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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Student Perceptions of Multilingual Learning and Teaching in Two Faculties at a South African University

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Abstract

Language can create multifaceted and complex dilemmas for higher education stakeholders, as language remains a gateway to epistemological access. This is especially true in a multilingual country like South Africa, where the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) at universities is typically English. Nevertheless, many South African universities have adopted multilingual language policies. The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) implemented its current language policy in 2015. In this article, the authors share findings from a cross-faculty multilingualism research project, focusing on the perceptions and insights registered students had of the Wits Language Policy. The aim is to inform and support continuing policy implementation strategies that are appropriate and aligned to students' learning needs and preferences. Data was collected from registered students in the Faculties of Science and Commerce, Law and Management, using a questionnaire. The findings suggest that not all students know of the institution's Language Policy or what the official Wits LoLTs are. There also appears to be a preference for English as the language of teaching in formal, lecturer-led spaces, and more openness to multilingualism in less formal, peer-to-peer learning interactions. The authors conclude by briefly discussing the implications of these findings for learning and teaching, before addressing limitations and outlining plans for further research.

Keywords: language policy; multilingualism; student learning; translanguaging.

Introduction

Within the South African higher education environment, language has a complicated history, especially in relation to physical and epistemological access (Morrow, 2009; Kerfoot & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2015). With the advent of democracy in 1994, the new government prioritised the need to address historical divisions within, and exclusion from, higher learning, which had been based on race, culture, and language under the apartheid regime. In 2002, the Language Policy for Higher Education (DoE, 2002) was approved to develop more equitable and transformed institutions of higher learning with respect to language use. This policy required higher education institutions to develop and implement their own language policies that make use of multilingualism in the institutional environment, as well as in its teaching and learning practices.

Post-1994, the language policies of many South African higher education institutions "designated English as the primary medium of instruction" (Madiba, 2018, p. 506), thus adopting an "English plus" (Madiba, 2018, p. 506) stance. The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) implemented its current language policy in 2015. The imperatives of the policy are to (1) support multilingualism, (2) develop isiZulu, Sesotho, and South African Sign Language (SASL) alongside English, (3) develop languages of learning and teaching, and (4) develop the linguistic proficiency of staff and students (Wits, 2015). It is against this backdrop that we embarked on a cross-faculty multilingualism research project in 2022. We were interested to learn more about the perceptions and insights registered students had of the Wits

Language Policy, as we realised little was known about their LoLT needs in the current climate.

To better understand the levels of language use and language policy implementation in our faculties – the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management (FCLM), and the Faculty of Science (FS) – we conceptualised a multi-phase Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) research project. The aim of the first phase of the project was to gauge student and staff views of, and the need for, multilingualism and translanguaging, in addition to gauging student awareness and understanding of the policy, and possibilities for multilingualism and translanguaging amongst staff in the two faculties. The second phase of the project aims to use insights gained from phase one for more in-depth interrogation of the language needs of our students, and possibilities for embedding multilingualism in teaching and learning practices. This article only reports on student inputs received during phase one of the study. In it, we share and reflect on participating students' awareness of the institutional language policy[1] and their views about the usefulness of multilingualism / translanguaging at the institution. Through this exploration we aim to support continuing policy implementation strategies that are appropriate and aligned to Wits students' learning needs and preferences, while also making observations that may be beneficial to others working in South African higher education institutions with similar interests or objectives.

Literature and Theoretical Underpinnings

In South Africa, language is usually situated in a monoglossic ideology which positions "language as an autonomous skill that functions independently from the context in which it is used" (García & Torres-Guevara, 2009, p. 182). There is also a tendency to position multilingualism as "multiple monolingualisms" (Banda, 2018, p. 200). Thus, languages are compartmentalised as separate systems "exclusively made up of bounded linguistic systems" (García & Kleifen, 2019, p. 557). In other words, when a language is taught, it is taught in isolation and then 'added' to an individual's language repertoire, operating under what Cummins (2007) termed the two solitudes assumption. Canagarajah (2006) warns against siloed monolingual language learning practices as it can lead to "vernacular speech ghettos" (p. 598). Rather, and especially in a multilingual country like South Africa, this siloed approach to language should be dismantled as it may implicitly create language hierarchies linked to the value of a language, its social capital, and the perceived place of specific languages in higher education settings. One way of achieving such a dismantling is through the development and implementation of appropriate language policies that address the perceived hierarchy of languages at universities.

Language remains integrally connected to learning and being, which places immense responsibility on higher education institutions when it comes to language policy work. Maturana and Varela (1980) mentioned that "there is no such thing as Language, only continual languaging, an activity of human beings in the world" (p. 34). Swain (2006) made a strong connection between languaging and thinking, problem-solving, and "a process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language" (p. 97). Building on the concept of languaging, translanguaging as a practice refers to moving across / beyond the bounded conception of language and can be defined as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages" (Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 283). In the South African context, Madiba (2018) found that translanguaging allows for the simultaneous use of African languages and English in the process of learning and meaning-making, illustrating that languaging is not a question of either / or.

