education academics all contribute to the field of linguistic diversity. Its growth cannot be attributed to a single person; however, prominent academics such as Joshua Fishman, Jim Cummins, and Ofelia García have substantially contributed to our understanding of linguistic diversity in education. As such, this article focuses on the *linguistic diversity theory* by Ofelia García, known as the *translanguaging pedagogy*. The term refers to the systematic and intentional switching of input and output languages in bilingual education. García (2009) broadened the concept of translanguaging to characterise the dynamic heteroglossic integrated linguistic practices of multilingual people and to emphasise the legitimacy of bilingual instruction that integrates rather than separates languages. García and colleagues focused on the theoretical features of translanguaging and examined with educators how translanguaging theory may be implemented in classroom contexts (García, 2009; García, Flores & Woodley, 2012; García & Leiva, 2014; García & Wei, 2014; García & Lin, 2016; García & Klein, 2016; García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2017; Vogel & García, 2017). A translanguaging pedagogy is formed when translanguaging theory is the basis, and translanguaging practice is the goal in the teaching and learning arena (Seals, 2021).

Translanguaging challenges traditional views of bilingualism and multilingualism, emphasising language use as dynamic and fluid (García, 2014). According to García, language is a fundamental aspect of identity, and people's linguistic practices are deeply tied to their sense of self and community (García, 2014). In the context of education, translanguaging advocates for recognising and valuing students' entire linguistic repertoires rather than segregating languages and promoting monolingual instruction (García & Wei, 2014; García & Lin, 2016). Furthermore, multilingualism is the norm, and linguistic diversity is an asset that enriches societies (Seals et al., 2019). Translanguaging encourages educators to create inclusive learning environments where students can draw on all their language resources to communicate and make meaning, ultimately leading to more effective and meaningful educational experiences (Nishanti, 2021).

Translanguaging addresses the power dynamics and inequality that linguistic diversity can bring. Dominant languages often enjoy higher status and resources, while minority languages might be marginalised or excluded from educational opportunities (Garcia, 2014; Seals, 2021). This recognition calls for efforts to maintain and revitalise languages, ensuring the survival and thriving of diverse languages and cultural expressions (García & Wei, 2014; García & Lin, 2016). Translanguaging pedagogy contributions have significantly influenced language education policies and practices, encouraging the implementation of bilingual and multilingual approaches to teaching and learning (García, 2009; Vogel & García, 2017; Seals, 2021). By acknowledging the context-dependent nature of linguistic diversity, Translanguaging pedagogy prompts educators and policymakers to adopt more nuanced and culturally sensitive approaches to language education, empowering learners to embrace their linguistic identities and foster a deeper appreciation for the diverse linguistic tapestry that shapes our societies (García, 2009; Vogel & García, 2017; Seals, 2021). Analysing language policy can provide insights into its conformity with inclusive and multilingual educational principles by analysing these critical assumptions of *translanguaging pedagogy* theory.

Translanguaging pedagogy can be used as a tool to evaluate the policy's ability to produce a more inclusive, culturally responsive, and enriching learning environment for all learners in South African public schools. While there may not be extensive studies demonstrating translanguaging's direct impact on improved language competencies in target languages or LoLTs, existing research suggests that translanguaging has the potential to enhance learner engagement, participation, and understanding. These benefits are crucial for fostering an enriching learning environment (García, 2009; Vogel & García, 2017; Seals, 2021). Additionally, the Department of Basic Education 2023 report refers to translanguaging, as the flexible use of language, which is seen as an internal strategy by which speakers use all their linguistic resources to communicate. Therefore "translanguaging as a teaching strategy is seen as proactive and planned" (Department of Basic Education, 2023, p.8).

