



Exploring The Possibility of Using Khelobedu As A Medium of Instruction: Teachers And Subject Advisors' Perspectives

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Abstract: The study sought to elicit the perceptions of teachers and subject advisors towards the use of Khelobedu, which is a dialect, as a medium of instruction. This study followed a qualitative approach, through which data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 8 Foundation Phase teachers and 2 subject advisors in Mopani District. The study revealed that teachers and subject advisors are of the view that Khelobedu would benefit the learners optimally if it can be used as a medium of instruction (Mol). The teachers' stance on Khelobedu as Mol was also motivated by the fact that they encountered problems when teaching Khelobedu-L1 learners in Sepedi. Thus, its use as Mol is likely to assist Khelobedu learners in overcoming the linguistic barrier, facilitate learning, and enhance their understanding.

Keywords: Khelobedu, Sepedi, perceptions, medium of instruction, linguistic barrier, official languages

1. Introduction

Generally, South Africa (SA) has been described as a multilingual country due to the number of languages spoken in the country. The languages that were declared as official languages in February 1997 include Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans, and English (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). In addition to the 11 official languages already mentioned, in May 2023, the South African National Assembly approved amending Section 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) to include South African Sign Language as an official language to advance the rights of deaf persons. These languages serve the purpose of facilitating learners' access to education. Unfortunately, despite the affirmation of democratic values such as human dignity, equality, and freedom in Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights, the dialects associated with these official languages, like Khelobedu, do not enjoy the same rights and status under the Constitution. If so, the State is infringing on the language rights of learners who speak dialects, meaning their rights to use their language are being infringed. This circumstance has sparked discussions among researchers, teachers, parents, and other concerned organizations. To alleviate the situation, some researchers advocate for the use of dialects in the classroom to accommodate learners who speak different languages.

For instance, Gxilishe (2013) suggests using dialects in the classroom as a transitional language to the standard language because a child's sense of self and belonging is enhanced when they are first exposed to their home language. Yiakoumetti (2007: 51) advocates for a "bidialectal situation in which the standard and non-standard variety of the same language are used alongside each other." Both viewpoints by Gxilishe (2013) and Yiakoumetti (2007) serve as a plea to save the rights of learners who speak dialects like Khelobedu. A similar concern has been raised by Cekiso, Meyiwa, and Majola (2023) in their study which focused on the challenges facing isiMpondo learners in learning standard isiXhosa. In the context of this study, isiMpondo is a dialect, and isiXhosa is a standard language. The findings of the study showed that isiMpondo-speaking learners were not exposed to the isiXhosa language outside of the classroom context as they were exposed to isiMpondo at home and in their community. Subsequently, isiMpondo vocabulary conflicted with isiXhosa vocabulary and complicated the life of isiMpondo-speaking learners when learning the new language, isiXhosa. The participants in the study were of the view that using a dialect and standard language simultaneously in the classroom could minimize the challenges experienced by isiMpondo learners.

The current study aimed to investigate the opinions of teachers and subject advisors regarding the possibility of using Khelobedu as a medium of instruction. It was

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inspired by the previously mentioned positive views that aimed to elevate the dialects to the point where they could be utilized in the classroom. According to the current study, a dialect is a language variation connected to a specific social or regional group. The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) and the Constitution marginalize the mother tongues of Xhosa learners, one of the minority groups in South Africa. The education policy compels this group of learners to give up their mother tongue, Xhosa, in favor of Sepedi, the standard language.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, not many studies have been done on the difficulties faced by learners who speak the Xhosa dialect while trying to learn the Sepedi language, despite the delicate nature of the issues that affect dialect learners in the classroom. It is for that reason that the authors of this paper feel that the views of the teachers and subject advisors are important on the matter. To achieve this goal, the study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of the teachers in the foundation phase when teaching Xhosa-L1 learners in Sepedi?
- What are the teachers' perspectives on the use of Xhosa as a medium of instruction?
- What are subject advisors' perspectives regarding the use of Xhosa as a medium of instruction?
- What strategies do the teachers in the Foundation Phase use to improve the understanding of the Xhosa-L1 learners?

