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Assessing the Intersectionality of Language Anxiety and Outcomes for African Learners Writing Examinations in English

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the intersectionality of language anxiety, writing examinations in English, and outcomes for non-English mother-tongue learners in South Africa. The study focused on the impact of these three factors on learner performance and delved into this intersectionality by reviewing the literature on anxiety stemming from writing examinations and the impact of the language medium used in assessing learners. Qualitative document analysis was used to collect and analyse the data for this study. It involved gathering literature from psychology, education, and language studies to reveal a correlation between anxiety, writing examinations, and the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). The study concluded that using English as a medium for examinations can have a negative impact on learners who may not be linguistically competent to express themselves effectively in English, even if they were taught using translanguaging pedagogies. It argued that the true potential and outcomes of learners will only be fully realised through the exam process if they are allowed to write examinations in their mother tongues; and recommended that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) should allow for examinations to be conducted in all official languages for all grades and encourage learners to write examinations in their mother tongues. The only examinations they should be required to write in English are those for English Additional Language, like Afrikaans mother tongue speakers who can write all their examinations in Afrikaans except for English as a subject.

Keywords: *Anxiety, English Hegemony, Examinations, Language of Learning and Teaching, Linguistic Injustice*

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INTRODUCTION

Translanguaging pedagogies allow learners to use their language skills to comprehend educational content in the classroom. However, this method is typically not fostered during examinations, which are solely written in English or Afrikaans. This situation forces learners who speak indigenous South African languages as their mother tongues to prepare to meet both the language and subject-specific requirements to pass their examinations. Consequently, South African learners experience an additional level of anxiety in their education due to the language barrier.[1]

[1] S Madonsela, "Language Anxiety Caused by the Single Mode of Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms: The Case of African Language Learners," *Africa Education Review* 12, no. 3 (2015): 447–59.

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Language is a contentious issue in South Africa, with numerous policies and projects aimed at correcting linguistic injustices. Despite 30 years of political emancipation, little has changed in the country, as students still study and write examinations in English and Afrikaans which were the only official languages during the apartheid era, despite their mother tongues being recognised as official in the current democratic era. Brock-Utne (2014) argues that there is a connection between language difficulties and the high dropout rate of learners, and to this end, Makalela suggests the use of ubuntu translanguaging in the classroom to help students understand content as teachers were already codeswitching (unofficially), allowing students to express themselves in their languages during classroom activities.[2] Given the status quo in the country in the direction towards translanguaging, this paper asks: How does the exclusion of previously marginalised indigenous languages from the examination process intensify language anxiety and academic challenges among South African learners, and how can ubuntu translanguaging pedagogies be employed to mitigate these educational obstacles?

In responding to this question, I consider that ubuntu translanguaging pedagogies can be deemed as an enabling strategy to address communication challenges in classrooms emanating from the use of English as the preferred Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). Madonsela contends that this LoLT causes language anxiety among students, adding an extra layer of difficulty to understanding academic content.[3] This paper asserts that language anxiety is worsened during exam periods when students face overwhelming pressure and examination anxiety. In response to these challenges, the paper seeks to conduct a document analysis of the DBE Diagnosis Report Book 2 from the 2023 Grade 12 cohort and further reviews the literature on language anxiety and establishes linguistic challenges resulting from a lack of proficiency in the language used in assessing learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this literature review is on LoLT and language anxiety.

The language of learning and teaching in South Africa

In 1997, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) published a Language in Education Policy (LiEP) that allows learners to choose their preferred Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) when applying for admission to a specific school. This policy aims to promote the use of previously marginalised languages in schools, but parents are still hesitant to have their children educated in African languages due to globalisation and the perception that these languages may not adequately prepare them for future success.[4] Additionally, the limited availability of educational materials in languages other than Afrikaans and English hinders the implementation of this policy.[5]

Despite changes in political structures, the Constitution, and educational policies, 79.1% of learners still do not have access to education in languages they understand best.[6] Since 1993, there have been suggestions for bilingual education with both English and learners' mother tongues, as well as proposals for mother tongue education.[7] Studies on mother tongue education and translanguaging

[2] Birgit Brock-Utne, "Language of Instruction in Africa-the Most Important and Least Appreciated Issue," *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa* 1, no. 1 (2014): 4–18;," in *Language in Epistemic Access* (Routledge, 2018), 24–41.Madonsela, "Language Anxiety Caused by the Single Mode of Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms: The Case of African Language Learners"; Madonsela, "Language Anxiety Caused by the Single Mode of Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms: The Case of African Language Learners."

[3] Madonsela, "Language Anxiety Caused by the Single Mode of Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms: The Case of African Language Learners."

[4] Haidee Kruger, "Towards a Paradigm for the Study of the Translation of Children's Literature in the South African Educational Context: Some Reflections," *Language Matters* 38, no. 2 (November 2007): 275–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/10228190701794632.

[5] Kathleen Heugh, "Multilingual Education Policy in South Africa Constrained by Theoretical and Historical Disconnections," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 33 (2013): 215–37; N Mohohlwane, "Mother-Tongue Instruction or Straight-for-English? The Primary Education Policy Dilemma," *RESEP Working Paper*, 2020.

[6] Stephen Taylor and Marisa von Fintel, "Estimating the Impact of Language of Instruction in South African Primary Schools: A Fixed Effects Approach," *Economics of Education Review* 50 (2016): 75–89.