Even though translanguaging affords an individual the opportunity to: i) break down artificial barriers between languages, ii) unite their linguistic repertoire, and iii) draw on their lived

[1] Within the context of this study, our primary, explicit interest was in students' awareness of the Wits Language Policy text and its practical applications within learning and teaching contexts. However, we acknowledge that the ideological dimensions of a language policy within the South African (and arguably any other higher education) context cannot be separated from the actual text and how it is implemented, which means that these dimensions are implicitly part of the study and our discussion.

experiences and culture while making meaning with others, it is not necessarily an easily accepted practice. Globally, in non-monolingual countries with more than one official language, English is privileged and preferred above other official languages, such as in Australia, Hong Kong, and Samoa (Liddicoat & Curnow, 2014). This is true for South Africa as well (Alexander, 2011; Cummins, 2015). Cummins (2015) mentions that many South African parents "identify English as the language of power and social advancement of their children" (p. 274), and as a result hold ambivalent views of the use of other languages at school. A dominant language, in this case English, affords equal opportunities in the world of work which supports parents' preference of English above other languages (Alexander, 2011). Furthermore, at school and societal levels, multilingualism is not positioned as intellectual and academic capital to enhance learning. As a result, many African language speakers do not recognise the educational legitimacy and relevance of their home languages (Cummins, 2015, p. 278). Liddicoat and Curnow (2014) mention that international prestige and historic dominance of a specific language creates language hierarchies that shape educational and societal language use, and as a result people may prioritise a prestigious language over their home languages. They also remark that attaching an official status to languages "may not be enough to dislodge the ideologically entrenched value systems that exist around languages" (Liddicoat & Curnow; 2014, p. 277). These complexities are important both for our project and national efforts related to the advancement of multiple official South African languages.

At South African institutions of higher learning, the top-down structure characteristic of language policies tends to create space for implementing language change, but bottom-up efforts are crucial for change to be enacted. Madiba (2018) points out that higher education institutions can only become truly multilingual after micro-interactions in both formal and informal learning spaces have been traced. The research aim for the first phase of our research is aligned to this imperative, and in this article, we share the findings of a questionnaire that collected data about students' awareness of the institutional language policy, as well as their perceptions of the use of various languages at the institution. Our analysis and discussion are theoretically and conceptually anchored by the concepts of multilingualism and translanguaging.

Methods and Data

The first phase of the study aimed to determine students' perceptions and understanding of the existing Wits Language Policy (Wits, 2015), as well as their needs and expectations regarding languages of learning and teaching. As this would entail collecting data from a sample of approximately 15,000 registered undergraduate and postgraduate students across the two participating faculties, it was agreed that a questionnaire, administered through an online platform, would be the best approach.

The development, drafting, and refining of the questionnaire was done collaboratively by the project team through an iterative process of deliberation as part of the ethics application process[2]. As the questionnaire was to be administered through Google Forms, it was agreed that routing would be used to direct respondents to sections of the questionnaire that are relevant to them. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section 1 (see Figure 1) had to be completed by all respondents and asked questions related to respondent demographics and language(s) of learning at secondary school level. Questions about race and gender were deliberately left open-ended to allow respondents to self-describe or -identify, if they felt comfortable to do so. At the end of this section, respondents were routed to Section 2 (see Figures 1 and 2) if they identified as bi- or multilingual, or to Section 3 if they identified as monolingual (see Figure 1).

Section 2 (see Figures 1 and 2) asked the bi- and multilingual respondents a range of questions related to their perceptions of the Wits Language Policy, their perceptions of the usefulness of multiple languages in social and

[2] The authors ascribe to the highest level of ethical conduct in their research and ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Wits Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) (Protocol Number: H22/06/31).

academic environments, and their need for multilingual spaces and resources to support learning. Likert scale questions (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Nemoto & Beglar, 2014) and select-the-appropriate-option questions were asked in the first part of Section 2 (see Figures 1 and 2), followed by open-ended questions (see Figure 1). Section 3 posed only open-ended questions to monolingual respondents (see Figure 1).

Once a complete draft of the questionnaire had been prepared, an open invitation was sent to all registered students in the two faculties to invite willing students to participate in a piloting of the questionnaire. The invitations were sent out by the respective student success and support units in the faculties. The pilot was done to refine areas of ambiguity and to help ensure reliability of the questionnaire (Boynton, 2004; Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). It involved 10 participants and the project team, who read through the questionnaire together, deliberated concerns and ambiguities, and ultimately refined the questionnaire for distribution. Thereafter, the respective Faculty Registrars were asked to send the questionnaire to registered undergraduate and postgraduate students in the two faculties through the institutional student management system. Students were invited to participate in the study voluntarily and informed consent was obtained from respondents by asking them to agree to having their data collected, acknowledge that their data would be kept anonymous and confidential, and to give permission for data to be shared (in aggregate form) in publications and reports.