2. Theoretical Framework

While translanguaging has been used for a long time by different authors, it was broadened as a theoretical and analytical concept by Blackledge and Creese (2010), Canagarajah (2013), Wei (2011), and Garcia (2011). The concept has been reshaped and applied to new realms, and because of these writers' works, it has also been questioned and cautioned against due to its abundance of meaning and overly optimistic attempts at transformation. The writers discuss translanguaging as a social practice and how it affects our perception and use of language. The authors also examine student- and teacher-driven translanguaging with a focus on developing translanguaging pedagogies—that is, framing translanguaging as a legitimate resource or asset that all students, teachers, and aspiring teachers should be able to perform. This theory was deemed relevant for the current study as it explored teachers' and subject advisors' views towards the use of Xhosa as a medium of instruction in the classroom. The translanguaging pedagogy mentioned by the above authors is relevant in this case.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Perspectives of Teachers and Subject Advisors Regarding the Use of Dialects as a Medium of Instruction in South African Classrooms

Literature on teachers' perspectives regarding teaching in an African language is mostly limited to postgraduate studies. The earliest study by Nomlomo (1993) explored teachers' perspectives towards isiXhosa and its different dialects. One of the main findings was that teachers believed dialects should not be used in the classroom. Sithole (2019) investigated the use of African languages as media of teaching and learning in public schools in Mopani District of Limpopo Province. In her qualitative inquiry, Sithole interviewed 30 teachers from five schools in Mopani District to get their perspectives on the use of African languages as mediums of instruction (MoI). The findings of her study revealed that African languages are admired by most teachers. Most importantly, the findings revealed that it is possible to introduce African languages as media of teaching and learning in South Africa, but it will require extensive preparation, including effective training of teachers and the acquisition of teaching and learning materials in African languages.

Literature on the perspective of subject advisors or education specialists in the South African context is also limited to a few postgraduate studies. These include studies by researchers such as Khweyane (2014) and Maqam (2015). Khweyane (2014) investigated the influence of the dialect Sepulana on the learning of Sepedi at Sabie Circuit, Mpumalanga Province, in South Africa. The study involved teachers and subject advisors in the Sabie Circuit. The study found that Sepulana has a negative impact on the learning of Sepedi as a standard language. The subject advisors therefore advised that learners should be penalized when they write in their dialect. Similarly, a study by Maqam (2015) found that Grade 8 learners were penalized for using their dialects in answering assessments, even though the teachers used dialects during lessons. Majola and Cekiso (2023) argue that it is unfair to penalize dialect-speaking learners when they use their dialects because these dialects are the linguistic resources the learners have at their disposal.

The subject advisors in Khweyane's study advanced that learners should be conscientized not to use Sepulana when writing assessments. Despite the fact that the learners are Sepulana-L1 speakers, its use in the classroom was discouraged. The subject advisors stressed that only Sepedi is to be used since it is the official language. At the same time, they argued that Sepulana cannot be promoted because it is not a language but a dialect. This denies the universal principle on the promotion and development of language varieties that every language, even a dialect, can be promoted through use. This perspective seems more biased from a monolingual standpoint than based on principles of language promotion and development. The claim that Sepulana cannot be promoted because it is a dialect ignores the fact that most languages, if not all, existed as dialects before standardization. This kind of

perception unwittingly contributes to viewing dialects from a deficit perspective, rather than as a resource learners can use to enhance their understanding, as advocated by the Language Resources (LR) theory.

3.2. The Process of Promoting a Dialect to the Level or Status of a Standard Language

MacKinnell (2024) believes that the process of a particular dialect becoming the 'standard' version of a language depends on a range of factors such as political and administrative factors, economic factors, educational system, media and communication, cultural prestige, geographic factors, social acceptance, and historical factors. MacKinnell believes that when a government or similar authoritative body uses a particular dialect for its language of record and business, then that dialect is likely to be promoted to the status of a standard language. An example MacKinnell provides is that of the North German Hanse. Similarly, McGowan (2024) declared that the Tuscan dialect in Italy was declared a standard language because of the success of Dante's 'La Comedia,' which made the Tuscan dialect widely known and used across Italy. May (2024) argued that many languages have their standard form inspired by the capital of the country they are spoken. May further claims that people of power play an important role in empowering a dialect to the status of a standard language since the capital is often where the royalty and upper echelons reside.

In the South African context, Rakgogo and Zungu (2022) conducted a study on the elevation of Sepedi from a dialect to an official standard language. Specifically, the study explored the role played by economic, cultural, and political power and influence when a particular dialect was elevated to the status of an official language. The findings of the study revealed that all official standard languages were dialects before. However, these dialects were considered superior and elevated to the status of official languages because of socio-economic power and political influence.