[7] Aceme Nyika, "Mother Tongue as the Medium of Instruction at Developing Country Universities in a Global Context," *South African Journal of Science* 111, no. 1–2 (2015): 1–5.

pedagogies have been conducted as a solution for the multilingual nature of the country to avoid creating linguistic divides.[8]

Translanguaging refers to the practice of using multiple languages to communicate effectively. Speakers choose the language that best enables communication in a given situation.[9] Unlike code-switching and codemixing, which involve moving between languages, translanguaging allows for the use of a full language repertoire for meaningful communication.[10] This teaching strategy is worth being celebrated as it welcomes languages that were once ignored in classrooms – making education more accessible. However, there is continued reliance on English as the language of assessment puts non-English mother tongue learners at a disadvantage due to language anxiety, low self-esteem, and difficulties in self-expression that can impact their academic performance.

Language anxiety

In general, anxiety is defined as a feeling of uneasiness caused by a threat.[11] Situations that can provoke uneasiness, such as examinations, the classroom environment, the subject matter, teachers, classmates, or even the language used in the classroom, can be triggers for anxiety.[12] In psychology, anxiety is described as an organic response characterised by apprehension and heightened vigilance in situations of uncertain danger or potential threats to the individual's well-being.[13] It is an automatic reaction to a threatening situation.

Anxiety is further categorised into two types: psychophysiological state anxiety, which involves physical and psychological reactions to a specific adverse event, and personality trait anxiety, which is a more enduring form of anxiety related to how individuals react to specific situations over time.[14] Despite some writers using fear and anxiety interchangeably, psychology scholars caution against this, stating that fear is a state that can be detached from, while anxiety is a more emotional and ambiguous feeling that is difficult to shake off .[15]

According to Ohman in Matthews and Mackintosh, fear involves a dread of impending disaster and a strong urge to defend oneself by escaping the situation, while clinical anxiety is described as an unpleasant feeling of foreboding that is hard to articulate.[16] Although there is an overlap between fear and anxiety, they are distinct phenomena, and this paper asserts that they should not be viewed as interchangeable.

They propose a cognitive model for understanding anxiety, which outlines five stages of anxiety as depicted in Figure 1.

[8] Z. Gudula, " The Influence of Language on the Teaching and Learning of Natural Sciences in Grade 7" (University of Western Cape, South Africa, 2017); M. Diko, " A Comparative Study of the Use of IsiXhosa and English as Media of Instruction in the Teaching and Learning of Static Electricity in Physical Sciences" (Stellenbosch University, 2018); Felix Banda, "Translanguaging and English-African Language Mother Tongues as Linguistic Dispensation in Teaching and Learning in a Black Township School in Cape Town," *Current Issues in Language Planning* 19, no. 2 (2018): 198–217; S. Ayob, "The Utilisation of Translanguaging for Learning and Teaching in Multilingual Primary Classrooms" (University of Pretoria, 2020); Malephole Philomena M Sefotho, "Ubuntu Translanguaging as a Systematic Approach to Language Teaching in Multilingual Classrooms in South Africa," *Journal for Language Teaching* 56, no. 1 (2022); Shalom Nokuthula Ndhlovana and Erasmos Charamba, "The Efficacy of Translanguaging in Selected South African Mathematics and Science Intermediate Phase Classrooms," *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching* 11, no. 3 (2023): 373–89;Letsela Motaung, *Translanguaging Pedagogical Practice in a Tutorial Programme at a South African University*, 2024.

[9] Brooke Ricker Schreiber, "'I Am What I Am': Multilingual Identity and Digital Translanguaging," 2015.

[10] C. P. Dladla, "Code-Switching during Church Sermons: Implications on Language Development" (University of KwaZulu Natal, 2017).

[11] Donald Moss, "Psychological Perspectives Anxiety Disorders," *Performance Anxiety: Origins and Management. 1st Ed. Thompson Learning*, 2002.

[12] Renxia Zhang and Jian Zhong, "The Hindrance of Doubt: Causes of Language Anxiety," *International Journal of English Linguistics* 2, no. 3 (2012): 27.

[13] Pollyana Caldeira Leal et al., "Trait vs. State Anxiety in Different Threatening Situations," *Trends in Psychiatry and Psychotherapy* 39, no. 3 (2017): 148.

[14] Leal et al., "Trait vs. State Anxiety in Different Threatening Situations."

[15] K T Strongman, "Theories of Anxiety," *New Zealand Journal of Psychology* 24, no. 2 (1995): 4–10.

[16] Arne Öhman, "Fear and Anxiety," *Handbook of Emotions*, 2008, 710;Andrew Mathews and Bundy Mackintosh, "A Cognitive Model of Selective Processing in Anxiety," *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 22, no. 6 (1998): 539–60, 544.