Following two iterations of data collection, 96 responses were received. Although this marks only about 0,64% of the population to whom the questionnaire had been sent, the findings have emerged as rich, informative, and at times surprising. In the findings and discussion section below, a descriptive-statistics approach was used to glean insights into responses to the non-open-ended questions, while thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns of meaning (Clarke & Braun, 2017) from responses to the open-ended questions.

Data Analysis And Findings

Closed-ended question responses

When the current Wits Language Policy was being drafted, a strategic decision was made by the institution to position four languages, English, isiZulu, Sesotho, and South African Sign Language (SASL), as its Languages of Learning and Teaching (LoLTs). The institutional language policy foregrounds multilingualism as an imperative (or at least the necessity for the Wits community to know more than one institutional LoLT), the premise being that access to a wider range of concepts, information, and cross-cultural interaction could be achieved gradually during policy implementation. Through the policy, students are encouraged to use or learn an additional institutional language to enhance their educational experience at the university.

Student perceptions of institutional languages of learning and teaching

To gauge respondents' familiarity with the Wits Language Policy and official LoLTs, we asked them to select all the languages they thought were included in the institutional policy. For this question, respondents were prompted to select from a list of the twelve official South African languages. No limit was set on how many languages respondents could select. The intention was to glean the diversity of responses that may emerge and the variety of languages that each respondent would choose.

All respondents were asked to identify the official Wits LoLTs. Figure 3 below shows the variation in responses received. Only four respondents (4,17%) were able to identify the official Wits languages accurately, while four others selected all official South African languages as the Wits LoLTs. A further two selected the four official Wits languages but added Afrikaans as a fifth official language All respondents selected English as one of the official Wits languages; however, it is noteworthy that 54 (56,25%) respondents selected English as the only official institutional language.

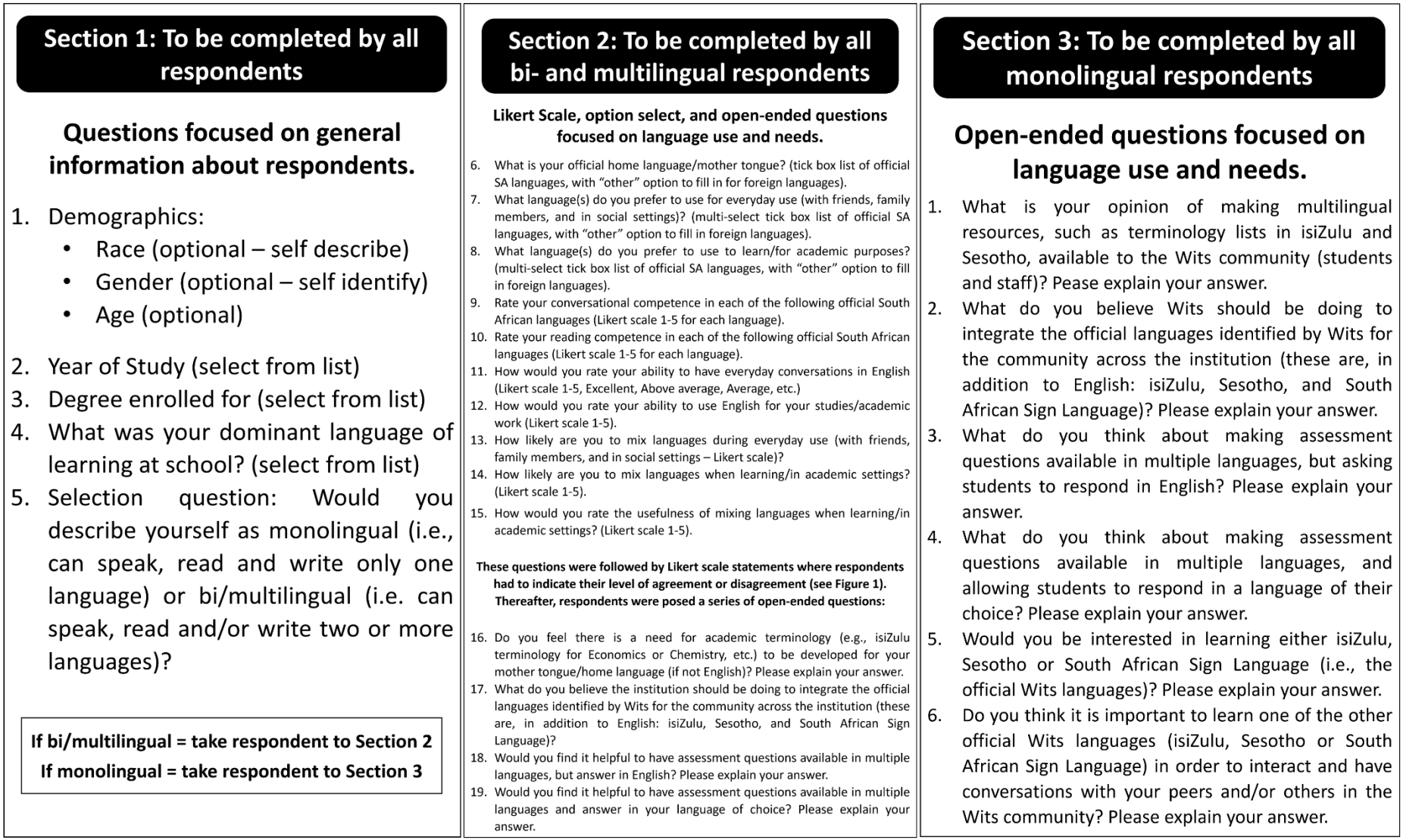

Figure 1: Questionnaire to explore respondent perceptions and needs regarding languages of learning and teaching.

