

Multilingualism in South African universities is a fallacy: a critical realist perspective

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Abstract

This paper explores the empirical, real, and actual trajectories in South African universities regarding multilingualism and decolonisation. It employs the critical realist approach to uncover these trajectories through reviewed literature. It investigates whether the policy is followed in implementing African indigenous languages (AILs) against the hegemony of English and Afrikaans in South African universities. The paper found that multilingualism is still an area that requires attention, even though ample legislation and policies were drafted to necessitate decolonised practices that foster it. This paper argues that the notion of decolonisation and the use of multilingualism can be placed at the centre of curriculum transformation. However, the paper again argues that actual events like a disconnect between basic and higher education systems, digitalisation, intellectualisation of African languages and confidence of the African language users in the academia can hinder multilingualism. African learners come to universities with unique African language repertoires, but English is still mostly used as a medium of instruction in most South African universities. This paper makes recommendations that can rescue the situation, some of them which are funding African languages digitalisation, awarding African languages research outputs, and widely conducting studies on the African students and academics' perceptions on multilingual education.

Keywords: African indigenous languages, decolonisation, epistemologies, language policy, medium of instruction

Introduction

Colonialism and Apartheid in South Africa (SA) have primarily contributed to the reduction of cultural capital of indigenous languages (Figone, 2012.) Throughout the colonial period, indigenous African languages (IALs) were marginalized and not used in higher education (HE) as languages of teaching and learning or to promote multilingualism in SA universities. The issue of marginalized languages is globally evident in academia, human rights advocacy, politics, and policymaking (Sibanda & Maphosa, 2015). But it is argued by research that language policy incorporating African languages can never work, for it is increasingly problematic for an African language to do what English does (Madadzhe & Sepota in Mutasa, 2006). In other words, African languages can never easily advance to competing

with English and Afrikaans because they are not equally equipped (Mutasa, 2006).

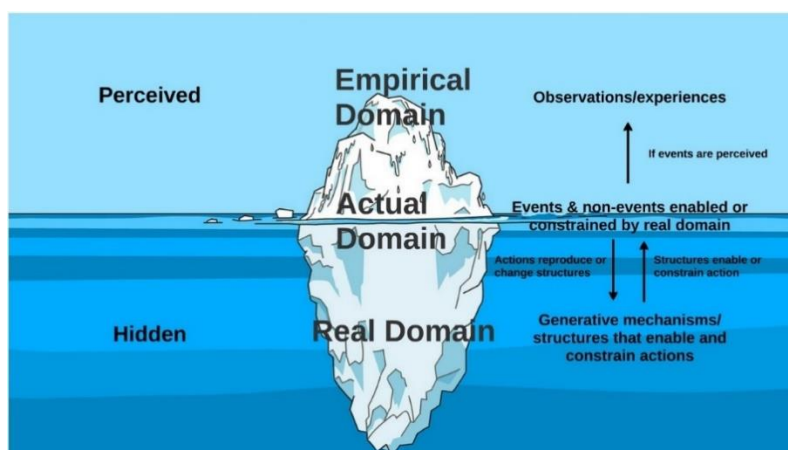
The enforcement of English and Afrikaans as the media of instruction (MOI) caused great harm in South African HE. Nonetheless the reinstitution of new power by IALs to replace the hegemony of English, may create new hegemony, thus continuing to alienate and oppress a different group in SA (Figone, 2012) viewed as an agenda to create Africanised ethnic institutions (Wade, 2005). This continues to make English a highly rated official language in education, administration, and business which is detrimental to Indigenous Languages (ILs) (Sibanda & Maphosa, 2015) despite many attempts to promote the IALs post 1994 in HE in South African universities. Duplessis (2021) advises that it demands that the Eurocentric mentality and that ideas of meritocracy behind the

ideology must be challenged. However, there are serious consequences for language teaching, learning, and research in the Global South because of the Global North's ideas undermining the ontological realities and epistemological viewpoints in the Global South (Fallas-Escobar, 2023). Key to this struggle should be decolonisation of the curriculum, academia and students. Decolonising education for students involves more than just valuing and utilising AILs and culture to confront historical injustices and marginalization and incorporating pertinent and affordable technologies as (Mampane, Omidire & Aluko, 2018) allude. This paper attempts to highlight why it is a challenge to promote IALs in HE to promote multilingualism. We argue that the use of multilingualism in South African universities is a misconception due to existing barriers that are apparent in HEIs and the little progress made in of African languages in facilitating access and success in higher education institutions through IALs. Until the entire higher education sector derives innovative policies and strategies to actively advance multilingualism in HEIs the multilingual education in universities will continue to be fallacious.