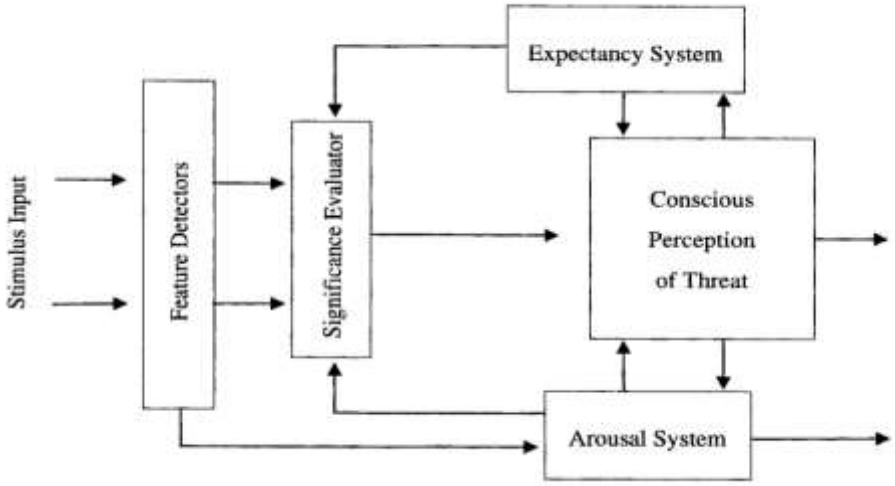


Figure 1: Information processing model of anxiety (Ohman, 1993) extracted from Mathews and Mackintosh [17]

According to this model, the stimulus input is analysed by feature detectors. A highly intense stimulus may activate an arousal of a system, skipping the significant evaluator phase. In cases where the stimulus is not intense, it is evaluated by the significance evaluator of the person without conscious awareness. Information is then transferred to the conscious perception of the threat, making a person less effective in the task they are expected to perform (expectancy system). This alerts the person to potential dangers that may result from not being able to fulfil expectations, leading to various kinds of anxiety.

This paper focuses on the negative anxiety associated with language and its impact on learners' outcomes in examinations written in a language other than their mother tongue. This type of anxiety includes various communication anxieties such as communication apprehension (fear of communicating with others) and language anxiety, which is cognitive distress resulting from contact with a foreign language or a second language.[18] In South Africa, most learners learn English as a second language and struggle with language anxiety.[19]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is constructivism, a learning theory that focuses on how learners build knowledge by incorporating new information into what they already know.[20] It suggests that humans comprehend new concepts by internalising the outcomes of their actions and striving for a balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Piaget's idea of equilibration views learning as the process of gaining insight into the intellectual processes of humans – "Intelligence organizes the world by organizing itself" Piaget in Moll.[21] Each new piece of information contributes to the foundation of knowledge that learners have, drawn not only from teachers but from the entire world they live in.

Language is initially acquired in the home environment, and as individuals interact outside the home or with others who enter their home, they acquire more words and languages. Schools provide a formal setting for acquiring skills, knowledge, and language, among other things. In South Africa, most learners are not native English speakers, yet English is the LOLT. These learners must build upon English as a basis for their education even though their communities speak other languages. While their primary languages are encouraged in the classroom for communication purposes through translanguaging

[17] Andrew Mathews and Bundy Mackintosh, "A Cognitive Model of Selective Processing in Anxiety," *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 22, no. 6 (1998): 539–60, 544.
[18] D. J. Young, "New Directions in Language Anxiety Research," in *Faces in a Crowd: The Individual Learner in Multisection Courses*, ed. C. A. Klee (MA: Heinle & Hienle, 1994), 3–46; Ming Wei, "The Interrelatedness of Affective Factors in EFL Learning: An Examination of Motivational Patterns in Relation to Anxiety in China.," *Tesl-Ej* 11, no. 1 (2007): n1.
[19] Madonsela, "Language Anxiety Caused by the Single Mode of Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms: The Case of African Language Learners."
[20] Bodner. " Constructivism: A theory of knowledge." *Journal of chemical education*, 63, no. 10 (1986): 873.
[21] Jean Piaget, "The Theory of Stages in Cognitive Development.," 1971; Ian Moll, "Computers in the Classroom: What Informs What We Teach the Teachers," *Innovations in Online Teaching and Learning. Cape Town: Aosis*, 2022, 3–27, 8.

pedagogies, they are not allowed in the examination room where they are needed most to demonstrate the knowledge, they accumulated over the years to respond to exam questions. Learning takes place when individuals achieve a balance between their existing knowledge and new information, and this balance is crucial during examinations, where learners must draw on all their knowledge, both inside and outside the classroom, to create responses.[22]

This study argues that the examination system in South Africa should consider the impact of the language of instruction to help alleviate poor academic outcomes among learners who are not native English or Afrikaans speakers. A re-evaluation of the language policy may help ease anxiety among learners.[23] The impact of exam-related anxiety has been studied since the 1950s and researchers learnt that learners experiencing this form of anxiety often drop out of educational institutions due to poor performance.[24] In investigating language anxiety in the South African context, I analysed the results of the 2023 Grade 12 cohort in the English First Additional Language examinations to assess their grasp of the language of learning and teaching, and non-language subjects to determine the impact of the latter in expressing themselves during examinations.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigated how language anxiety affects learners' performance in examinations. The researcher relied on document analysis, a method for examining written or recorded material, including institutional reports.[25] This involved a content analysis of language-specific issues reported in the Department of Basic Education's 2023 Diagnosis Report Book 2, which can be accessed by the public at www.dbe.gov.za. In 2023, a total of 691,160 Grade 12 learners wrote their final examinations nationwide. Out of these learners, 574,968 took English First Additional Language (EFAL) and 572,467 learners achieved a pass of 30% or higher, resulting in a pass rate of 99.6%. Since English is the preferred LOLT in the country most learners wrote all their examinations in English (a second language) and used their native languages for their home language papers.

The researcher examined sections of the report which addressed language issues and purposefully selected comments related to randomly selected subjects – English First Additional Language, Economics, Business Studies, Accounting, Agricultural Sciences, and History. The data was analysed and categorised based on language comprehension and expression, to determine the relationship between language anxiety and learner performance in EFAL and non-language subjects.