Section 2: To be completed by all bi- and multilingual respondents*

Likert Scale questions about language-of-learning needs and resources.

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
• My faculty should provide learning material in at least one other official Wits language.					
• My faculty should provide lecture videos and audio material in at least one other official Wits language on Ulwazi.‡					
• My faculty should allow students to use any language in formal learning spaces (e.g., tutorials, lectures, labs) when discussing material with each other.					
• Lecturers in my faculty should provide verbal feedback during class in English only.					
• Lecturers in my faculty should be able to provide verbal feedback during class in all the official Wits languages.					
• My faculty should send official communications to students in all the official Wits languages.					
• My faculty should provide assignment, test, and exam questions in multiple languages.					
• My faculty should allow students to answer assignments, tests, and exams in multiple languages.					

Likert Scale questions about the usefulness of using multiple languages for learning.

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
• Using languages other than English while studying helps me to better remember what I learned.					
• Using languages other than English to discuss work with classmates helps me to better understand the work.					
• Using languages other than English to find out about assignments, tasks, and deadlines helps me to plan better and write better.					

* See Figure 1 for additional details about Section 2.
‡ Ulwazi is the Learning Management System (LMS) used at Wits.

Figure 2: Likert-type rating scale questions that formed part of Section 2.

In general, 34 respondents (35,42%) selected isiZulu, 22 (22,92%) selected SASL, and 20 (20,83%) selected Sesotho as official Wits languages, although the combination of these languages with other languages were incorrect. Notably, 16 respondents (16,67%) selected Afrikaans as an official Wits language, despite it never having been an officially recognised language at the institution.

Figure 3: Student perceptions of Wits languages of learning and teaching.

The results indicate that despite the policy's availability on student platforms at the university, the majority of respondents have not engaged with it and may not be aware of it. The language policy is made available in centralised repositories, such as on the university's website and YouTube channel. In both instances, students may access these platforms, and download the document or watch the video for their knowledge. However, respondents' apparent lack of engagement with the institution's language policy could mean that there is a need for greater visibility of the language policy in spaces where students are more likely to engage in learning activities. There is also a need for the institution to promote, share, and practice its own language policy more explicitly.

Currently, English is the only visible language of teaching and assessment at the institution, as all class material and lectures are in English. Institutional signage is also exclusively in English. The lack of signage in the official institutional languages on campus may also contribute to students being unaware of the languages associated with the institution, as "linguistic landscape items are mechanisms of language policy that can perpetuate ideologies and the status of certain languages and not others" (Gorter and Cenoz, 2017, p. 239). Thus, the language(s) used in signage can also influence student perceptions of which languages are affiliated with the institution, as well as the status of specific languages at the university. This offers a possible explanation as to why all respondents selected English as a LoLT, and 56,25% selected English as the only LoLT used at Wits.

Students' perceived 'place' of languages in institutional spaces

In the questionnaire we asked respondents to indicate to what extent they are likely to mix languages in both social and educational settings (see Figure 4 below). This question set was part of the questionnaire that only bi- and multilingual students answered, thus for this section of the findings the total number of respondents were 90. Figure 4 shows that 77 respondents (through combining the extremely likely and very likely categories – 85,55%) indicated that they tend to make use of multiple languages in social settings, which we see as translanguaging. Only 21 respondents (23,33%) indicated that they would make use of the same

practices in academic settings. Thirty-six respondents (40%) indicated that they were unlikely to use translanguaging in an academic setting.