This paper employs critical realism framework because it conceptualises the actions, forces, and changes that occur in the HE system by exploring the real, the actual, and the empirical domains in the system. It does this by putting forward the incongruities in the implementation of AILs in South African universities to argue that the use of multilingualism in HE is a misconception.

Methodology

Bhaskar developed the philosophy of Critical realism (CR) and described social reality as having three domains: the real, the actual, and the empirical. The real domain is made up of social structures and generating mechanisms that assign power and resources to various individuals within a social context, thereby enabling or constraining the actions of those individuals. These actions (or lack of action) create events (or non-events) in the actual domain (Anderson, 2020). People typically do actions that either copy or modify real-world structures. Sometimes events occurs with no recognition by people. If an event is observed, however, that experience occurs in the empirical domain (Anderson, 2020). The three domains are shown in the diagram below from Anderson (2020).



“Critical Realism’s Stratified Reality” by Brad C. Anderson is licensed under the CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 / A derivative from the original work (Anderson, 2020)

The study guided by CR, adopted a qualitative desktop method to explore secondary data to gather solid arguments to elaborate on structures and agents that regress the use of AILs universities. Data were generated by analysing literature available in the public domain through, policy documents, government reports, journals, and books. Because the data were already in written form, it is nonreactive and may be read and reviewed several times without changing due to the researcher's influence, making this method trustworthy (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Data were critically described, interpreted, and explained (Mullet, 2018) through critical discourse analysis to buttress arguments on the use of IALs as medium of instruction in HE is a misconception. As such literature was reviewed to explore what is actual, real, and empirical in HE domain regarding the use of AILs. For this paper, the terms, language of instruction; language of teaching and teaching, medium of instruction will be used synonymously as applied by different HEIs in SA.

Findings and Discussion

Language policy and language instruction at South African universities

Language Policy in HE (LPHE) provides a framework that advances and supports the use of indigenous languages (ILs) in teaching and learning. It stipulates guidelines for developing, implementing and for monitoring policies that transform institutions that were marginalised to foster inclusivity and social unity (DHET, 2020).

The challenges faced by HEIs create more setbacks for the core functions of the university using IALs. Universities fail to create multilingual environments that determine, publish and make the language policy available to all in research, teaching and learning and to address diversity. Reports also showed the existence of limitations in the implementation process include lack of incentives, lack of clear directives, lack of mechanisms that enforce its implementation and lack of alignment between the language policy and the curriculum.

Furthermore, in the SA context, the increase in student population in universities maximises the levels of multilingualism post 1994 (DHET, 2015) but the use of English as MOI still

denies the speakers of IALs a meaningful participation and epistemological success in HE even though these speakers are in the majority. The agency of students and some staff to free and decolonise education, over language policies at select South African universities between 2015 and 2016 show that there need to be curriculum transformation. Research shows that commendable language policies exist in universities, but implementation is problematic (Antia & van der Merwe, 2019).

Antia et al (2019) argue that the language dimension of the protests was mainly about dislodging Afrikaans on those campuses where the institutional language policy had made it co-official with English. In several campuses, for example, North-West University, Stellenbosch University, University of Pretoria, University of the Free State, there were language protests and/or litigation over proposed changes to language policy texts (Antia et al, 2019). One consequence of the protests is the ongoing review of the language policies in HE, with the national review foregrounding IALs, while, paradoxically, certain institutional reviews (Stellenbosch, Pretoria, North-West) are according English an exclusive status of primary MOI, with other languages playing a supportive role (Antia & van der Merwe, 2019).

According to the DHET (2015), institutions which support English as language of learning & teaching (LOLT), still profess respect for multilingualism while they lack articulation about which languages are involved, and how this multilingualism will be accommodated in the teaching and other practices.

Since the first colonial occupation, when Dutch was the only official language (Mthombeni & Ogunnubi, 2020), till the Apartheid epoch, South African HE did not prioritise IALs as MOI. The mission to support IALs is not fully supported due to mixed feelings about their effectiveness of teaching at tertiary level (Mthombeni et al, 2020). Hence the discourse on the language of instruction and language policies in South African higher academic institutions is still receiving attention in relation to the continued exclusion and marginalisation of ALs (Mthombeni et al, 2020) to address the situation for the promotion of

multilingualism in HEIs (Ministry of Education, 2002). So, the push for bilingual and multilingual language policies in African institutions is viewed as a decolonial force propelling pedagogical reforms in teaching (Mthombeni et al, 2020). The Ministry insists that HEIs ensure that a multilingual environment is created where all languages are developed as academic languages, while ensuring that the existing language(s) do not become barriers to success and access (Ministry of Education 2001; 2002; 2003), but in South Africa's HEIs, so far, mother tongue education is not yet the mainstream (Mthombeni et al, 2020). For example, the speakers of African languages are still in the majority - English and Afrikaans which are the languages of the minority, are the languages of power (Mda 2010); even though democracy attempts to shift this power, the shift is towards the language of the most powerful dominant group (Dyers 2008).

