

# Literacy in multilingualistic context

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## Metalinguistic Skills

In a nutshell

- Metalinguistic skills, also called metalinguistic abilities, refer to the awareness and regulation of aspects of language and linguistics.
- Metalinguistic awareness is the concluding stage of language development in children. It develops in later stages of language development around the ages of five or six, building on earlier linguistic knowledge.
- Metalinguistic skills such as phonological awareness, morphological awareness, and orthographic knowledge play an important role in the development of word reading

among learners.

- Multilingual competence is the system of linguistic knowledge, understanding the mechanisms of functioning of language and algorithms of speech actions, good command in metacognitive strategies, and developed cognitive ability.

## Introduction

This article uses evidence-based literature to discuss “metalinguistic skills (phonological awareness, morphological awareness, and orthographic knowledge<sup>1</sup>Tighe, E., & Fernandes, M. (2019). *Unraveling the complexity of the relations of metalinguistic skills to word reading with struggling adult readers: Shared, independent, and interactive effects. Applied Psycholinguistics*, 40(3), 765-793.)” and the role they play in the development of word reading among learners. The role teachers can play to foster metalinguistic skills in learners has also been highlighted in explicit and systematic ways with examples where necessary. The discourse begins with an understanding of metalinguistic skills and their constituents and how these aid in the development of word reading in learners.

## Meaning of Metalinguistic Skills

Tighe and Fernandes<sup>2</sup>Tighe, E., & Fernandes, M. (2019). *Unraveling the complexity of the relations of metalinguistic skills to word reading with struggling adult readers: Shared, independent, and interactive effects. Applied Psycholinguistics*, 40(3), 765-793. noted that “Over the last several decades, three metalinguistic skills have consistently emerged as integral foundational processes underlying word reading development: phonological awareness, orthographic knowledge, and morphological awareness.” Metalinguistic skills, also called metalinguistic abilities, refer to the

awareness and regulation of aspects of language and linguistics. They include a person's ability to discuss an issue in a language, using language in context (e.g., when talking to a teacher, to a friend, at a market). Furthermore, these skills include an awareness of turn-taking in a conversation (listening to others as they listen to you when talking). Metalinguistic skills also take into account the processes involved in developing word reading<sup>3</sup>

Apel, K., & Masterson, J. J. (2001). Theory-guided spelling assessment and intervention: A case study. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 32, 182–195.. The scope of metalinguistic skills concerning the development of reading is realised at the levels of phonological awareness, morphological awareness, and orthographic knowledge as the precursor to the consciousness and control of linguistic components of language<sup>4</sup>

Tighe, E., & Fernandes, M. (2019). *Unraveling the complexity of the relations of metalinguistic skills to word reading with struggling adult readers: Shared, independent, and interactive effects*. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 40(3), 765-793.<sup>5</sup>

Ehri, L. C. (2005). Learning to read words: Theory, findings, and issues. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 9, 167–188 . The ability to think and discuss language is the hallmark of metalinguistics. Metalinguistic awareness is the concluding stage of language development in children.

TerKuile, et al.<sup>6</sup>

Ter Kuile, H., Veldhuis, M., Van Veen, S., & Wicherts, J. (2011). Bilingual education, metalinguistic awareness, and the understanding of an unknown language. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 14(2), 233-242., noted that “metalinguistic awareness refers to the understanding that language is a system of communication, bound to rules, and forms the basis for the ability to discuss different ways to use language. The acquisition of metalinguistic awareness is the last stage of language development of children.” The awareness of metalinguistics may be perceived as the ability to reflect upon and manipulate the structural features of a

spoken language, treating language itself as an object of thought, as opposed to using the language systems to comprehend and produce sentences<sup>7</sup>Tunmer W.E., Myhill M.E. (1984) Metalinguistic Awareness and Bilingualism. In: Tunmer W.E., Pratt C., Herriman M.L. (eds) Metalinguistic Awareness in Children. Springer Series in Language and Communication, vol 15. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.. Bialystok<sup>8</sup>Bialystok, E. (1986). Children's concept of word. Journal of Psycholinguistic research, 15, 13-22. adds that metalinguistics is a field of study that examines the relationship between language and culture. Metalinguistic skills are strategies that are applied, either consciously or automatically, to an oral or written linguistic message, to the analysis of a message, and to the control of language processing within the communicative culture.