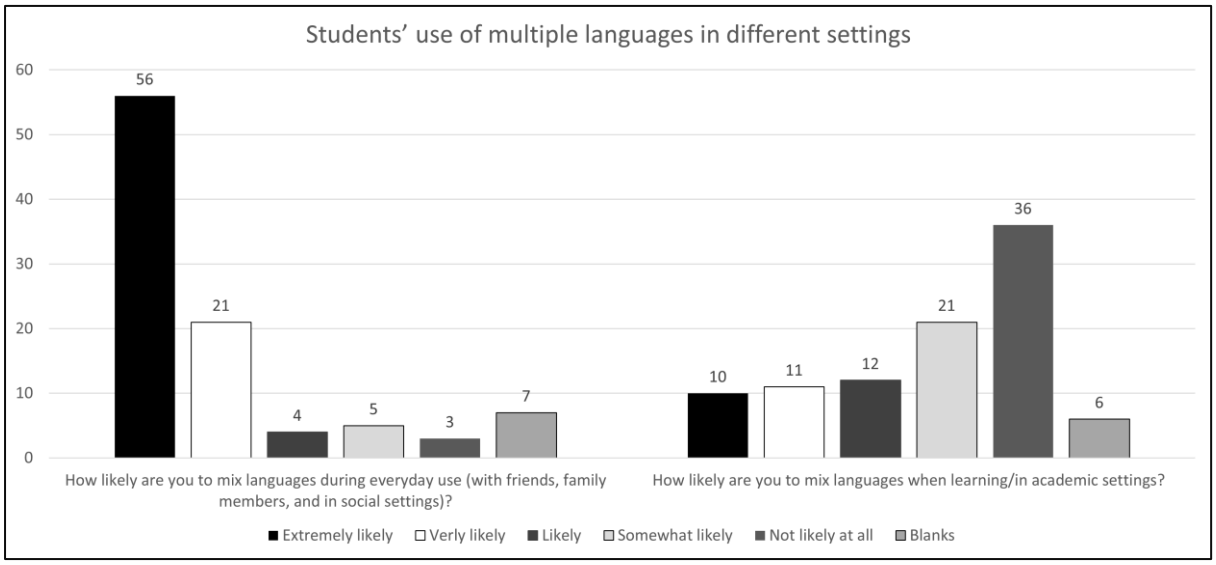

Figure 4: Student self-reported likelihood of mixing languages in social and academic settings.

Even though respondents indicated that they were not likely to move between languages in academic settings (Figure 4), the next question yielded somewhat contradictory responses. Figure 5 provides students' responses to questions about using languages other than English for studying, discussions, and assignment planning, as well as whether they would find it useful to translanguage when learning. The responses to this question set show that students are more likely to make use of languages other than English to navigate the university. With regard to studying and retention of learning, a collective 46 respondents (51,11%) either agreed or strongly agreed that using languages other than English is useful. Sixty-two respondents (through combining the extremely likely and very likely categories - 68,89%) indicated that using languages other than English while discussing coursework with their classmates helps them to better understand the content. Forty-eight respondents (53,33%) indicated that their use of other languages to find out about assignments, tasks, and deadlines helped them to plan better and write better. Sixty-one students (67,77%) also indicated that they found it useful to translanguage when learning (through combining the extremely useful, very useful, and useful categories). Twenty nine respondents (32,22%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that using languages other than English helps them to better remember what they have learned. Similarly, 18 (20%) disagreed with the statement that discussing work in other languages helps them to better understand the work, and 23 respondents (25,55%) indicated that they do not think that using other languages to find out about assignments, tasks, and deadlines helps them to plan and write better. Furthermore, only 16 respondents (17,77%) indicated that they thought it is not useful at all to mix languages while learning. Across the first three questions the neutral responses made up 15,55% (n=14), 11,11% (n=10), and 21,11% (n=19) respectively. The responses to these questions, even though not overwhelmingly positive, does indicate that using a first language makes it easier for some students to navigate the academic environment, and that they feel it is useful to do so.

The disjunct between responses in Figure 4 and Figure 5 might be rooted in students' conceptions of what it means to use a language in academic settings. It is possible that students view formal inputs (lectures and readings) and formal outputs (assignments, tests, and exams) as part of the 'academic' setting, while the process of how to internalise the inputs and produce the outputs (the process of learning and constructing knowledge) is not positioned as part of this setting. Thus, it is possible that students perceive language(s) of learning as separate from language(s) of teaching. This would imply that specific languages have

specific 'places' at the institution, or at least for the students from the two faculties who responded to the questionnaire. This would imply that English is seen as the language of the curriculum and formal teaching spaces, while a greater variety of languages are seen as languages of social learning spaces

Open-ended question responses

Responses from the open-ended questions support the idea that students differentiate between languages of formal teaching and assessment and languages of social learning. Even though respondents reported that they were unlikely to use languages other than English in academic settings (Figure 4), their responses to the open-ended questions align more closely with what they reported in Figure 5 (see examples in the sub-sections below). Respondents were prompted (see Figure 1) to provide input on whether more multilingual resources should be made available at the institution[3] , as well as whether multilingualism should be used in assessments. Linked to assessments, we asked students two questions: 1) whether it would be useful to have question prompts available in all official languages, but only answer in English[4] , and 2) whether they would like to have question prompts available in all official Wits languages, as well as the opportunity to answer them in any of these languages[5]. The open-ended questions were not compulsory to answer, thus some respondents did not provide input on these questions.

English as lingua franca

Linked to the 'place' of language at the institution, students' responses supported that they preferred English as the language of formal teaching and assessment[6] . Reasons cited most often by respondents were that English is the language of the workplace, and that the additional LoLTs may cause language injustice and therefore exclude international students. To counteract these injustices respondents suggested the use of English as lingua franca, as shown in the quotes below. This aligns with the insights from Cummins (2015) and Alexander (2011).