Du Plessis (2006), for instance, had noted that universities which were historically Afrikaans speaking (for example, Pretoria, Stellenbosch, North-West) seemed to be doing the most to promote multilingualism. Again, with a few exceptions (Stroud & Kerfoot, 2013; Antia et al,

2015), the widespread scholarly view prior to the protests was that universities in the country had reasonably good language policy documents consistent with the country's social transformation goals, and that the major problem was either the lack of implementation of explicit provisions or the failure by stakeholders to act on the implementation spaces (DHET 2015; Makalela & McCabe 2013).

Post-1994, the Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE) was crafted and required individual universities to formulate their language policies in keeping with the directives of state policy as enshrined in the then new Constitution of 1996, which designates eleven languages as official and pledges the state to advance the development of these languages. [See the table below which lists South Africa's 23 universities. It provides universities and their language choices, as articulated in their institutional language policies. This is according to the 2015 Report on the use of African Languages as the mediums of instruction (Page 28).

University	Official languages as stated in institutional Policy		LP published?
	LoLT/LWC	Other language/indigenous language selected	
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	English	Afrikaans, IsiXhosa	Yes
Central University of Technology Cape Town	English		Yes
Durban University of Technology	English	IsiZulu	Yes
Fort Hare	English	IsiXhosa	Yes
Free State	English	Afrikaans, Sesotho	Yes
Johannesburg	English	Afrikaans, Sepedi, IsiZulu	Yes
KwaZulu Natal	English	IsiZulu	Yes
Limpopo	English	Afrikaans, Sesotho sa Leboa, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Setswana, IsiNdebele	Yes
Mangosuthu University of Technology	English	IsiZulu	Yes
Nelson Mandela Metropole	English	Afrikaans, IsiXhosa	Yes
North West	English	Afrikaans, Sesotho, Setswana	Yes
Pretoria	English	Afrikaans, Sepedi	Yes
Rhodes	English	Afrikaans, IsiXhosa	Yes
Stellenbosch	English	Afrikaans, IsiXhosa	Yes
Tshwane University of Technology	English	Afrikaans	Yes
UNISA	English	Afrikaans, All 9 official indigenous languages	Yes
Vaal University of Technology	English		Yes
Venda	English		Yes
Walter Sisulu	English	-, IsiXhosa	
Western Cape	English	Afrikaans, IsiXhosa	Yes
Witwatersrand	English	Afrikaans, Sesotho	Yes
Zululand	English	-, IsiZulu	Yes

Table 1: South African universities and their language choices (Report on the use of African Languages as the mediums of instruction, 2015:28)

Under the LPHE, universities had to ensure that Afrikaans and English would no longer be “a barrier to access and success” in HE (Ministry of Education, 2002). Many South African citizens did not speak Afrikaans or English at home during apartheid, even though these languages were official national languages at South African universities (Antia & van der Merwe, 2019).

Additionally, the #RhodesMustFall protest movement which called for the decolonisation of curricula at South African tertiary institutions, and globally, the students at former Afrikaans-medium universities challenged, among others, the status of Afrikaans as a LOLT. Movements at Pretoria, Free State and North-West

universities, as another example, demanded that Afrikaans be replaced by English to allow more access for the formerly marginalised population groups in SA (Dube, 2017). But, as explained by Dube (2017), for most South African university students, neither Afrikaans nor English is their native language. It was surprising that the students were largely voiceless about the role of IALs in HE. Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015) also questions how the students become complicit with the challenges of English language tuition and not become concerned about the marginalisation of ALs.

Mkhize (2023) explains the linguistic diversity of universities such as Wits and the University of the Western Cape - Wits is in a big metropolitan city in the Gauteng Province and

University of the Western Cape (UWC) situated in the Western Cape Province. Mkhize (2023) stresses that while Johannesburg is highly multilingual, with all 11 official languages spoken in the city, Cape Town could be deemed trilingual city given the dominance of three official languages: isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Other official languages are also spoken, although to a limited extent, including those that could be regarded as minority languages due to the small numbers of speakers (Mkhize (2023).