The DBE technical report was the most relevant resource for obtaining data on Grade 12 results. The study acknowledges potential limitations, such as the way results are reported by the DBE, as Monyooe *et al*. advocate additional external observations and a critical examination of current policies regarding reporting on performance standards, teacher training schemes, and the administration and management of schools within an environment heavily influenced by unions, to help researchers determine the true potential exerted by learners.[26] Despite these concerns, the study recognises the Department of Basic Education as the most official source for publishing results and believes that its strength outweighs any limitations.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, I present the findings from a comprehensive document analysis of the Department of Basic Education Diagnosis Report Book 2 from the 2023 Grade 12 cohort, complemented by a review of pertinent literature. The analysis reveals several key points regarding learners' performance across various subjects learnt from analysis of excerpts from results in English First Additional Language (EFAL), Economics, Agricultural Sciences, Business Studies, Accounting, and History. I identified significant errors attributable to language barriers and systematically documented them in the accompanying tables,

[22] Moll, "Computers in the Classroom: What Informs What We Teach the Teachers."
[23] Madonsela, "Language Anxiety Caused by the Single Mode of Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms: The Case of African Language Learners."
[24] Anisa Trifoni and Miranda Shahini, "How Does Exam Anxiety Affect the Performance of University Students," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2011): 93–100.
[25] Glenn A Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40.
[26] Lebusa Monyooe, Martin Tjatji, and Eulenda Mosese, "South Africa? S Increased Matriculation Passes: What Skunks behind the Rose?.," *Journal of Education and Training Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 180–92.

which provide specific commentary on the linguistic challenges that have impeded comprehension and expression among students. This analysis aims to elucidate the extent of these challenges and their impact on academic outcomes, thereby offering insights into potential pedagogical strategies to overcome these obstacles.

Learner performance in the main LOLT (English First Additional Language)

In the year 2023, 99.6% of learners passed with a score of 30% or higher, showing a slight improvement compared to 2022. For this paper, the following three excerpts are considered:

EFAL
There has been a decline of 4% in performance in Q1. Candidates who did not do well displayed a challenge in reading for meaning due to a lack of adequate vocabulary and poor reading skills. Many candidates also displayed a clear inability to interpret questions beyond lifting information from passages and visual stimuli provided.
There has been a decline in performance in Q5 that tests language and editing skills. Many candidates could not answer basic language conventions correctly. Formal language teaching from Grades 8–12 deserves consistent attention.
The absence of reading comprehension skills was identified in some very incoherent responses where candidates quoted haphazardly from the given passage.

Table 1: Language commentary on AFAL results[27]

Although some improvement has been observed, learners still lack basic language skills in the main language they need to master to understand other subjects. They tend to engage in surface learning by 'lifting' or simply taking information from the words provided in the question paper without clearly interpreting the question. Biggs refers to this as surface learning approaches in contrast to deep learning approaches where learners fully immerse themselves to clearly understand the given information and process it well enough to demonstrate their understanding of the content.[28] According to the constructivist approach to learning, learners require linguistic skills as a foundation for acquiring and processing knowledge. Thus, deep learning approaches to learning may be challenging if one has challenges with the LoLT. The report mentioned that learners had poor reading skills, struggled with reading for comprehension, and had limited vocabulary for self-expression, and this hindered their ability to interpret questions.

Reading without a grasp of concepts makes reading challenging and this challenge continues to affect expression, which also becomes problematic as words are learned through reading.[29] As Phala and Hugo stated, "Reading is the most important indicator of success in life and school," this skill still needs to be developed for second language learners to have a chance at achieving positive outcomes in examinations.[30] This development should start in the EFAL classroom where data shows that these learners were unable to correctly answer basic language conventions, leading to incorrect and/or incoherent responses.

Madonsela references a warning by Lafon on the impact of learning and teaching in a second language and its role in causing language anxiety:

[27] Department Basic Education, "2023 Diagnosis Report Book 2," 2024, 17&24 https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/Diagnostic Reports 2022/Diagnostic Report 2023 Book 2.pdf?ver=2024-02-23-154559-813.

[28] John Biggs, "What the Student Does: Teaching for Enhanced Learning," *Higher Education Research & Development* 18, no. 1 (1999): 57–75.

[29] B.D. Hlalethwa, "Reading Difficulties Experienced by Learners in the Foundation Phase in Inclusive Schools in Makapanstad" (University of South Africa, 2013).

[30] Thembi A Phala and Anna Hugo, "Difficulties in Teaching Grade 3 Learners with Reading Problems in Full-Service Schools in South Africa," *African Journal of Disability (Online)* 11 (2022): 1–9.

> If learners do not have sufficient knowledge of the medium, they will constantly stumble in their learning, not necessarily on the concepts or ideas or knowledge to be imparted, but on linguistic representations and expressions.[31]

Learners require a language that serves as the basis for their learning. If this foundation is in a foreign language, minimal learning will occur. The inclusion of indigenous languages in examination papers could provide a solid foundation for learning, helping to reduce linguistic barriers. Language anxiety, in this case, leads to mental stress caused by the demands of the classroom.[32]
Considering the difficulties that students encounter with EFAL outcomes, to effectively build and communicate their knowledge, this paper also delves into themes of comprehension and expression in non-language subjects, randomly selected.