The role of political influence in elevating a dialect to the status of a standard language has been mentioned by Semono (2024). Semono referred to a speech made by the current South African President Ramaphosa during the coronation ceremony of the Queen of Balobedu, Ga-Modjadji, in Limpopo province. In his speech, President Ramaphosa revealed that Khelobedu could become an official South African language. Such utterances from the president might yield political influence that could change the status of the Khelobedu dialect. However, whether it was a political statement or something to be implemented remains to be seen.

Regarding the possibility of using a dialect (Khelobedu) as a medium of instruction, it falls within the scope of elevating the status of a dialect to that of a standard language. As mentioned in the introduction, some researchers like Gxilishe (2013) have advocated for the use of the dialect alongside the standard language in the classroom. This view aims to meet halfway those learners who speak the dialect. A study conducted by Cekiso, Meyiwa, and Mashige (2019) on Foundation Phase teachers' experiences with instruction in the mother tongue showed that teachers were not trained to teach in the medium of instruction of the mother tongue, which was isiXhosa in the context of that study. The authors recommended that teacher training institutions should provide adequate and relevant professional training to Foundation Phase teachers so that they could teach in isiXhosa optimally. This view can easily apply to the current study since the possibility of using Khelobedu as a medium of instruction has not been tested before. It means that to achieve this important goal, institutions of higher learning must train teachers on how to teach in the medium of instruction of Khelobedu. Cekiso, Meyiwa, and Mashige (2019) suggested that all textbooks, readers, educational media, study guides, and related literature be made available in isiXhosa. The same applies to the current study since all prescribed and supporting material should be made accessible in Khelobedu. Thus, pre-service as well as in-service training needs to foreground Khelobedu as a language that should contribute to effective teaching and learning.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research approach and study design

This section provides a brief discussion of the methodology that was followed to achieve the objective set out earlier in the introduction section. In order to elicit in-depth data to establish the perceptions of teachers and subject advisors towards the use of Khelobedu as a medium of instruction (MoI), a qualitative approach was followed. The qualitative research approach was preferred because it was able to produce descriptive data, which are generally people's own written or spoken words. The in-depth interviews allowed the participants the time and space to respond to the questions posed. The use of a qualitative approach afforded the participants the latitude to explore the topics under discussion, give their honest perspectives, relate the issues to their own experiences, and most importantly, offer solutions to problems or propose solutions. In the current study, a case study research design was followed.

4.2. Participants

The sample consisted of Foundation Phase teachers and subject advisors. The total number of teachers was eight, seven of whom were females and one male. Their age distribution ranged between 40 and 59 years, and their teaching experience ranged between 15 and 33 years. Seven of the eight teachers were Khelobedu-L1 speakers, and only one teacher was a Sepedi-L1 speaker. The two subject advisors were females and both were Khelobedu-L1 speakers. These participants were purposively selected. This sampling technique enabled the researchers to select schools and participants based on the researcher's judgement about which ones would be the most useful or representative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Purposive sampling also enabled the researchers to select schools

where a majority of teachers and learners are Khelobedu-L1 speakers. In the Bolobedu South region, not all schools enrol learners who speak Khelobedu as their L1, and not all teachers in Bolobedu South are well acquainted and knowledgeable in Khelobedu. For this reason, purposive sampling was used to select participants in the current study, who in this case are the Foundation Phase teachers, speaking and/or teaching Khelobedu-L1 learners. The subject advisors have been teachers before and have taught learners who come from dialectal backgrounds, especially in Bolobedu South.

After selecting participants, they were given leaflets to inform them about the study and their rights in the data collection process. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, which were achieved through assigning the participants code names. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. The data were analyzed thematically.

McMillan and Schumacher (2001:461) define qualitative data analysis “as primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among categories.” The analysis of qualitative data is concerned with organizing and working with the data, breaking them into manageable units, coding and synthesizing them, and searching for patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The analysis aimed at making meaning and conclusions from the research participants’ information provided. Qualitative data were, therefore, analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a procedure for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). During the analysis process, the researcher noted patterns, themes, categories, and regularities. The researcher then classified the data that were similar and those that were different and summarized them based on similarities and differences in order to move from a mass of words to a final report. The coding process enabled the researchers to analyze and interpret the data, which is presented in the following subsections.