In addition to the socially named official languages, other African and non-African languages from outside SA are spoken in these cities, thus complicating the linguistic diversity resulting in several linguistic styles, registers and other linguistic formations (Dyers and Antia, 2019; Makalela, 2014). Regardless the complex multilingual dynamics in these cities, the language policies in the two universities remain limited in terms of the number of officially recognised languages, with Wits opting for English, isiZulu and Sesotho (University of Witwatersrand, 2003) while UWC chose Afrikaans, isiXhosa and English (University of the Western Cape, 2003). Antia and Dyers (2016) posit that the reality is that in both universities English remains the primary language in almost all disciplines. Its dominance running contrary to the country's linguistic dynamics and undermines the language policy (DHET, 2017).

In the university such as University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), academic staff and students have mixed feelings about the implementation of the bilingual language policy (Mthombeni & Ogunnubi, 2020). UKZN language policy places the use of isiZulu alongside English (Henry 2015) to address the racial inequalities inherited from being products of the apartheid government (Ndebele & Zulu, 2017). Its policy derives from various legislative and policy provisions of the democratic constitution of SA (1996), which grant official status to 11 South African languages. Mwelwa and Spencer (2013) believe that ALs have an important role in HEIs where students with less proficiency in English can have an opportunity to express themselves in languages, they are proficient in. Post-colonial

education policies and implementation should nurture multilingualism and promote all languages (Gordon & Harvey, 2018). Adopting ALs is not only a matter of including another medium of communication, but, as Alexander (2002) posits, English continues to be a major obstacle to academic success.

Ontological and epistemological access and success

“The production and validation of knowledges should be anchored in the experiences of resistance of those who previously suffered [the] injustices, oppression, and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy” (Santos, 2018, p. 1). The Global South social groups yearn for recognition of their epistemologies in global knowledge production processes and practices (Kubota, 2020) but this will prevail if scholars from the Global South cease to mimic concepts and theories from the Global North (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012 as cited in Mkhize 2023) and start ‘developing knowledges that contribute towards changing what counts as knowledge, of developing a relation between existing knowledge ...’ (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020 as cited in Mkhize, 2023). The importance of decolonising HE curriculum should aim at “generating knowledge that focuses on solving African problems while drawing on “global human experiences” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 50, as cited in Mkhize 2023). African languages have not been given systemic power where you can trace their use in business, production and education in South Africa. Therefore, African languages will continue to be less prioritised for education and business (Madadzhe & Sepota 2006) and that's where English dominates, in business, production, and education. English is viewed as ‘quintessential’ as it is mostly necessary for the labour market.

However, these have social and political implications towards African languages. Kamwangamalu (2003) argues that apart from economic reasons the economic and international status of English, the perceived low reputation of the indigenous African languages, the legacy of apartheid-based Bantu education, brand new multilingual language policy and the linguistic

behaviours of language policy makers contributed to the shift away from African languages towards English.

Evidently, the embracing of multilingualism as policy, its implementation in HE education, teaching, and research practices to counter the hegemony of English and the promotion, development and use of AILs as languages of scholarship are the primary challenges in SA. Many African scholars can implement African language policies demanded in the 21st century (Seshoka, 2013), but the dilemma is that a high number of them attained their qualifications using English (Turner & Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2014). So, it becomes a challenge to implement policies incorporating ALs (Turner et al, 2014). Most public HEIs in SA were historically white universities; they had bilingual policies, where English and Afrikaans were used as MOI with an enrolment of mostly English- and Afrikaans-speaking people (Nudelman 2015). It will be difficult to use ALs as MOIs in South African HEIs because colonial education promoted foreign languages' dominance over native languages for the sole reason that excluding vernacular languages from many African school systems contributes to the colonisation of the mind (wa Thiong'o, 1986).

Disconnect between Basic education and Higher Education

The authors concede with Maluleke (2019) that, instead of continuously using Eurocentric languages as the language of instruction, which results in a high failure rate, multilingual strategies in education must be centred on high-quality mother-tongue education. This applies to both primary and higher education in SA.

The public policy's choice of the LOLT in public schools in SA is a problem. In other countries like India, learners in many public and private low-cost schools are similarly not helped to attain any proficiency in English (Jha, 2021). This adversely impacts their capacity to learn other subjects well (Jha, 2021) and does not prepare them for HE. Additionally in Europe, university entrant students are supposed to have a high level of English language proficiency for HE admission.