Comprehension

Ghaicha explains that examinations are a process of analysing students' performance against set criteria to measure their comprehension, skills, and abilities.[33] Various assessment criteria are used to offer feedback to both students and teachers regarding learning and teaching approaches. This section considers the points reported about the Grade 12 students' comprehension of knowledge, skills, and abilities as determined through their responses to questions asked in the examination. This analysis is based on excerpts from the report for Economics and Agricultural Sciences.

Economics
Poor language skills made it difficult for candidates to understand the requirements of questions and to express themselves clearly, especially in paragraph-type questions which formed a large part of the question paper. Most candidates were unable to solve problems, give their own opinions, or evaluate data connected to their study material. Candidates also lacked basic knowledge of the general economic issues of the day. More time should be spent on improving the reading skills of all learners – especially of those whose mother tongue is not the language of teaching and learning. Learners' understanding of terminology should be assessed continuously. A glossary of all concepts should be compiled for each topic.

Table 2: Language commentary on Economics results [34]

Agricultural sciences
It should be noted that weaker candidates were still challenged to deal effectively with even the less challenging parts of questions in Q1.3 and Q1.4 which required the basic subject terminology. They also had language barriers and were poorly prepared; these weaknesses were linked to their poor comprehension skills. Poor spelling continued to challenge most candidates and they tended to give responses that had no meaning and were far removed from the correct concept. Sometimes they wrote words that have different meanings, for example, importance instead of *impotence, and genetically modified organism instead of genetic modification*. Despite the subject-specific language used in Agricultural Sciences, weaker candidates continued to experience difficulty in understanding the requirements of questions. They tended to provide incomplete or unclear responses to questions requiring explanations or comments, and often relied on the commonly used responses offered in previous marking guidelines, and used them inappropriately in different contexts.

[31] Michel Lafon, "Asikhulume! African Language for All, a Powerful Strategy for Spearheading Transformation and Improvement of the South African Education System," *Standardisation of African Languages-Language Social Realities*, 2008, 37–59.

[33] Abdallah Ghaicha, "Theoretical Framework for Educational Assessment: A Synoptic Review.," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 24 (2016): 212–31.
[34] Department Basic Education, "2023 Diagnosis Report Book 2," 98- 99

Table 3: Language commentary on Agricultural Sciences results[35]

Ocansey and Gyimah emphasised that exam time makes students anxious, often leading to cognitive disorganisation that hinders them from reaching their full potential in assessments.[36] In a Grade 12 exam, students are expected to be able to read questions and provide their best responses. However, in the 2023 cohort, students lacked adequate language skills, preventing them from understanding and answering questions, solving problems, expressing opinions, evaluating information, understanding terminology, using correct spelling and terminology, and providing meaningful, in-depth, and complete responses. Despite an increase in the NSC pass rate in recent years, this should not be viewed as an accurate reflection of the quality of education in the country.[37] It is intriguing to see an upward trend in the success rate despite ongoing comprehension challenges. There is a language skills gap, which is unexpected, disheartening, and puzzling, especially considering that 99.6% of learners passed the EFAL exam, which is the Language of Learning and Teaching.

Typically, Grade 12 learners should be able to comprehend exam questions. Reading goes beyond merely identifying letters, words, and sentences; it involves using background knowledge to anticipate the text's direction and interpret new information. While basic decoding skills are essential for comprehension, they are enhanced by complex processes that aid in understanding. The main goal of reading is to acquire knowledge, particularly in English as a tool for understanding non-language subjects. The purpose of reading is linked to the learner's engagement in the task, typically focused on grasping the message. Within educational settings, comprehension is often demonstrated through activities such as answering questions, summarising in writing, or giving oral presentations.[38]

Brock-Utne argues that the LoLT contributes to the number of learners who drop out before completing Grade 12.[39] Despite their resilience in staying at school and completing final papers, the LoLT remains a challenge, hindering more positive outcomes. Madonsela identified these challenges as contributing to language anxiety, impacting learners not only in the classroom but also during examinations, leading to poor results.[40] In addition to language anxiety impacting learners' comprehension challenges, Ocansey and Gyimah suggest that cognitive disorganisation is a significant aspect of exam anxiety, including a lack of self-confidence, difficulty in responding to questions, thinking challenges, and forgetting what has been learned.[41] These learners not only faced language difficulties but also external factors such as copying responses from previous marking guidelines and using them incorrectly, indicating disorganisation that leads to poor exam results.

The difficulties faced by learners in their education led teachers to adopt translanguaging pedagogies to help students understand educational content and prepare them for advancement to higher levels.[42] Scholarly work highlights linguistic challenges encountered by learners, as reflected in Sepeng, noting that students feel more comfortable and confident when expressing themselves in their mother tongues, as "learners struggle to ask questions and build on previous responses using a language that is not their first language."[43]