Policy implementation

Mthethwa (2012) defines policy implementation as the procedures, resources, and connections that connect policies to program activity. Many scholars have developed theories to demonstrate the essence of policy implementation and the factors that contribute to success or failure, such as the various levels, processes, and stakeholders involved in policy implementation (Thomas & Grindle, 1990; Calista, 1994; Matland, 1995; Alesch & Petak, 2001; Brinkerhoff & Crosby, 2002; Bressers, 2004; O'Toole, 2004). In addition, Kamwangamalu and Bryant (2012) specifically speak to LiEP and

highlight that the formulation and execution of policies and plans about language use in education are intricate procedures that necessitate multiple decisions to be made for them to be successful. Despite research pointing to the elements that produce favourable results, governments frequently overlook these or find them too challenging to implement, given their limited means. Inadequate preparation and learning outcomes in language acquisition might result in resource waste.

This analysis focuses only on the policy implementation framework proposed by Bhuyan et al. (2010), which consists of seven key dimensions that influence policy implementation:

1. the policy, its formulation, and dissemination

2. social, political, and economic context

3. leadership for policy implementation

4. stakeholder involvement in policy implementation

5. implementation planning and resource mobilisation

6. operations and services; and

7. feedback on progress and results.

Firstly, the framework emphasises the importance of a clear policy with well-defined objectives and effective communication with all stakeholders.

The second crucial dimension is understanding the broader social, political, and economic context on which the policy impacts. Contextual factors can present challenges and opportunities that must be considered during implementation.

The third dimension focuses on leadership, highlighting the critical role of effective leadership in guiding and coordinating implementation efforts.

Engaging relevant stakeholders is the fourth dimension, recognising the value of their involvement and support to increase the likelihood of successful policy implementation.

The fifth dimension focuses on comprehensive planning, resource allocation, and mobilisation to support the implementation process effectively.

The sixth dimension addresses policy actions and service delivery to translate policy intentions into tangible results.

Lastly, the framework by Bhuyan et al. (2010) underscores the importance of continuous feedback, monitoring, and evaluation to assess progress and outcomes,

facilitating necessary adjustments for improved implementation. By considering these dimensions, policymakers and implementers can navigate the complexities of policy implementation and enhance the potential for successful policy outcomes.

In the education context, the above policy implementation framework proposed by Bhuyan et al. (2010) offers valuable insights into the factors that influence the successful implementation of language policies, such as the Norms and Standards (Department of Education, 1997). By addressing these seven dimensions, South African education policymakers can enhance the implementation of language policies, promote inclusive education, and embrace the country's linguistic diversity. By leveraging effective leadership, stakeholder engagement, and resource allocation, the policy's transformative potential can be fully realised, ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their linguistic background.

The three chosen theories (inclusive pedagogy, translanguaging pedagogy, and policy implementation framework) are suitable for this study as they provide a comprehensive and holistic lens to evaluate the Norms and Standards. Inclusive pedagogy offers insights into fostering an equitable and diverse learning environment while translanguaging pedagogy sheds light on leveraging learners' multilingualism for enhanced learning. The policy implementation framework ensures a systematic assessment of its effectiveness and identifies key dimensions influencing its successful implementation. Together, these theories offer a robust analytical framework to assess the policy's impact on advancing inclusivity and multilingual education, facilitating evidence-based recommendations for improvement.

3. Methodology

The transformative paradigm recognises the need for societal change and aims to address social inequalities and promote inclusive practices (Yong et al., 2021). By adopting a transformative paradigm, this study seeks to identify the limitations of the Norms and Standards for Language Policy in Public Schools (Department of Education, 1997) and propose recommendations to enhance its impact on advancing inclusivity and multilingual education. A qualitative approach is relevant as it allows for a detailed exploration of the language policy's implementation, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and provides valuable insights into advancing inclusivity and multilingual education in South African public schools. Using document analysis, the study can offer a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the LiEP, drawing from primary sources and official documents. This approach aligns with the qualitative nature of the

study, as it allows for a rich exploration and interpretation of the policy's impact on advancing inclusivity and multilingual education in South African public schools.

This study aims to evaluate the Norms and Standards (Department of Education, 1997), focusing on its impact on advancing inclusivity and multilingual education. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Assess the policy's objectives and aims in promoting linguistic diversity and equitable access to quality education.

- Examine the scope and coverage of the policy and its implications for diverse language communities.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of implementation strategies, including teacher preparation and community involvement.

- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the policy in achieving its intended outcomes.

Data for this study were collected through an analysis of the Norms and Standards document (Department of Education, 1997), official reports on its implementation, and relevant academic literature. The document analysis examined the policy's content, including its stated objectives, strategies, and implementation guidelines. Additionally, official reports on the policy's implementation progress and academic literature on language policy and inclusive education in South Africa were reviewed to provide context and external perspectives. The data collected through document analysis were subjected to thematic analysis. Themes were derived from the research questions and guided by the conceptual framework, incorporating insights from inclusive pedagogy, translanguaging pedagogy, and the policy implementation framework proposed by Bhuyan et al. (2010). The analysis identified patterns, similarities, and disparities within the policy document, official reports, and academic literature. The themes were used to critically evaluate the policy's effectiveness in advancing inclusivity and multilingual education in South African public schools.

The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards. Notably, this research did not involve human participants; therefore, issues related to informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality did not arise. The analysis was conducted solely on public documents, which are publicly accessible and free of confidential information. We maintained transparency and integrity throughout our analysis, ensuring accurate and impartial interpretations of the policy documents. The findings from the analysis were then used to formulate recommendations to enhance the policy's impact and promote more equitable and enriching learning environments for all learners.

4. Findings and discussions (policy analysis)

The analysis of the Norms and Standards (Department of Education, 1997) is presented in this section. The critical analysis paper addresses the research objectives to convey arguments effectively. Themes address the research questions, and suggestions are made based on the findings and a critical policy assessment. The Norms and Standards are made up of two policies: the Language in Education Policy (section IV) and the Norms and Standards Regarding Language Policy (NSRLP) (section V). The two policies differ in their objectives but must be studied concurrently as they complement each other (Department of Education 1997, section II). As such, for this article, both policies will be analysed as one coherent policy under the Norms and Standards.

Context and background

The Norms and Standards notice in terms of the South African Schools Act (Department of Education, 1997) was introduced in the aftermath of apartheid. Since 1994, efforts to address the realities of multilingual education in South African schools have been made (Department of Basic Education, 2023), reflecting the need for an inclusive education system that acknowledged the linguistic diversity of South Africa. Hence, one of the paradigms it operates under, indicates that:

> [I]n terms of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the government, and thus the Department of Education, recognises that our cultural diversity is a valuable national asset and hence is tasked, amongst other things, to promote multilingualism, the development of the official languages, and respect of all languages used in the country, including South African Sign Language and the languages referred to in the South African Constitution (Department of Education, 1997, section IV A[1]).

It sought to dismantle language-based segregation and promote social cohesion through multilingualism by calling for the school governing body to "stipulate how the school will promote multilingualism through using more than one language of learning and teaching, and/or by offering additional languages as fully-fledged subjects, and/or applying special immersion or language maintenance programmes, or through other means approved by the head of the provincial education department" (Department of Education, 1997, section V, C[1]). However, Cele (2021) argues that the policy has failed to effect and impact its transformation and social inclusion aspirations.

Policy objectives and aims

The Norms and Standards policy (NSRLP) sets its objectives and aims in the introduction The aim recognises that:

> …diversity is a valuable asset, which the state is required to respect, the aim of these norms and standards is the promotion, fulfilment and development of the state's overarching language goals in school education in compliance with the Constitution, namely:
>
> (1) The protection, promotion, fulfilment and extension of the individual's language rights and means of communication in education;
>
> (2) the facilitation of national and international communication through promotion of bi- or multilingualism through cost-efficient and effective mechanisms; and
>
> (3) to redress the neglect of the historically disadvantaged language in school education (Department of Education, 1997, section V, A[1-3]).

Additionally, the LiEP aims:

> 1. to promote full participation in society and the economy through equitable and meaningful access to education; 2. to pursue the language policy most supportive of general conceptual growth amongst learners, and hence to establish additive multilingualism as an approach to language in education; 3. to promote and develop all the official languages; 4. to support the teaching and learning of all other languages required by learners or used by communities in South Africa, including languages used for religious purposes, languages which are important for international trade and communication, and South African Sign Language, as well as Alternative and Augmentative Communication (Department of Education, 1997, section .IV, C[1-4]).