5. Findings

The findings in this subsection are presented according to four themes: challenges encountered by Sepedi FP teachers, translanguaging by teachers, translanguaging by learners, and academic performance using Khelobedu. For the purpose of a smooth presentation, the teachers were assigned code names according to sequence and gender. MT1 will stand for male teacher 1, and FT1 for female teacher 1, while SA will stand for Subject Advisor. We now present a synthesis of the teachers’ responses, per interview question, supported by quotations where necessary.

5.1. Findings from Teacher Interviews

Theme 1: Challenges Encountered by Sepedi FP Teachers

Drawing from the literature that indicated that using a language other than the learners’ L1 as MoI might result in many complex classroom problems, teachers were asked if they ever encountered challenges in their respective classrooms as a result of using Sepedi as MoI. In response to the question, all the teachers indicated that they encountered a number of challenges, such as learners having a limited vocabulary, incorrect spelling, incorrect pronunciation, as well as using phonemes from Khelobedu. The following excerpts reveal these challenges:

- FT1: “Yes, we come across challenges.”
- FT2: “Learners use their dialects instead of Sepedi (standard), this is because it is their mother tongue.”
- FT3: “They are not able to articulate sounds, they struggle with pronunciation, they use Khelobedu, and another challenge is vocabulary. For example, *Katse*, which means cat, they say *Khemake*.”

MT1: “As some learners are already familiar with the language, Khelobedu, from home, there are certain concepts that surprise them when we use them in the classroom. This becomes a struggle for them. For example, *Buuswa*, meaning porridge, instead of *Bogobe*, now the learner starts to change the tone because they are not used to it as it is not the language they speak regularly. In Selobedu, we have *Obhela*, which means ask, instead of ‘go *Kgopela*,’ so now the child finds it difficult to use ‘Ke A Kgopela.’”

Based on the above verbatim quotations, it is clear that teachers faced challenges teaching Khelobedu learners in Sepedi. They attributed the learners’ challenges to the mismatches that exist between Sepedi and Khelobedu. Furthermore, the teachers remarked that these challenges are exacerbated by the fact that the learners are not exposed to Sepedi, which they only encounter in the classroom.

Theme 2: Translanguaging by Teachers

Based on the diglossic situation in FP classrooms in Bolobedu, teachers were asked if they utilize translanguaging as a pedagogical tool to enhance the understanding of Khelobedu-L1 learners. A majority of the teachers shared that they use TL (Sepedi and Khelobedu) in the same lesson, as the following excerpts show:

- FT6: “Yes, we translanguage because when we teach in Sepedi, learners do not understand.”
- FT4: “We translanguage to enhance their understanding.”
- MT1: “We are compelled to translate to Khelobedu since the learners struggle to understand when we teach in Sepedi.”

The above extracts revealed that teachers use both Sepedi and Khelobedu via TL. They deemed this approach to teaching effective as it enhances the learners’ understanding. They shared that they use TL for purposes of

explaining content, demonstrating activities, asking questions, etc. For example, the teachers shared that asking the learners questions in Sepedi is a futile exercise in most cases, but when they ask in Khelobedu, most learners raise their hands, eager to respond. Having shared that they use TL, teachers were asked if they allow their learners to utilize it as well. Their responses are presented in the following subsection.

Theme 3: Translanguaging (TL) by Learners

Given that Khelobedu-L1 learners are taught in Sepedi as the prescribed Language of Learning and Teaching, teachers were asked, “Do your learners employ TL in the classroom during learning?” In response, all the teachers indicated that their learners employ TL extensively in the FP classrooms, as the following extracts show:

- MT1: “They use Selobedu extensively.”
- FT1: “Yes, they translanguange.”
 - FT2: “They use their home language since it is their first time at school.”

Based on the teachers’ verbatim quotes, it is clear that Khelobedu-L1 learners use Khelobedu in the classroom by means of TL. FT2 believes that the learners use TL because it is the first time they attend school, and as such, they are likely to use the language they have been exposed to at home.

Theme 4: Academic Performance Using Khelobedu as MoI

Given the general consensus that teaching learners in a language they speak at home enhances their understanding, thus improving their academic performance, the teachers were asked, “What would be the learners’ academic performance if they were taught in Khelobedu?” In response to this question, all the teachers indicated that their learners would excel academically if Khelobedu was used as MoI, as the following extracts reveal:

- FT6: “They can perform well because it is the language they speak regularly”.
- FT3: “Good, they can pass, but the challenge is employability”.
- FT5: “The pass rate will be 100%”.
- FT7: “The learners can perform well, because even the parents, being the first teacher, will be in a position to assist”.