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[35] Department Basic Education, "2023 Diagnosis Report Book 2," 41.
[36] Sylvia Ocansey and Emmanuel Kofi Gyimah, "Causes of Test Anxiety among Students in the Faculty of Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana," 2015.
[37] Nicholas Spaull, "South Africa's Education Crisis: The Quality of Education in South Africa 1994-2011," *Johannesburg: Centre for Development and Enterprise* 21, no. 1 (2013): 1–65, 8.
[38] Milevica Bojovic, "Reading Skills and Reading Comprehension in English for Specific Purposes," in *The International Language Conference on the Importance of Learning Professional Foreign Languages for Communication between Cultures*, vol. 23, 2010, 1–6.
[39] Brock-Utne, "Language of Instruction in Africa-the Most Important and Least Appreciated Issue."
[40] Madonsela, "Language Anxiety Caused by the Single Mode of Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms: The Case of African Language Learners."
[41] Ocansey and Gyimah, "Causes of Test Anxiety among Students in the Faculty of Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana."
[42] Leketi Makalela, "Bilingualism in South Africa: Reconnecting with Ubuntu Translanguaging," *Bilingual and Multilingual Education* 3 (2017): 297–310; Leketi Makalela, "Uncovering the Universals of Ubuntu Translanguaging in Classroom Discourses," *Classroom Discourse* 10, no. 3–4 (2019): 237–51; Manyane Makua and Nomalungelo Ngubane, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Language Policy for Higher Education from the Social Justice Perspective," *Journal of Educational Studies* 20, no. 1 (2021): 113–29; Sefotho, "Ubuntu Translanguaging as a Systematic Approach to Language Teaching in Multilingual Classrooms in South Africa."
[43] J.P. Sepeng, "Grade 9 Second-Language Learners in Township Schools: Issues of Language and Mathematics When Solving Word Problems" (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2010), 87.

Expression

Although the DBE report emphasises the use of the LoLT in the classroom, Makalela and other scholars discuss the use of translanguaging pedagogies to help learners understand content.[44] Therefore, one cannot ignore the constraints posed by the use of indigenous languages in the classroom. Cenoz and Gorter consider that pedagogical translanguaging reduces students' anxiety and teachers' guilt feelings about using more than one language in class.[45] Through these pedagogies, teachers exercise their agency to help learners express themselves during discussions and ask questions in the classroom. However, learners are still expected to respond to examination questions in the LoLT.

This section examines how learners expressed themselves in their examination papers for subjects such as Business Studies, Accounting, and History.

Business Studies
Linguistic barriers continue to limit candidates' responses to certain middle- and higher-order questions. Such shortcomings were granted partial marks where necessary. The language proficiency barrier was also noted in the 2022 National Diagnostic Report. (Page 64)

Table 4: Language commentary on Business Studies results [46]

Accounting
Innovative problem-solving questions will always feature in a balanced Grade 12 examination paper. An over-reliance on past papers will therefore not suffice. Informal class tests and class discussions must be encouraged as this will sharpen insight into internal control and ethical issues relevant to current times. Learners must be encouraged to express themselves clearly and to communicate in the language of assessment during class discussions and in revision programmes.

Table 5: Language commentary on Accounting results [47]

History
For second-language speakers, English seemed to be a language barrier in writing, hence it is difficult for them to get average to full marks.

Table 6: Language commentary on History results [48]

The responses of learners were influenced by their limited ability to answer higher and middle-order questions, their language proficiency, and their incorrect responses to instructional verbs. In the context of Accounting, the DBE took into account feedback from its 2022 report which highlighted the language difficulties faced by learners, reporting that "Another significant issue is the misunderstanding of the information provided for each adjustment, especially for learners taking Accounting examinations in a second language. Teachers need to regularly spend time breaking down and analysing the details of the information provided to boost these learners' confidence."[49] The burden was placed on teachers to further explain content to these learners for them to correctly express themselves in the examinations.

In the classroom, the content is explained (in English or *Ubuntu* translanguaging), and students are expected to apply what they have learned to the examination paper. The questions asked of students are structured according to Bloom's taxonomy of critical thinking, where questions progress from basic to advanced cognitive abilities. Examinations require students to demonstrate Knowledge, which involves recalling specific facts and formulae; Comprehension, which involves expressing ideas in their own

[44] Makalela, "Bilingualism in South Africa: Reconnecting with Ubuntu Translanguaging"; Makalela, "Moving out of Linguistic Boxes: The Effects of Translanguaging Strategies for Multilingual Classrooms"; Makalela, "Uncovering the Universals of Ubuntu Translanguaging in Classroom Discourses."

[45] Jasone Cenoz and Durk Gorter, *Pedagogical Translanguaging* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[46] Department Basic Education, "2023 Diagnosis Report Book 2," 2024, 64. https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/Diagnostic Reports 2022/Diagnostic Report 2023 Book 2.pdf?ver=2024-02-23-154559-813.

[47] Department Basic Education, "2023 Diagnosis Report Book 2," 39.

[48] Department Basic Education, "2023 Diagnosis Report Book 2," 162.

[49] Department Basic Education, "2023 Diagnosis Report Book 2," 23.

words; Application, which involves applying knowledge to practical situations; Analysis, which involves breaking down a subject to understand its structure; Synthesis, which involves creating new works; and Evaluation, which involves critically assessing various topics. The taxonomy emphasises essential cognitive skills in the first half and more complex thought processes in the second half.[50]

Students are expected to first understand the questions asked based on the verbs used, to guide their responses. A lack of understanding of these verbs leads to incomplete and incorrect responses. Understanding is crucial for grasping subjects across the educational spectrum, and students must integrate individual words to form cohesive sentences and synthesise those sentences to understand the text. Thus, this paper contends that students face constraints during examinations not only due to language barriers but also because of their ability to apply learned knowledge from their schemata. Factors identified by Dene are important when selecting a LoLT:[51]

- Learners must have a high level of proficiency in the language of instruction.
- Learners must have a good understanding of educational material to actively participate in class and class activities.
- Learners must be able to apply their practical knowledge, come up with new ideas and be able to express them in the language of instruction.