It emphasises creating an inclusive education system accommodating learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. It also recognises the importance of preserving linguistic heritage while promoting proficiency in English as the language of communication (Department of Education, 1997, sections V, A[1-3], IV, C [1-4]).

The Department of Basic Education is tasked with recognising and valuing the linguistic diversity within its student population. This involves creating policies that value this diversity as a positive attribute rather than a challenge. The department must align educational programs with the state's language goals, protecting and promoting language rights. It should protect each student's right to receive education in their language of choice, offering instruction in multiple languages and providing teacher

resources. Promoting bilingualism or multilingualism can enhance national and international communication, and the department should address the historical neglect of certain languages, particularly those of marginalised communities. This includes developing curricula, training teachers, and promoting their use within schools. Therefore, the Department of Basic Education ensures that all learners' education is equitable and inclusive of learners' linguistic diversities, subsequently providing learners with equal access to opportunities.

The policy aligns with the principles of *inclusive education* as argued by the Salamanca Statement (1994) by recognising and accommodating linguistic diversity (UNESCO, 1994). Mohohlwane (2020) support the policy's emphasis on inclusivity and multilingualism as critical aspects of South African education. She agrees with promoting learners' mother tongue while gradually transitioning to English. The policy mentions the importance of mother tongue-based bilingual education but lacks comprehensive support for *translanguaging pedagogy* (Nishanti, 2020). Emphasising *translanguaging pedagogy* could enhance learners' engagement and understanding of concepts across languages. Furthermore, the policy's implementation strategies exhibit gaps, particularly in teacher training and community involvement. A more comprehensive approach to implementation, as suggested by Bhuyan et al. (2010), would enhance the policy's effectiveness.

Cele (2021) criticises the policy's lack of specificity in achieving its objectives, questioning the effectiveness of its implementation. Its lack of specificity and challenges in implementation may hinder its full realisation of inclusive practices. Kaschula (2004) and Kretzer & Kaschula (2021) attest that the policy has yet to be implemented globally, and mother tongue languages are still underrepresented.

While the policy's commitment to inclusivity and multilingualism is commendable, it requires greater specificity and support for *translanguaging pedagogy* to fully capitalise on learners' linguistic resources. Comprehensive strategies, including teacher training and community engagement, are essential for the policy's successful realisation. Continued evaluation and refinement are necessary to ensure that the policy aligns with its objectives and positively impacts the South African education system.

Policy scope and coverage

The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) acknowledges all official languages, which align with the South African Constitution, 1996 (Department of Education, 1997, section IV(A[1]). It further states that "all language subjects shall receive equitable time

and resource allocation" (Department of Education, 1997, section. IV, D[3]). Furthermore, the policy states that "[f]rom grade 3 (Std 1) onwards, all learners shall offer their language of learning and teaching and at least one additional approved language as subjects" (Department of Education, 1997, section IV D[2]). This means that each learner should study in at least two languages, namely their home language and a second language (Department of Education, 1997, section IV, D[2]). It recognises the importance of maintaining the mother tongue language for identity and cultural preservation. By recognising multiple official languages and promoting mother tongue-based education, the policy aims to create an inclusive environment where learners can develop a strong sense of identity and cultural pride. Exposure to multiple languages can also foster cognitive benefits and enhance language proficiency.

Scholars generally support the policy's recognition of linguistic diversity and the importance of mother tongue education for learners' cognitive and cultural development (García & Lin, 2016; Nishanti, 2020). However, some argue that the policy's focus on majority languages might marginalise smaller language groups and hinder their educational opportunities (Howie et al., 2017; Mohohlwane, 2020). The policy's recognition of multiple languages aligns with the principles of *inclusive education*, as it acknowledges learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds (UNESCO, 2009). However, the focus on majority languages may need to be balanced to ensure equitable representation.