It is evident that all the interviewed teachers are optimistic that the use of Khelobedu as MoI would benefit the learners greatly. More so because the parent, being the first teacher, would be able to assist their children. Despite the conviction that Khelobedu would benefit learners in the classroom, FT3 raised a concern regarding employability. FT3 felt that it would be difficult to find employment as a monolingual speaker of a local dialect. This view is dealt with in context in the discussion section.

5.2. Findings from Subject Advisors

As already indicated under the methodology section, 2 subject advisors were interviewed. The findings are presented according to 2 themes: learners’ academic performance and steps taken by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to address the challenges Khelobedu-L1 learners are facing and the high failure rates in schools in Bolobedu in relation to the use of Sepedi as the MoI.

Theme 1: Learners’ Academic Performance

Based on the literature that indicated that teaching learners in a language they speak at home enhances their understanding, which makes them perform better, the subject advisors gave contrasting views regarding learners’ academic performance using Khelobedu as MoI. These contrasting views are noted in the following excerpts:

- SA1: “I’m of the opinion that learners will perform excellently if they use the languages they use at home.”
- SA2: “I don’t think so. I don’t believe it is a matter of the language learners speak at home being a medium of instruction.”

The responses above show that the SAs do not share the same view on the question at hand, hence different answers. SA1 believes that learners would perform excellently if Khelobedu was used as MoI, whereas SA2 does not think so. When they were asked to elaborate, they said the following:

- SA1: “They could perform well in their home language; it can be a dialect or any. If it is the language they know, they will perform alright, as long as when the learner says *kheghethelo* (dish), it is allowed. It is the language the learner understands which they will perform best in.”
- SA2: “...so for me, it is not about language, it is about the skill. If we are to teach the language skills correctly, whatever language it may be, learners would perform. Personally, I would say our teachers are found wanting, our FP teachers are old. If we can train our teachers to teach a language, I keep saying that in Grade 12, we complain that learners are not able to read, but is there anyone who gave themselves time to teach the learners to read? So if we can focus on the four language skills in the FP, the issue of language is not a problem.”

The language of instruction is not the only factor that contributes to the performance of learners. According to SA2, poorly trained teachers also contribute to learners underperforming. For this reason, it is important that learners are taught in the language they speak at home and that teachers are well-equipped in that language of instruction when training to be language teachers.

Theme 2: Steps Taken by the DBE

Based on the literature, which indicated that teaching learners in a language other than what they speak at home can give rise to many complex classroom problems such as a high failure rate, dropouts, etc., one would think that some intervention would be needed from the DBE. Therefore, the officials were asked to shed some light on the remedial steps the DBE may have taken to address the problem of the high failure rate in Bolobedu, in particular. The following responses show that no such steps were ever taken by the DBE:

- SA1: “To be honest, there was no step that was ever taken anywhere. They just see it as rural. They just think it is okay. I’m being honest. I don’t want to lie. They do not see any problem that Khelobedu learners, why Khelobedu learners are taught in another language and not in Khelobedu. There was not a person or government that ever reached out to investigate what you are saying. Why? Growing up, we never thought Khelobedu was important. We did not even think Khelobedu could be part of the language used to teach learners to be better people, to reach higher heights, or to be in a position to have a smooth transition to transfer Khelobedu to English when they progress to Grade 4 and above. We did not grow up thinking Khelobedu could become an important language on its own...this is where the problem lies, where even the district or Limpopo will not worry much to take steps on why are they not taught in their own language, why are they still taught in another language. We grew up holding to the notion of the whites that a better language is from GaSekhukhune.”
- SA2: “No step has been taken by the DBE to address the issues the learners face in Bolobedu South. It is not just the issue of language, but the skills to teach, which our teachers lack.”

There seems to be a general perception that certain languages or dialects are not that important as far as the above views are concerned. For this reason, the DBE has not taken any steps to address the challenges the learners are facing in Bolobedu, either by teaching them in a familiar language or by thoroughly equipping their teachers. It is clear that attitude is one of the hindrances to the prospect of using dialects as MoI.