Sinyosi argues that the main reasons for learners failing Mathematics in school include the poor socioeconomic backgrounds of the learners, a lack of appropriate learner support materials, a generally impoverished school environment, poor quality teachers and instruction, unsuitable language instruction, and poor study orientation.[52] Although the pass rate for EFAL is 99.6% nationally, this does not mean that learners can fully participate in education and achieve the expected outcomes if they have been taught in their mother tongue. [53]

Language anxiety and the LoLT of examining learners who are second language speakers of the LoLT

In their 2023 study, Salam emphasised the link between anxiety and self-confidence, stating that academic self-confidence and self-esteem are crucial factors in determining educational performance.[54] Having a positive self-perception of one's learning abilities is associated with setting higher academic goals, engaging in deeper cognitive processing, and showing resilience in the face of academic challenges, often resulting in better academic results. On the other hand, a lack of self-confidence and negative self-assessment can hinder academic success, as students may focus more on their perceived weaknesses rather than their strengths, leading to feelings of anxiety. As stated by the DBE, learners should be supported in building confidence in their studies, especially when language barriers exist and impact their ability to acquire and express subject knowledge. They should be capacitated to construct knowledge and be allowed to draw from that construction in the languages they understand and can express themselves best in. Language anxiety is a common issue for South African students learning a second language, and the main challenge of the LoLT has been articulated in this paper in line with the impact identified by the Department, which is as follows:

[50] Christopher P. Ormell, "Bloom's Taxonomy and the Objectives of Education," *Educational Research* 17, no. 1 (1974): 3–18.
[51] H. K. Dene, " A Study on Factors That Affect Kistane Language to Become an Educational Language in Sodo Wereda of Gurage Zone, SNNPR" (Ethiopian Civil service University, 2018).
[52] L.B. Sinyosi, " Factors Affecting Grade 12 Learners' Performance in Mathematics at Nzhelele East Circuit: Vhembe District in Limpopo" (University of South Africa, 2015).
[53] Brock-Utne, "Language of Instruction in Africa-the Most Important and Least Appreciated Issue"; Diko, " A Comparative Study of the Use of IsiXhosa and English as Media of Instruction in the Teaching and Learning of Static Electricity in Physical Sciences"; Mohohlwane, "Mother-Tongue Instruction or Straight-for-English? The Primary Education Policy Dilemma."
[54] Yasmeena Salam, "Self Esteem and Academic Anxiety among Secondary School Students," *International Journal of Indian Psychology* 11, no. 1 (2023).

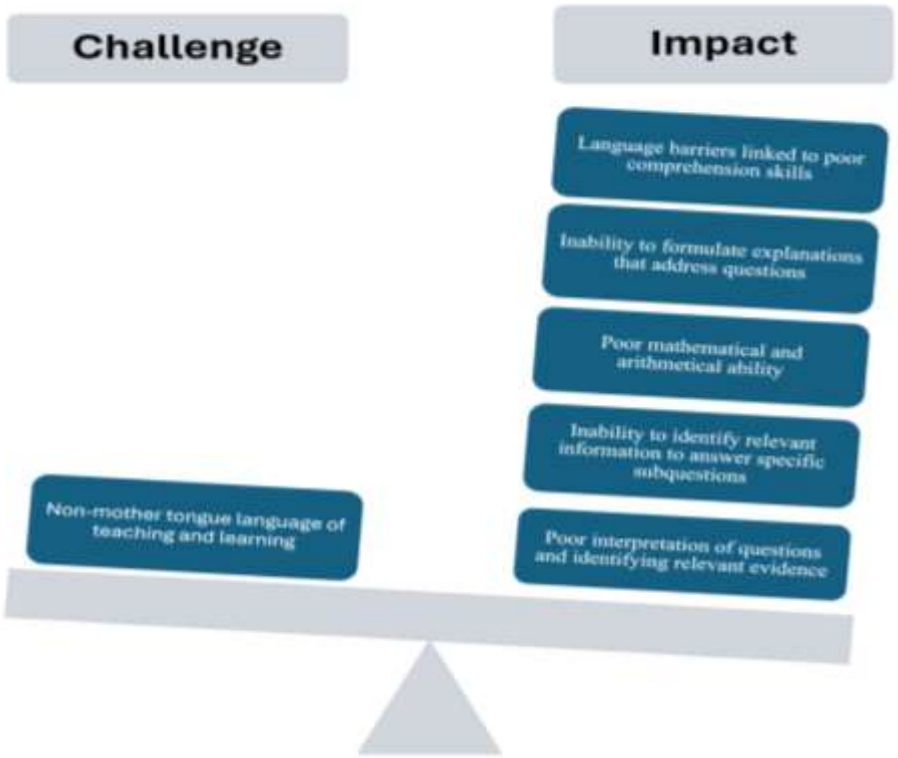


Figure 2: Impact of the Language of Learning and Teaching identified in the 2023 Grade 12 cohort examinations.[55]

The impact of language barriers on learners' outcomes is one of the problems in the education system that needs to be addressed through translating examination papers. This paper does not argue for mother tongue-based education because it has been argued to result in island institutions of learning where one can only register at a school where their mother tongue is spoken, thus this cannot be the only solution in multilingual societies but can be a possibility for bilingual societies.[56] To foster translanguaging in the educational system, examinations must be made available in all official languages represented in the classroom. The Department of Basic Education should take the initiative to translate examination papers, thereby allowing learners to choose the language in which they feel most comfortable writing their examinations. To support this effort, the DBE should also produce memorandums for marking these examinations in all official languages and employ staff proficient in each of these languages to undertake the marking process. This approach would empower learners, who are educated through translanguaging pedagogies, to read exam questions and provide responses in their preferred language. Consequently, this would level the playing field in terms of language and reduce exam anxiety.