The policy's emphasis on mother tongue-based education is consistent with the principles of *translanguaging pedagogy*, as it recognises the value of leveraging learners' linguistic repertoires for better learning outcomes (García & Wei, 2014; García & Lin, 2016). However, the policy's scope requires more explicit guidance on effectively implementing multilingual practices (Rambukwella, 2021). To fully align with the *implementation theory*, the policy should address the needs of smaller language groups and provide adequate resources for implementing mother tongue-based education (Mohohlwane, 2020). The policy's acknowledgement of *linguistic diversity* is a positive step towards inclusive education. To enhance its impact, the policy should ensure equitable representation and resources for all language groups, allowing learners to learn in their mother tongue while developing proficiency in other languages.

Policy implementation strategies

The Norms and Standards Regarding Language Policy (NSRLP) outlines various strategies for implementation, including the promotion of mother tongue-based bilingual education (Department of Education, 1997, section V, A[2]), language support

materials, and teacher development programs (Department of Education, 1997, section V, C[1]); (Department of Education, 1997, section V, D[4]). The Norms and Standards aim for the "facilitation of national and international communication through the promotion of bi- or multilingualism through cost-efficient and effective mechanism" (Department of Education, 1997, section V, A[2]). On the other hand, it requires that:

> the governing body must stipulate how the school will promote multilingualism through using more than one language of learning and teaching, and/or by offering additional languages as fully-fledged subjects, and/or applying special immersion or language maintenance programmes, or through other means approved by the head of the provincial education department programs (Department of Education, 1997, section V, C[1]).

Additionally,

> [t]he provincial department must explore ways and means of sharing scarce human resources. It must also explore ways and means of providing alternative language maintenance programmes in schools and/or school districts that cannot be provided with and/or offer additional languages of teaching in the learners' home language(s). (Department of Education, 1997, section V, D[4]).

The implementation strategies are intended to create an enabling environment where teachers can effectively use learners' mother tongues to instruct and support their language development. Teacher development programs are expected to equip educators with the necessary skills to navigate multilingual classrooms successfully. Scholars generally agree with the policy's focus on mother tongue-based education and teacher development (Nishanti, 2020; Mohohlwane, 2020). According to research, UNESCO (2022) attests that teaching in the mother tongue is an essential aspect of inclusiveness and quality learning, as well as improving learning outcomes and academic success. Teaching in the mother tongue is critical, particularly in primary school, to prevent knowledge gaps and accelerate learning and comprehension (UNESCO, 2022). Most importantly, multilingual education based on the learner's mother tongue allows all students to participate in society (UNESCO, 2022). However, some argue that the strategies lack specificity and may not adequately address the complexities of multilingual classrooms.

Kaschula (2004) argues that although multilingualism is entrenched in the Constitution (1996), the promise of a dynamic and linguistically diversified country appears to be unfulfilled, and multilingualism implementation has been mainly unsuccessful. Additionally, there is still a long way to go until all learners have the right to an

education in their mother tongue. Most pupils in most nations are taught in a language different from their mother tongue, which limits their capacity to learn efficiently (Nishanti, 2020; UNESCO, 2022).

The policy's emphasis on teacher development aligns with *inclusive education* principles, as it recognises the importance of well-prepared educators in meeting learners' diverse needs (UNESCO, 2009). However, explicit guidance on inclusive teaching practices in multilingual settings may benefit the policy. The policy's promotion of mother tongue-based education is consistent with *translanguaging pedagogy*, which advocates for the meaningful use of learners' languages in the learning process (García, 2014). However, further support for teachers in adopting *translanguaging pedagogy* techniques could enhance its implementation.

The policy acknowledges the significance of teacher development, which is crucial for effective implementation (Bhuyan et al., 2010). However, more comprehensive training on *translanguaging pedagogy* would strengthen the policy's alignment with *implementation theory*. The policy's focus on teacher development is vital for successful implementation. To fully align with *inclusive education* and *translanguaging pedagogy*, the policy should provide more explicit guidance on inclusive practices and support teachers in effectively using learners' languages to enhance learning.