"I think at higher education level, communication and learning should only be conducted in English, which is a way of preparing students for the workplace environment, which as we know is English driven. I feel that at tertiary level it is too late to try and accommodate other languages. That should already have happened at basic education level." [Respondent 6].

"I honestly think English is the easiest way to do work and communicate because it is a language that is spoken internationally and it is spoke [sic] in most work places in South Africa." [Respondent 9].

Many respondents positioned English as the language of access, not only as a language to access knowledge, but as a foundational communication tool to better access the job market, both nationally and internationally. Students' drive to make themselves as marketable as possible for the world of work through their preference for English might be exacerbated by South Africa's high unemployment rate (Quarter 1, 2024: 32,9%) (GCIS, 2024), and the trend for students to look for employment outside of South Africa's borders.

Language injustice

The next theme that emerged was that of language injustice where respondents felt that the official Wits LoLTs were perpetuating language injustices, as it seems to the respondents that isiZulu and Sesotho are usually privileged above other South African languages.

"What will make the two languages of choice favourable over the other? Won't that be another form of an injustice, where particular languages always obtain favor [sic] while others

[3] Sixty eight of 90 respondents completed this question (response rate = 75,56%). Of the 68 received responses 69,12% (n = 47) were outright positive, 14,71% (n = 10) were outright negative, and 16,18% (n = 11) showed mixed sentiments.

4 Sixty nine of 90 respondents completed this question (response rate = 76,67%). Of the 69 received responses, 46,38% (n = 32) were outright positive, 36,23% (n = 25) were outright negative, and 17,39% (n = 12) responses showed mixed sentiments.

5 Seventy of 90 respondents completed this question (response rate = 77,77%). Of the 70 received responses 42,85% (n = 30) were outright positive, 47,14% (n = 33) were outright negative, and 10% (n = 7) responses contained mixed sentiments.

6 Please note that due to word limitation, only the most salient respondent quotations have been shared in the article.

not even included in the National Anthem always receive suppression?" [Respondent 93].

"It will be unfair for Zulu and Sotho speaking people to have the privilege of being asked questions in their mother tongue, while the other 8 languages will not have a chance to write their own languages, but English. However, it will be better if all people will be treated equally (all learning in English as done internationally)." [Respondent 94].

Linked to international students, respondents indicated that the selected LoLTs could alienate this specific segment of students, as shown by the following example:

"It is going to create confusion and unnecessary racial conflicts. Using English alone is good because it is universal and does not exclude anyone especially international students who do not know any of the South African languages." [Respondent 77].

Even though respondents took a strong stance on the importance of English, it is also necessary to note that they felt that there is a place for other languages at the university.

"I don't think science should be in multiple languages except for explaining things to each other in class." [Respondent 20].

The quote directly above shows that respondents feel that there is a place for other languages, just not in formal interactions, indicating that it does have a place in spaces of meaning making and learning, i.e. discussions.

Several students indicated that multilingualism can be a valuable resource for meaning making, which can support the learning process.

"… isiZulu and Sesotho students who received schooling in these languages, they should be allowed to apply for translated notes and slides in their language of choice." [Respondent 3].

Some indicated that the use of multiple languages can help them communicate their ideas better, while others highlighted that it helps them in the learning process. Particularly to engage with and grasp topics and content knowledge, which some respondents reported allows them to engage more directly with the content, thus bypassing the extra layer and complexities of the English language.

"I think [multilingual resources] would help a lot of students conceptualise topics and develop a deep understanding and knowledge. I think they'd pass better." [Respondent 28].

"Having multilingual resources makes studying easier for me as I'm able to grasp concepts quicker because the African language tends to relate to things happening in around one's environment. I'm also able to relate better with the work as it speaks to me as an individual rather than having to first understand the meaning in English then apply the language to the context." [Respondent 22].

Respondents also indicated that they feel that having assessment prompts in the official Wits languages could help with their understanding of what is required of them.

"[When you have assessment prompts in multiple languages] it become easier, quicker and effective to comprehend and answer." [Respondent 71].

The perceptions linked to language use and language injustice is complex. As the responses above show there is a perceived tension between privileging / excluding some student groups and using all the Wits LoLTs to enhance learning and meaning making, as well as engaging more meaningfully with assessment requirements. Returning to the perceived 'place' of language at the institution, this tension might be addressed by using English as the language of teaching and assessment, and the other Wits LoLTs in more social learning spaces. However, a possible concern that might arise from such a positioning is that the other Wits LoLTs may then be positioned is positioned as remedial and could be perceived as being of less importance which may have serious epistemological and ontological ramifications.