6. Discussion

6.1. Challenges in teaching in Sepedi

This study found that Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges when they teach Khelobedu-L1 learners in Sepedi. They cited challenges such as spelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary. These have been found to be common challenges teachers face as documented in UNESCO reports over the past years. Researchers such as Alexander & Bloch (2004), Evans & Cleghorn (2012), Fleisch (2008), and Wolff (2016) have found that when learners are taught in a language different from theirs, they encounter linguistic challenges such as a lack of vocabulary, incorrect spelling, sentence structure, and pronunciation. The teachers claimed that these challenges are attributed to the mismatches that exist between Khelobedu and Sepedi. A report by the National Research Council (2010) attests that language differences can affect students’ academic achievement in several ways. A study by Rakgogo & Mandende (2022) demonstrated that there are mismatches between Khelobedu and Sepedi. In their study, they compared Khelobedu lexical items with Sepedi and showed that the two differ greatly in terms of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and origin. This correlated with what the teachers said during interviews: their learners struggled with reading because they were not exposed to how Sepedi words are pronounced. This finding thus establishes that teaching learners in an additional language is problematic for the learners. This finding is supported by O’Connor and Geiger (2009) in the Western Cape and UNESCO (2010) in Africa. O’Connor and Geiger (2009) reported that teachers who participated in the study were frustrated by a considerable workload arising from the fact that they had to teach the language and vocabulary for specific content, thus confirming the study’s finding. Furthermore, O’Connor and Geiger reported that teachers complained that their learners were not able to speak the MoI and were ill-disciplined because they did not understand instructions.

The brief discussion above confirms that when teachers teach learners in an additional language, they also face challenges. Although teachers sometimes struggle with their own inadequacies in the MoI, it can be concluded that when teaching and learning are performed in an additional language, both learners and teachers are likely to encounter challenges. In order to navigate the above challenges, this study found that teachers actually used Khelobedu in the classroom and allowed their learners to use it as well via a trans-lingual approach. This is discussed herein in the following subsection.

6.2. TL by Teachers

The third research question focused on strategies that FP teachers used in their classrooms to navigate the challenges they encountered when teaching in Sepedi. The findings of the study in relation to this research question revealed that teachers used TL for various pedagogical purposes. Taking into account learners’ poor economic and linguistic backgrounds and lack of exposure to Sepedi, teachers saw TL as the best practice. They shared that they used TL as an instructional strategy, and they deemed it to be effective. The effectiveness of TL is also affirmed

by Nhongo and Tshotsho (2019). More specifically, Nhongo and Tshotsho (2019) investigated the perceptions of Science and Mathematics teachers about translanguaging as a method of teaching Science and Mathematics. Their study was conducted in four secondary schools in Bulawayo and Matabeleland South province in Zimbabwe. The results of their study showed that teachers have applied translanguaging as an instructional method in the teaching of Science and Mathematics. Their study concluded that adopting translanguaging as a teaching method in bilingual classroom contexts aids learners' cognition, thereby enhancing comprehension of concepts better than when only the English language is used in teaching and learning.

The study's finding also concurs with findings from studies conducted by Mokgwathi (2011) and Khairunnisa and Lukmana (2020). The results of their studies reported that teachers held positive attitudes towards TL in the classroom as they regarded it as a strategy to facilitate communication. Their studies concluded that TL is beneficial to the learners and, therefore, should be encouraged, especially in settings where additional languages are used as MoI.

6.3. TL by Learners

Given the diglossic situation in Bolobedu South, teachers were asked to shed some light on their learners' linguistic behavior in the classroom. The teachers revealed that their learners use TL in the classroom in which they switch between Khelobedu and Sepedi. They deemed this to be effective as they claimed TL enabled their learners to participate in classroom activities through asking and answering questions. This is the most important function of TL because responding to questions is an integral part of learning. One would not say learning has taken place if learners are not able to respond to questions. Thus, with TL available as a pedagogic strategy, learners were able to participate in classroom activities. This tallies with findings by Garcia, Johnson & Keltzer (2017) and Gorter and Genoz (2017) that TL allows learners to answer content questions in the language in which they feel most comfortable, thus increasing their participation in the classroom. The use of TL can lead to more humanizing experiences, enhanced epistemological access, learners feeling included, and learners feeling like valued members of the classroom community.