For learners to succeed, there should be a connection between the knowledge they already have and the new knowledge they are learning. This process is crucial when it comes to writing examinations, as students are expected to demonstrate their knowledge using the language approved by the examiners. Examinations must be conducted in languages that all learners fully understand and are comfortable using to express their knowledge effectively.

South African learners often face challenges when examinations are in an additional language, leading to increased anxiety, procrastination, and decreased self-confidence. This anxiety can have a negative impact on academic performance. By addressing language barriers and allowing learners to use their preferred language in examinations, we can promote constructivism-led approaches to learning, reduce anxiety, and improve the chances of positive outcomes for all learners.

[55] Department Basic Education, "2023 Diagnosis Report Book 2," 17.
[56] Nyika, "Mother Tongue as the Medium of Instruction at Developing Country Universities in a Global Context."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, this paper recommends that translanguaging pedagogies employed at school be extended beyond learning and teaching to include examinations. The Department of Basic Education should consider the following:

- Revise existing examination policies and frameworks to formally integrate translanguaging practices. This includes not only the examination process but also the provision of learning materials and assessments in all official languages of South Africa.
- Develop a robust framework that outlines the steps and protocols for translating and administering examination papers in multiple languages, ensuring consistency, accuracy, and fairness in examinations.
- Encourage the development of technical lexicographic resources in African languages to support learning and teaching in the languages.
- Organise comprehensive stakeholder engagement initiatives involving educators, policymakers, parents, and students. These initiatives should aim to educate stakeholders on the benefits of multilingual examinations and how they contribute to reducing language-induced anxiety and enhancing educational outcomes.
- Conduct workshops and seminars to address ideological barriers and misconceptions regarding multilingual education. These sessions should provide empirical evidence and case studies demonstrating the positive impact of using students' mother tongues in examinations on academic performance and emotional well-being, including findings from the pilot project already conducted in Cofimvaba in the Eastern Cape.[57]

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the intersectionality of language anxiety, writing examinations in English, and outcomes for non-English mother tongue learners in South Africa based on the DBE Diagnosis Report Book 2 for the 2023 Grade 12 results which were compared to the report from the department with literature on language anxiety. It found that the poor outcomes of learners are not only caused by the fact that knowledge acquired over the years in preparation for their final examination is inaccessible due to linguistic challenges, but also by barriers associated with constructing knowledge. These barriers are caused because students do not have enough language skills in the LoLT to understand the higher-order questions and align what they were taught with what is required in the examination.

South Africa has a LiEP which allows learners to choose the official language in which they want to learn, regardless of their mother tongue. This policy allows learners to write examinations in a language they are comfortable with, similar to how Afrikaans-speaking learners can choose to write in Afrikaans. To accommodate the diversity of languages during examinations, papers should be translated into different languages and learners should be allowed to choose which language to use. This choice should be supported by teaching methods that allow all languages used in the classroom to be carried over to the exam room.

Learners need to be able to understand exam questions, terminology, concepts, and logic to achieve good results in a subject, as according to the examined report, this is a challenge for some of them. Translating examinations can help with this. Language plays a crucial role in learning, as it helps to create meaning and facilitates the formation of neural connections in the brain. It is easier for learners to understand information when it is conveyed in a language they are comfortable with.

According to The Equal Education Law Centre, only 51.6% of Black youth finish school.[58] Brock-Utne claims that there is a link between linguistic difficulties and the high dropout rate of learners; and based on the results of the 2023 cohort, language challenges are a reality for learners.[59] There is a lack of confidence among learners due to exam and language anxiety. To address this issue, students should be allowed to use their linguistic skills to express themselves orally and in writing. Currently, this is only

[57] A. Motshekga, "Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Seminar on the Eastern Cape Mother Language Education Programme Held at ICC, East London," 2022.
[58] Equal Education Law Centre, "Improvement in Quality Learning Outcomes and Equity in Public Education in South Africa, A Spotlight on 'Underperfoming' Schools," 2022, https://eelawcentre.org.za/wp-content/uploads/underperfoming-schools-report-1.pdf.
[59] Brock-Utne, "Language of Instruction in Africa-the Most Important and Least Appreciated Issue."

permitted from Grades 1 to 3, and will soon be extended to Grade 4 as announced by the DBE in May 2024. Teachers are already codeswitching and translanguaging in the classroom to explain information, but examinations and assessments are still conducted in English. Madonsela argued that code-switching should be used to maximise learner outcomes.[60]

As indicated in this paper, the medium of instruction poses a significant challenge to learners, especially during examinations where language assistance is limited. Therefore, examination papers to be translated into all official languages and for students to be allowed to write in their language of choice given that the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) affords them that choice.[61] This will help establish the true potential of learners during examinations and formal assessments without the impairment introduce by the medium of instruction. This involves making examinations available in all official languages, which can be achieved by translating examination papers into all official languages enabled by the LiEP.

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[60] Madonsela, "Language Anxiety Caused by the Single Mode of Instruction in Multilingual Classrooms: The Case of African Language Learners."

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