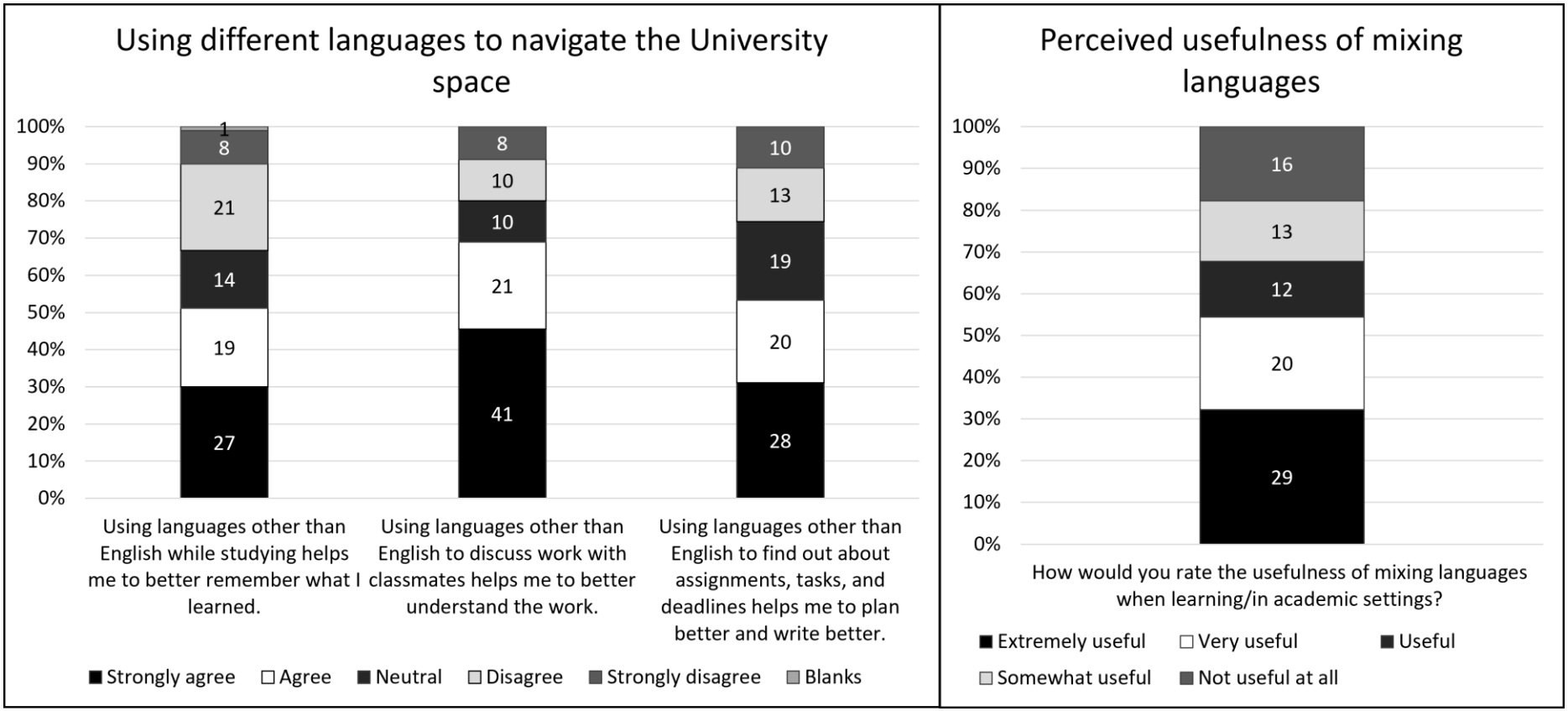

Figure 5: Students' self-reported use of various languages as well as the perceived usefulness of translanguaging.

Languages of official communications

A final theme that emerged was that respondents felt it important to have an option to access official institutional communication in all Wits LoLTs.

"At the very least provide a choice to access all official communication & websites in other official languages." [Respondent 27]

Furthermore, the need to receive communication at course level in official Wits LoLTs was also highlighted.

"I think it would be best for the time being to keep lectures in english but make other resources such as communication on [the LMS] available in other languages." [Respondent 24]

These observations about languages of communication, whether in learning and teaching spaces or the university more broadly, highlights the value some students tie to experiencing their home languages used within the institution. This is likely linked to the cultural and identity dimensions of language and could therefore serve to help foster a sense of belonging for students and other members of the Wits community.

Discussion

The complex nature of both LoLTs and multilingualism, especially within the context of a South African higher education institution, are reaffirmed by this study. Therefore, in this section we share several important observations based on the findings, which will inform how we proceed and that may be useful to other researchers working in similar contexts.

First, it is apparent that within a higher education context like the one in which we work, language is complex and multifaceted, as it intersects with student learning, the notion of spaces within the university, and power hierarchies. Multilingualism, then, adds an additional layer of intricacy to the already complex phenomenon that is language. For this reason, we contend that institutional language policies should be regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain current, relevant, and responsive to the climate[7] and institutional culture within which they are being implemented. Having an inert policy may simply not be sufficient when it comes to something as dynamic and contested as language. Furthermore, Madiba (2018) states that there is often a "gap between [overt] language policy and language practice" (p. 508) at institutions of higher learning, because formal policies are rarely implemented to their full extent and might not be a true representation of the languages spoken at the institution. Closer to home and tied to the above, our findings suggest that the existing Wits Language Policy (Wits, 2015) will have to be reviewed and updated if it is to remain sufficiently relevant and responsive to student needs and to changes within the higher education landscape (although we acknowledge that further research may be necessary, as it could be argued that perception alone does not necessarily warrant policy review).