Policy equity and access

The policy emphasises providing equal educational opportunities to all learners, irrespective of their linguistic backgrounds (Department of Education, 1997, section IV, C[1]). Norms and Standards indicate that the policy in language education aims to "promote full participation in society and the economy through equitable and meaningful access to education" (Department of Education, 1997, section IV, C[1]). By promoting equitable access to education, the policy seeks to address historical disparities and create a level playing field for all learners. It recognises the importance of accommodating linguistic diversity to foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Cele (2021) supports the policy's emphasis on equity and access. However, some argue that the policy's implementation faces challenges, and learners from marginalised language groups may still experience disparities in educational opportunities (Kretzer & Kaschula, 2021). The policy's focus on equitable access aligns with inclusive education principles, which advocate removing barriers and providing support to meet the diverse needs of all learners (UNESCO, 2021).

However, the policy's implementation challenges must be addressed to achieve true inclusivity. The policy's recognition of linguistic diversity aligns with *translanguaging pedagogy*, which values learners' linguistic repertoires and advocates for meaningful use in learning (García & Kleyn, 2016). The policy's efforts to address equity and access demonstrate alignment with the *implementation theory* (Bhuyan et al., 2010). However, more targeted measures may be needed to bridge the gap between policy intentions and outcomes. The policy's commitment to equity and access is commendable, but its effectiveness in addressing disparities must be closely monitored. To fully align with *inclusive education* and Implementation theories, targeted interventions and support for marginalised language groups are essential for achieving accurate equity in education.

Policy language of learning and teaching

The policy (Department of Education, 1997) advocates using the learners' home language as the language of learning and teaching during the foundation phase (Grades 1 to 3) and gradually transitioning to English as the language of learning and teaching. The document highlights that

> (1) All learners shall offer at least one approved language as a subject in Grade 1 and Grade 2.
> (2) From Grade 3 (Std 1) onwards, all learners shall offer their language of learning and teaching and at least one additional approved language as a subject." (Department of Education, 1997, section 1V, D[1-2]).

The policy recognises the value of the mother tongue in early learning and aims to create a supportive learning environment by using a familiar language for instruction. Gradually transitioning to English prepares learners for later stages of education and enhances their proficiency in the dominant language. In order to support the bridging of racial, linguistic, and regional divisions and to foster respect for other languages, the LiEP aims to both ensure that students acquire an additional language of communication and to encourage the use of their home languages in the classroom (2010). Nishanti (2020) generally supports the policy's emphasis on mother tongue-based education during the foundation phase. They acknowledge the cognitive and academic advantages of using the mother tongue for early instruction (UNESCO, 2022). However, Bayeni and Bhengu (2018) caution that the policy's implementation may be challenging without sufficient resources and teacher training (Kangira, 2016; Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018). In real life, there is sometimes a discrepancy between the home languages of teachers and students and the LoLT of the school. This is due to two factors: first, a

learner may attend a school where the language of instruction is not their native tongue. This may occur as a result of the school's placement within the community; for parents, this is an important factor in their decision on which school to send their kids. In actuality, learner populations differ depending on the communities in which they are situated; some communities are more diverse than others. Second, a growing number of South African students and educators speak multiple languages while interacting in metropolitan and peri-urban settings (Department of Basic Education, 2023).

The policy's recognition of the mother tongue as the language of learning and teaching during the foundation phase aligns with *inclusive education* principles, as it respects learners' linguistic diversity and promotes inclusive practices (UNESCO, 2009). However, the policy could further strengthen its alignment by providing additional support for teachers to implement *translanguaging pedagogy* effectively. The policy's promotion of using the mother tongue aligns with the *translanguaging pedagogy*, which emphasises the value of learners' multilingual resources in learning (García & Wei, 2014). The policy's approach to using the mother tongue aligns with the *implementation theory's* emphasis on practical strategies for policy execution (Bhuyan et al., 2010). However, successful implementation may require additional support for teachers in adopting *translanguaging pedagogy*. The policy's recognition of the mother tongue during the foundation phase is a positive step towards inclusive education. However, the policy's effectiveness hinges on providing adequate resources and support to teachers to implement *translanguaging pedagogy* successfully. This approach would maximise learners' linguistic resources and improve educational outcomes.