“Both international and local students clearly identify English as the necessary language in order to transform the university into a multilingual one” (Lurda, Cots & Armegol, 2013) “Although many European HEIs see multilingualism as one of their main language policy objectives, English is making this aim unviable due to its adverse effect not only upon other foreign languages, but also upon national languages.” (Lasagabaster, 2015)

The power of English over ILs creates loss or confusion of linguistic identities and of sense of pride in one's own linguistic heritage (Oloruntoba-Oju & Pinxteren, 2023). But this problem emanates from the neglect of ALs in primary education. According to Maponopono, (2021) English and Afrikaans are offered official status across the nation even though ILs existed in the country. Thousands of non-English speakers join universities each year. Surely, they are intimidated by the Eurocentric practices applied in universities, and this includes the use of English and Afrikaans as MOI which is not consistent in primary education. Among 2000 languages spoken in Africa there seems to be no single IAL that is fully operational as a MOI beyond primary education level in disciplines other than specific language courses and for communicative purposes (Heine & Nurse, 2000).

The 2015 student protests which targeted issues from decolonisation of the curriculum to non-payment of fees, to challenging the hegemonic position of Afrikaans in historically Afrikaans universities (Mkhize, 2018), the African language-speaking students' issues remain largely unaddressed (Mkhize, 2018), “... and black students increasingly felt excluded” (de Swaan, 2023, p. 1). Unfortunately, SA is continuing to produce learners who cannot read in their own African language at the primary level. According to the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study report released in May 2023, 81%, Grade 4 learners in SA cannot read for meaning in any language and that mostly African language schools that recorded a decline in reading, while English and Afrikaans schools did not.

At the end, HEIs in SA remain hotspots for monolingual and epistemological bias of both the colonial and Apartheid era, (Yafele &

Makalela, 2022) because universities want to create “globally relevant” students (Hlatshwayo & Siziba, 2013). Universities, as catalysts of knowledge, have a duty to promote and preserve IALs both as mediums of teaching and assessment and realms for research and innovation. This is not about policies and structures, but the non-English speakers must also be agents of change. It is a commonly heard argument that the students, at North-West University (NWU) for example, have a negative attitude towards the use of their IALs for teaching and learning purposes (Hlatshwayo & Siziba, 2013).

One unavoidable motive is that globalisation-related forces prevent university authorities from implementing any language policy that does not support English, and this kills multilingualism. It is a highly topical issue that English must coexist with official bilingualism. But is it just a dream, to SA and to other countries whose first language is not English. The staff and students seem not to be impacted by the hegemony of English on the implementation of multilingual programmes. They continue to legitimise Afrikaans and English in varying degrees (Maseko & Siziba, 2023). Furthermore, Maseko and Siziba (2023) add that while the language policies of the institutions such as North-West University (mentioned above) and Stellenbosch University in SA are full of promise to foster inclusive multilingual education, the wording of the policy provisions betrays the fallacy of this promise “by the inclusion of caveats and conditions to be met for AILs to be used in teaching and learning” (Maseko et al, 2023, p 310). These researchers do concede though that the universities have taken positive steps as historically Afrikaans medium universities to commit to the inclusion of AILs as potential languages of instruction, but as concluded by Maseko and Siziba (2023) universities should revise their language policies to avoid terminology that is vague and escapist because it will be against the realisation of multilingualism.

Indigenous African languages, multilingualism and decolonisation

Concerns about the search for non-Eurocentric paradigms in education did not attract

attention only in South Africa but throughout the world. The students' movement that took place at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in SA in 2015 inspired similar ideas to those put forth at the University College London in 2014 and the Malaysia Conference in 2011 (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2022). It promotes the decolonisation and innovative approaches to curriculum reform, calling for a changed, Africanised, and decolonised curriculum. **that** (Nyamnjoh 2016; Stroud and Kerfoot 2021). Decolonisation is concerned with productive and just redressing of colonial structures evident in the continuing dominance, imposition, and normativity of Western scientific paradigms, practices, and provenance of people (Turner, 2023). Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2013) argues that maintained structures of cultural and epistemic colonial violence is an ongoing unresolved matter in universities. The ignorance on the use of AILs in HE as a way of redressing the past imbalances is not ending, hence decolonisation of the curriculum. The SA HE landscape emphasises decolonising the curriculum, systematically and deliberately including indigenous knowledge systems in their teaching and learning fields and incorporating views and comments from individuals and communities that have been excluded or marginalised in the past. But what is often overlooked is the necessity to also incorporate local AILs which should form an integral part of the decolonisation process, as they promote multilingualism, inclusivity, and facilitate more effective teaching and learning (Peterson, 2023).