Second, the complexities that come with including some official South African languages in university language policies and not others, warrant attention. While the logistics and practicalities of not accommodating all the official South African languages stand to reason, the associated implications for students and the university cannot be ignored. As language is intricately tied to culture, being, and identity, (Otheguy et al., 2015), selecting only some languages to include in university language policies are potentially compromising how users of the remaining languages adjust to university, foster a sense of belonging while at the university, and experience the power imbalances that may ensue from favouring some official languages above others (whether intentionally or not). One potential way of mitigating this, is to actively encourage and support the use of all official South African languages among members of the university community, even if informally. This would align with Madiba's (2018) description of covert language policies as informal and bottom-up, thus mimicking the everyday language

7 For example, generational variations in student body, advancement in the domain of artificial intelligence, pandemics, and an evolving world of work

practices of the university community more closely. Even though it might not be feasible to have a covert institutional language policy (as opposed to an overt one), it is important not to lose sight of the valuable insights and richness that could arise from 'the bottom' that could be to the benefit of the language policy and the university community. Furthermore, the institution should also share information about how and why certain languages were chosen as official institutional languages. Communication and collaboration with students are thus vital parts when it comes to language policy development and implementation, and the realisation of a truly multilingual university community.

Third, the perception of English as a prestige language (Alexander, 2011) – a language of science, the economy, and the world – may make it difficult to use non-English languages as LoLTs in higher education. The issue is complex. Our findings show that several respondents preferred English for formal teaching and assessment practices yet mentioned the value of using non-English languages for learning, meaning making, and understanding. It seems that, at least for those students that participated in this study, formal teaching and social learning take place in different 'places' within the university (see sub-heading Students' perceived 'place' of languages in institutional spaces above), and as a result, the languages linked to these spaces also have a specific 'place'. This can create a complex, and perhaps dangerous, language hierarchy where everything is done in service of English as a status language, and all other languages are seen as inferior. Positioning language in this way links to what Banda (2018) termed multiple monolingualisms. In other words, languages as separate systems, which is in direct and fundamental opposition to one of the core tenets of translanguaging. According to translanguaging, each speaker draws on a single linguistic repertoire whether they are bi- or multilingual (Otheguy et al., 2015). Furthermore, the manifestation of such a hierarchical language structure in education may deter the development of other languages into academic languages, as development can only take place through use. Yet it could also have deeper and more serious repercussions. Language and culture are inextricably linked (Alexander, 2011; Cummins 2015; Otheguy et al., 2015), and the stagnation and possible decline of one could very likely have a negative effect on the other.

Lastly, our findings show that some students are unaware of Wits language resources and policies, thus emphasising the importance of appropriate and timely communication with students about them, ideally via multiple platforms. Consequently, we deem it imperative that students be informed about opportunities and discussions related to language and multilingualism within the institution, about language-related functionalities, such as those existing in the institutional learning management system, and that the institutional language policy is made visible and available in an accessible manner to students. Coupled with communication is collaboration. As active members of the university community, students must be afforded the opportunity to participate in and contribute to conversations and discussions related to language within the university. While on the one hand this would allow student voices to be heard, it would also aid with preventing unrealistic expectations in the language domain. Although our study yielded several innovative ideas and suggestions related to the use and integration of multiple languages within the university (not shared in this paper), many respondents showed a lack of insight into the complexities of achieving some of these suggestions (e.g., translating all course material into students' languages of choice). This is understandable, considering the respondents are not experts in this area, but could be avoided through involving and educating students (and the university community) about multilingualism, the language policy, and the intricacies characteristic of the space.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Further Research

In conclusion, it is important to note that this study is limited to two faculties at a research-intensive South African university. Expanding the study to include the other faculties at Wits could provide more comprehensive contextual insights into students' LoLT needs and will likely increase the response rate. Similarly, the study could be expanded to other South African higher education

institutions, which would provide a national perspective that may inform broader policy development within the sector. Another area of further research could be to conduct interviews or focus groups with students, which would provide a more in-depth qualitative and nuanced perspective of students' LoLT needs. Finally, the part of the study reported on here is limited to student perspectives. During the next phase of the project the team will be conducting focus group discussions with staff from the two faculties, which we anticipate will provide further, more well-rounded insights, while also potentially raising additional complexities in relation to language policy implementation. We intend integrating the combined staff and student findings from this study to inform how we proceed and what we share with other key stakeholders within the institution. Ultimately, our aim is to continue working towards the realisation of genuinely multilingual learning and teaching environments within the two faculties through translanguaging, while more broadly supporting language transformation at the institution and across the South African higher education sector.

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