Policy teacher preparation and support

The policy acknowledges the importance of teacher preparation and development for effective language instruction:

> [t]he provincial department must explore ways and means of sharing scarce human resources. It must also explore ways and means of providing alternative language maintenance programmes in schools and or school districts which cannot be provided with and or offer additional languages of teaching in the home language(s) of learners (Department of Education, 1997, section V, D[4]).

Teacher preparation and support are critical in ensuring that educators can effectively implement the policy's language strategies and address the diverse linguistic needs of their students. Well-prepared teachers are better equipped to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Chisholm (2019) agrees with the policy's recognition of teacher preparation. However, Goldhaber (2019) expresses concerns about the

adequacy of the training provided and the need for ongoing support to address the complexities of multilingual classrooms. The policy's emphasis on teacher preparation aligns with inclusive education principles, as it acknowledges the importance of well-trained educators catering to learners' diverse needs (UNESCO, 2009). The policy's recognition of the role of teachers in implementing language strategies aligns with *translanguaging pedagogy*, which emphasises the centrality of educators in leveraging learners' linguistic repertoires (Vogel & García, 2017). The policy's acknowledgement of teacher preparation and support aligns with the *implementation theory*, which emphasises the significance of equipping educators with the necessary skills for policy execution (Bhuyan et al., 2010). Teacher preparation and ongoing support are crucial for successful policy implementation. Adequate training and resources are needed to effectively empower teachers to navigate multilingual classrooms. By investing in teacher development, the policy can enhance the quality of education and foster an inclusive learning environment that celebrates linguistic diversity.

Not all students are taught in their home language or even the language of their choice, despite a policy that encourages multilingualism and Foundation Phase instruction in all of South Africa's official languages (Department of Basic Education, 2023). The policy assumes that LoLT and instructors' and students' home languages match; however, this may not always be the case, and teachers may require assistance to improve their instruction in multilingual settings. Therefore, difficulties that develop in multilingual classrooms must be considered in teacher preparation programs and in-service teacher education opportunities.

Policy parent and community involvement

The policy recognises the significance of involving parents and communities in supporting learners' language development. Parents are involved in these decisions through the school governing board, and schools make LoLT selections based on the LiEP (Department of Basic Education, 2023). The Norms and Standards (Department of Education, 1997) argues that "[t]he parent exercises the minor learner's language rights on behalf of the minor learner. Learners who come of age, are hereafter referred to as the learner, which concept will include also the parent in the case of minor learners" (Department of Education, 1997, section V, B[1]). Furthermore,

> [s]ubject to any law dealing with language in education and the Constitutional rights of learners, in determining the language policy of the school, the governing body must stipulate how the school will promote multilingualism through using more than one language of learning and teaching, and/or by offering additional

languages as fully-fledged subjects, and/or applying special immersion or language maintenance programmes, or through other means approved by the head of the provincial education department (Department of Education, 1997, section V, C[1]).

In addition, "In the case of a new school, the governing body of the school in consultation with the relevant provincial authority determines the language policy of the new school in accordance with the regulations promulgated in terms of section 6(1) of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996" (section V, D[2]). Further steps include:

> (1) Any interested learner, or governing body that is dissatisfied with any decision by the head of the provincial department of education, may appeal to the MEC within a period of 60 days.
> (2) Any interested learner, or governing body that is dissatisfied with any decision by the MEC, may approach the Pan South African Language Board to give advice on the constitutionality and/or legality of the decision taken, or may dispute the MEC'S decision by referring the matter to the Arbitration Foundation of South Africa (Department of Education, 1997, section V, E[1-2]).

Engaging parents and communities in education can enhance language learning and cultural preservation. Parents and community members can contribute valuable insights, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Sanders and Sheldon (2009) agree with the policy's recognition of parent and community involvement. They emphasise the importance of creating partnerships between schools and communities to strengthen learners' language skills and cultural connections (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Ðurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). The policy's emphasis on involving parents and communities aligns with *inclusive education* principles, which recognise the significance of collaboration in fostering an inclusive education system (UNESCO, 2009).