Furthermore, the language question, which refers to the presence and role of African languages beside English and Afrikaans in HE is an ongoing conundrum in post-apartheid SA (Turner, 2023). The language question has been prevalent since the “invention” of AILs but remains unresolved due to its complex alignments with identity and power structures (Turner, 2023; Makoni & Mashiri, 2007). The #FeesMustFall discourses of 2015/2016 which called for decolonisation of the university space, did not feature AILs as a primary objective (Lockett & Hurst-Harosh, 2021). Gilmour (2006) states that may be because this is partly due to the historically grounded baggage of AILs as colonial constructs,

which puts non-colonial language speakers in an uncomfortable and seemingly unresolvable predicament. So, if HE is failing to “unchain or de-cage the ‘caged’ mind” it will mean that “decolonial efforts will do nothing more than offer patently cosmetic changes that remain marooned within Western knowledge and practices” (Nyoni, 2019, p 7).

Digitalisation and Intellectualisation of Indigenous African Languages

The view that ILs are more than just a means of communication because they are essential to the identity of Indigenous languages speakers themselves, the maintenance of their customs, worldviews, and visions, and above all, allowing them to proclaim their right to self-determination is shared by Requesens-Galnares (2023). Although in 2019, The United Nations declared 2019 as the Year of Indigenous Languages and proclaimed (2022-2032) as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, (Requesens-Galnares, 2023), in countries like South Africa, various obstacles constrain many South African universities from implementing one or more African languages into formal and digital structures in a localisation process (Turner, 2023). Despite making it technically possible, digitalisation does not per se bring about diversification in terms of communicative practices. The hegemony of English prevails also in the digital realm, and power structures of the analogue world are mirrored online. The presence of delineated African languages in institutionalised online spaces is equally impeded, as was also observed due to the complexities of the language question. We argue and concede with Turner that the ambiguities about making use of African languages for epistemic empowerment continue online as well, because digitalisation should diversify experiences of teaching and learning, and knowledge production at universities, but it also threatens to reproduce referent power structures (Turner, 2023). Speakers of AILs have so far been disproportionately disadvantaged (Turner, 2023) through the monolingual bias ingrained in voice recognition and mobile learning technologies (Makalela, 2021). The main barrier in the digital development of African languages has been the comparatively meagre availability of digital text

corpora that enable algorithms procedures to build useful tools and resources for education (Roux, 2020). Mkhize (2022) notes that as we enter the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) with all its potential technological and linguistic opportunities, research in the humanities, for example, must combine efforts and resources to build a foundation for unrestricted information distribution and knowledge creation, making optimal use of modern digital technology under the umbrella of digital humanities. How can that make room for change if African languages are still “developed” under the framework of so-called intellectualisation that aims to foster the learning, employment, and appreciation of African languages for and in formal and official spaces? (Nkomo, 2020). It is accepted that central concerns of intellectualisation are implementing policy, publishing and researching glossaries, and developing terminology in and of African languages, as well as using information and communication technologies to do so (Kaschula & Maseko, 2017). While intellectualisation seems to implicitly suggest an epistemic deficiency of African languages, Kaschula and Maseko (2017) assert that it is precisely not about catching up in linguistic complexity but about addressing the material gap concerning African languages caused by “years of neglect and the lack of both corpus and status planning” and thus propose strategic development in teaching and learning in HE. Only African epistemic legitimacy would propel African ideas (Cross and Govender 2021), plus, effective education can only take place in the language that the learner is most familiar with, which is their mother tongue (Alexander, 2002; Kaschula and Wolff, 2016). Though, models from the Global North may not always apply to the epistemic domains of the Global South. (Dlakavu, Mathebula & Mkhize, 2022) due to the forces already mentioned above.

Additionally, Mkhize (2020) highlights that African literary and historical texts have also never existed in institutions. Globalisation of HE has also elevated the international status of English to the status of a global academic lingua franca, with universities today both collaborating and competing on a worldwide scale in the pursuit of knowledge production. In many international

contexts, English has emerged as the language of choice for those undertaking and offering university education, and, subsequently, has become a valuable commodity in the global economy (O'Regan, 2021 in Bhatt, Badwan, & Madiba, 2022). Language is pivotal to globalisation (Bhatt et al, 2022), and AILs for now will not match English. Universities' pursuit of worldwide knowledge economy is dependent on proficiency in English. It dominates within international politics and economics and, of course in HE. Lecturers are often dependent on their teaching and supervising activities, as well as the revenue gained from grants and written outputs of their research. But as universities continue to persist as sites of linguistic diversity, it is therefore, possible to become a 'multilingual university' (Bhatt, Badwan & Madiba, 2022), but the future looks bleak because universities still grapple with the problem of language and the role of AILs in its knowledge pillars. This is due to the way English is used in university teaching, research, supervision, socialisation, landscapes, and soundscapes **needs not to be given a second thought**. So, if the problem of AILs is solved, the public education will ultimately threaten the privileged position, and that is unlikely to happen. Languages that are used more intellectually in higher spheres inherently confer greater political and ideological authority on both their speakers and the language itself. A language that is intellectualized is one that can be utilized from first grade through college and beyond again, this revolutionary shift must incorporate the local intelligentsia (Mkhize, 2020). We are not saying African lecturers do not have problems with English, but it will take time, effort, resources, and self-efficacy to make AILs reach the status of English in research and publishing in SA HEIs to help universities reach that Ivy league status because AILs should endlessly be able to establish, maintain, sustain and reproduce knowledge systems that rationalise domination in an equitable just manner. Thus, higher education's language problem is a challenge for any category, whether it is research or teaching (Bhatt, Badwan & Madiba, 2022).