The findings of this study further showed that a majority of Khelobedu-L1 learners used their language as a readily available resource to effectively participate in the learning activities in the classroom. This indicates that the plethora of knowledge learners bring to the classroom can be put to good use. This finding is in line with the orientation of language as a resource by Ruiz (1984). The orientation of language as a resource promotes the idea that "every language should be valued as a precious possession and a quintessential aspect of humanity—one that ensures achieving or fulfilling social, economic, governmental, and educational objectives" as argued by Mutasa (2015:2).

6.4. Academic performance using Khelobedu as MoI

The teachers and one subject advisor echoed the same sentiment regarding the positive impact Khelobedu would have on learners' academic performance. They indicated that learners would perform well because it is the language they speak regularly. This finding is supported by findings from Prah (2000), Phillipson (2009), UNESCO (2010), and UNICEF (2016). The above-cited researchers found that learners learn better when the language used for instruction in the teaching and learning process is a local language, which later facilitates the acquisition of other languages easily. These scholars further argue that local languages are the basis for literacy since they are already understood by local populations, and young children, in particular, can more easily learn academic content in languages they already understand. The finding under discussion is also consistent with the findings of Alidou (2003) and Heugh (2006) that learning in one's own language holds various advantages for the learner, including increased access, improved learning outcomes, reduced chances of repetition and drop-out, and socio-cultural benefits. The positive cognitive effects of using a familiar language of instruction include the ready construction of schemata for learning and the availability of prior knowledge in learning new content (Alexander & Bloch, 2014; Collier & Thomas, 2004).

The finding of this study also tallies with findings from Ouane and Glanz (2010), who conducted a study in Ethiopia. The findings of their study demonstrated that learner performance in Mathematics and Science was far better for those using local languages as MoI than for those using English as MoI. This concretizes the notion that the use of local languages or dialects as MoI has a positive impact on learner achievement, even in subjects such as Mathematics and Science. This is an extremely important finding in this study because it establishes that it is feasible to teach school content in any language, even if it is a dialect. The catch is, that dialect or language should be the one spoken and understood by the learners for better academic results. This finding, thus, positions dialects such as Khelobedu as linguistic resources that can be used by teachers in the FP in Bolobedu South for the purposes of teaching and learning. In other words, this finding makes one look beyond a dialect such as Khelobedu as a problem and start perceiving it as a resource, which is consistent with the orientation of language as a resource by Ruiz (1984).

6.5. Steps Taken by the DBE to Assist Dialect-Speaking Learners

Despite the finding that FP teachers face challenges when they teach Khelobedu-L1 learners in Sepedi, the study has found that no steps have been taken by the DBE to address the issues of learners underperforming in the Bolobedu South region. This is shocking because a plethora of reports by the DBE in 2015 indicated that learners

in the Bolobedu South region are underperforming, with Sepedi being the worst-performed subject. This establishes that the inaction by the DBE is not a matter of not being aware of the situation because reports indicate that the DBE is well aware of the challenges faced by learners in Bolobedu South. Similarly, a study by Khweyane (2014) found that learners who speak the dialect Sepulana are not performing well in Sepedi. One of the reasons advanced was that their dialect negatively affects their writing and thus its use should be discouraged. What is common in both the current study and Khweyane's is that the issues dialect-speaking learners face are not entertained. The researchers believe that this inaction by the DBE has a possible negative effect on the linguistic competence and academic achievement of Khelobedu-L1 learners and Sepulana-L1 learners. The likelihood of this, therefore, is that these learners will continue to struggle. The implication of this study is that the DBE has a huge task in addressing the issues dialect-speaking learners face daily in their classrooms as a result of being taught in a different language.

7. Conclusion

This study sought to explore the possibility of using Khelobedu as a medium of instruction. The findings revealed that both teachers and subject advisors perceived the use of Khelobedu as MoI positively. They believe that Khelobedu-L1 learners would perform exceptionally well academically if taught in Khelobedu since the learners already possess thousands of vocabulary words and knowledge and sounds of Khelobedu. This will make the learners access academic content more efficiently. The findings in this correlated with the literature reviewed. On a more practical level, teachers shared they indeed used Khelobedu via a translingual approach to navigate the challenges they experience when they teach learners in Sepedi. This shows that teachers walk the talk; they do not just believe that using the dialect Khelobedu could enhance learners' understanding and lead to better academic achievement, but they actually admit that they use it. We conclude this study thus: dialects such as Khelobedu need to be used as MoI as a way to value and preserve them and to prepare learners for the world in a language that promotes understanding. This will not only promote understanding but will account for local culture, bringing back autonomy and pride to the local population.

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