The policy's recognition of the role of parents and communities is consistent with *translanguaging pedagogy*, which values learners' linguistic and cultural resources in the learning process (Wei & García, 2022). The policy's acknowledgement of parent and community involvement demonstrates alignment with *implementation theory*, which emphasises the importance of community engagement in successful policy implementation (Bhuyan et al., 2010). Parent and community involvement are invaluable for creating a supportive learning environment. By actively engaging with parents and communities, the policy can leverage their resources to enrich language learning experiences and promote cultural preservation. However, in actuality, learner

populations differ depending on the communities in which they are situated because some communities are more diverse than others (Department of Basic Education, 2023).

Policy assessment and evaluation

The policy mentions the need for ongoing assessment and evaluation of language policies and practices. It notes that "[t]his Language-in-Education Policy Document should be seen as part of a continuous process by which policy for language in education is being developed as part of a national language plan encompassing all sectors of society, including the deaf community" (Department of Education, 1997, section IV, A). A robust assessment and evaluation framework are essential for determining the policy's effectiveness in achieving its objectives. The education system can make informed decisions and refine the policy by monitoring outcomes and gathering data.

Griessel et al. (2019) support the policy's emphasis on assessment and evaluation. However, some highlight the need for a more comprehensive evaluation framework to accurately capture the policy's impact (Cele, 2021). The policy's focus on assessment and evaluation aligns with *inclusive education* principles, which emphasise evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement (UNESCO, 2009). The policy's recognition of the importance of data collection aligns with *translanguaging pedagogy*, which advocates for research-based practices to inform language instruction (Liu et al., 2020; García, 2014). The policy's emphasis on assessment and evaluation is consistent with the *implementation theory*, which highlights the significance of monitoring outcomes for effective policy execution (Bhuyan et al., 2010).

On the other hand, when a policy is explored, the results will be incomplete and unreliable due to the traditional constraints (temporal, human, and financial). The functioning of the policy cycle will likewise be defective in this instance, and policies will be unable to pursue the intended aims optimally (Ghazinoory & Aghaei, 2021). A comprehensive assessment and evaluation framework are vital for refining the policy continually. By leveraging data to inform decision-making, the policy can adapt to meet the evolving needs of learners and ensure its alignment with its objectives and theoretical principles.

5. **Conclusion**

Through a transformative paradigm and qualitative document analysis, this study critically examined the Norms and Standards for Language Policy in Public Schools in South Africa (Department of Education, 1997). The analysis revealed its potential to advance inclusivity and multilingualism in South African public schools, representing a critical step toward these goals in the country's education system.

The policy's objectives align with promoting inclusivity and a certain view of multilingualism in education, but its lack of specificity and implementation challenges hinders its full potential. The policy can be strengthened by embracing *inclusive education*, *translanguaging pedagogy*, and *implementation* theories to promote equitable access to education and celebrate linguistic diversity. Specific objectives and indicators for practical assessment will maximise its impact.

Balancing the focus on majority and minor languages will ensure equitable representation and support for all language groups. In the early grades (Grades R to 3), it is policy for learners to be taught in their home language where possible. However, from Grade 3 onwards, there is a significant shift towards English and, to a lesser extent, Afrikaans as the primary language of instruction. The use of indigenous languages as mediums of instruction beyond the foundation phase remains limited, although there are ongoing efforts to promote multilingual education. Strengthening teacher training in *translanguaging pedagogy* and inclusive practices will empower educators to leverage learners' linguistic resources effectively.

Additionally, based on the findings, greater community engagement is crucial for cultural preservation and a supportive learning environment. To continually refine the policy, a comprehensive evaluation framework is needed. Future research on implementation challenges, academic achievement, and the experiences of marginalised language groups, including the deaf and sign language users, will contribute to creating a more inclusive and transformative education system in South Africa. By embracing these recommendations and future studies, the policy can play a pivotal role in fostering an education system that celebrates linguistic diversity and empowers all learners.

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