HEIs should make technology accessible to revitalize IALs, but universities fail to meet the needs of the digital learners (Ngcamu, 2019). It

will not be easy to bridge the digital divide and the effects of digital divide regarding the IALs in universities since IALs information is limited in archives for preservation and use. The unavailability or inaccessibility of resources in indigenous South African languages (Wierenga & Carstens, 2021) also needs to be addressed. Information and computer technology (ICT) terminology should by right enable indigenous speakers to easily access AILs information online (Magagane, 2011).

Decolonisation and institutional structures

CR alludes that real domain comprises of social structures and generates mechanisms that assign power and resources to various individuals within a social context, and it enables or constrains an individual's actions. Those actions create events in the actual domain and the experiences occur in the empirical domain. Structures at micro and macro levels form constituents of the real domain which are the institutions with the power to direct social activities, with the establishment of associations among positions, practices and roles. SA adopted multilingual language policy as a structure in the real domain that can make events such teaching and learning, research, decolonisation, curriculum transformation (by considering multilingualism) to happen or not happen. Other structures such as students, lecturers, support staff, university executive management, language committees, political unions can constrain or enable events to occur. This paper has shown that the policy development is effective but the implementers in HEIs such as lecturers and students are less efficacious. There appears to be a reluctance to decolonise the curriculum. Universities as implementers have crafted language policies that commit to promote multilingualism and contribute to the transformation of HE, but it is not enough because universities still maintain monolingual practice in teaching which constrains the success of students whose background is neither English nor Afrikaans. The structures complicate the new language issues which directly affects masses of multilingual students in SA. This paper has shown that historically Black English medium universities, retained monolingual practices in teaching and research contexts failing the

democratic call to use IALs alongside Afrikaans and English. Students' agency through #events attempted to protest the Westernised or Eurocentric curriculum. But tensions and distrust amongst structures and HEIs management as well as the government ensued in most cases. The paper argues that the interplay of policies, lecturers and their attitudes and SA HEIs contextual factors delays the progress of using multilingualism as way to decolonise the curriculum in HE. The structures identifiable in the paper were both at macro and micro levels. Macro-structures such as universities; the DHET; DBE, and micro-level structures included the students' representative councils, university management, students and policies.

Although the use of more than one language is a universal practice at universities worldwide, fully-fledged multilingual universities are very few and largely uncommon in most parts of the world, the history of language in HE can be understood within the broader political context. The shifting of monolingual or bilingual education to the use of multilingual IALs in HEIs can work if SA's apartheid history, and its continued manifestation in the curriculum decolonisation is given serious attention. In addition to addressing the indigenous knowledges, the decolonisation of the curriculum portends a pedagogical strategy that addresses inequality by encouraging universities to move quickly to provide new courses that would make students aware of their place in terms of epistemology, culture, language, history and ideology.

The killing of indigenous people's knowledges (epistemicides) (Santos & de Sousa, 2014) and killing of indigenous people's languages (linguicides) (wa Thiong'o, 2009, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) will persist if coloniality is confused with colonialism as stated in Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 243). Coloniality refers to the long-standing patterns of power that have emerged because of colonialism, which define 'culture, labour, inter-subjectivity relations and knowledge production beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. We experience coloniality 'in books, in criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of people, in aspirations of self, and in many

other aspects of our modern experience' (Mignolo, 2005, p. 6). There is unease amongst South African (and African, Caribbean and South American, and others) about the direction of HE within the still-prevailing neoliberal, marketised global economy (Brink, 2021). wa Thiong'o (1981, p. 87) argues that decolonisation of the curriculum is about Africans seeing themselves 'clearly in relationship with ourselves and other selves in the universe'. Suarez-Krabbe (2017, p. 62) says the obvious curriculum problem at SA university level has been described as the over-determination and over-representation of 'whiteness' in which black voices are deafened. The visibility of Suarez-Krabbe's over-representation of 'whiteness' or the invisibility in HEI curriculum change are experienced in the empirical domain where lived experiences of decolonisation or practices of multilingualism are manifested. One cannot deal with the problems of coloniality without considering the historically constituted system within which they continue being produced. From the realist perspective, there should be a connection between everyday social experience and the somewhat experience distant concepts used by current epistemologies. The schooling system in SA is not designed to match the HEIs. It is still colonised. **Colonisation** insights thus have ramifications for the higher education system in SA. Decolonising the curriculum is not just an epistemological challenge; it will require deeper changes in research priorities and practices. It also has relevance to how academics conceive and enact the notion of academic freedom. So that they can apply and acknowledge the availability of multiple knowledges and that knowledge traditions broadens the scope of curriculum selection, thus deepening one's interpretation and ultimately exercise of academic freedom at the actual level.

Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

This paper has employed critical realist theory to explore factors that constrain the promotion of multilingualism in decolonising the curriculum in HEIs in SA. It has done so by bringing together literature regarding structures like policies, universities, students and events such as development of language policies and

decolonising the curriculum process as domains for supporting the impracticality of implementing multilingualism in HEIs in SA context. The paper did so by pinpointing disablers for decolonisation of curriculum in HE through multilingualism. CR perspectives were followed to show how structures such as languages in the HE world have the power to give direction by constraining access and success on IALs. The structures identified in the paper range from symbolic (policies), the epistemological (teaching and learning) and the ideological (ideas, opinions, and experiences regarding the use of IALs in HEIs). Structures that constrain such social events and their subsequent discourses were discussed by considering both the historical and sociolinguistic contexts in SA. Justification was made based on the important points that:

- Colonialism and Apartheid in South Africa created the marginalisation of Indigenous African languages and continues to enforce English and Afrikaans as the media of instruction.
- Digital non-advancement of African languages as compared to English and Afrikaans deter the progress of IAL as languages for teaching and learning, therefore still allowing Afrikaans and English as barriers to learning.
- Eurocentric mentality among the academia creates mixed feelings and affect their confidence about the use of IALs.
- Undermining of the Global South ontological realities and epistemological viewpoints by the Global North.
- Disconnect between Basic education and Higher Education; the mismatch of language development and the growing illiteracy in grade four where learners cannot read for meaning in their own African language does not prepare learners for higher education.

The findings have implications for practicality of multilingualism in HEIs. Our findings demonstrate how universities are tolerant of multilingualism but lack practices to fully support and implement it. This paper firmly argues that the tale of Afrikaans and English as drivers of HE will not end until language policies and

practices are evidently situated within pedagogy and research to satisfy the inclusion of IALs in HEIs.

Following the interpretation of the results and the recommendations, it is concluded that it was doable to develop university language policies, the point is on implementation, and thus, more research attention could be given to strengthening users' confidence in implementing policies.

The inclusion of AILs requires massive multilingual policies and practices overhaul supported by bold leadership and financial investments for curriculum transformation and decolonising programmes. HE language policy cannot change without transforming human and technological resources. Based on the discussion, a compelling case can be made for the development of multimodal structures: people and policies, systems including support, monitoring, and evaluation of language policies that support IALs. The aim should be to foster deeper conceptual understanding, above that there should be a political will, the African intelligentsia that acknowledges it is upon them to redress the gaps between indigenous and Western knowledge. Again, it is equally important that considering the prevailing narrative around English and its hegemony, the injustices and violations of social justice do not give rise to a new hegemony by IALs. Although pedagogy and technology are the main factors in intellectualizing, digitalizing, and Africanizing education, IALs have not yet reached **such** an intellectualisation. Besides, decolonisation should not be seen from the periphery. As such, people and languages that have suffered marginalization should first be decolonised. The African academics should consider if they really need to intellectualise IALs. Studies can be conducted in the future to find out if that is their wish. This research paper is subject to limitations as a conceptual study. It necessitates partnerships between the department, schools and tertiary institutions to ensure that there is development of indigenous languages in the education system. As such, there is a need for HE to prepare HE practitioners, language practitioners, translators and educators that will fulfil the needs of diverse learners than mimic the Global North ideologies.

Institutional councils and senates need not only to determine, publish and make the language policy available to all, these structures must ensure that the use of IALs in promoting multilingualism are used alongside Afrikaans and English is not for compliance purposes, and that they do not create new linguisticicides.

Having said that, we espouse that the advancement of the use of indigenous languages to support multilingualism will not be a fallacy but a reality.

Consent for publishing.

Not applicable.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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