In communication, there is a speaker and a listener. The speaker uses metalinguistic skills to relate the linguistic form of an intended utterance to the environment in which the utterance occurs to produce a message which has a desired effect on the listener. Likewise, the listener uses metalinguistic skills to understand the message that the speaker intends to convey. *Meta* is the Greek word that means *beyond*. It is interpreted as going beyond communication and meaning to instead focus attention on underlying structures.

Metalinguistic awareness can be defined as a child's knowledge of the nature of language as an object. Children begin to notice words as objects and later become able to manipulate them to learn to read and write and to accomplish a host of other tasks, such as using metaphors, creating puns, and using irony/sarcasm. Pan and Gleason<sup>9</sup>Pan, B. A., & Gleason, J. B. (1997). Semantic development: Learning the meanings of words. In J. Gleason (Ed.), The development of language (4th ed., pp. 311–331). Boston: Allyn and Bacon. observed that before children can engage in flexible use of words, they must have

an implicit understanding that words are separate from their referents. Young children often consider the name of an object another of its intrinsic attributes. They believe, for instance, that if you called a horse a cow, it might begin to moo. Later, children learn that words themselves are not inherent attributes of objects, which allows them to move beyond literal word use and adopt a metaphoric stance. This change in perception can be attributed to growth in metalinguistic ability.

Duncan et al.<sup>10</sup> Duncan, L., Casalis, S., & Cole', P. (2009). Early metalinguistic awareness of derivational morphology: Observations from a comparison of English and French. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 30(3), 405-440. indicated that metalinguistic awareness develops in later stages of language development around the ages of five or six, building on earlier linguistic knowledge; others have shown that metalinguistic skills start to develop as early as the age of one as children learn to monitor their breakdowns in communication when they are misheard. Some children are even able to play with words around the age of one. Children are heard playing with such words as *mami* by calling their mummies *mima* and laughing when they know that the correct way is *mami* or *mama*. As they progress towards the academic years, their metalinguistic skills continue to improve as they attain knowledge of specific meaningful language components that include sounds, syllables, words, and sentences. Tunmer et al.<sup>11</sup> Tunmer W.E., Myhill M.E. (1984) Metalinguistic Awareness and Bilingualism. In: Tunmer W.E., Pratt C., Herriman M.L. (eds) *Metalinguistic Awareness in Children*. Springer Series in Language and Communication, vol 15. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. add that young children need to develop metalinguistic awareness or the ability to think about and manipulate the structural features of spoken language.

## **The Application of Metalinguistic Skills to the Teaching of Literacy**

Research-based evidence in the past decades suggests that teachers typically taught three components of metalinguistic skills, namely: phonological awareness, morphological awareness, and orthographic knowledge<sup>12</sup>Tighe, E., & Fernandes, M. (2019). *Unraveling the complexity of the relations of metalinguistic skills to word reading with struggling adult readers: Shared, independent, and interactive effects*. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 40(3), 765-793.<sup>13</sup>Apel, K., & Masterson, J. J. (2001). Theory-guided spelling assessment and intervention: A case study. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 32, 182–195.<sup>14</sup>Ehri, L. C. (2005). Learning to read words: Theory, findings, and issues. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 9, 167–188.. These are further presented and exemplified in the sections below.

### ***Phonological Awareness***

Honig, et al.<sup>15</sup>Honig, B., Diamond, L. & Gutlohn, L. (2018). *Teaching Reading Sourcebook*, (3rd Ed.). California: Arena Press. reported that “phonological awareness is an umbrella term that includes the awareness of the large parts of spoken language, such as words, syllables, and onsets and rimes – as well as the smallest parts, phonemes.” Furthermore, a phoneme was defined as “the smallest unit of spoken language that makes a difference in a word’s meaning. For example, the phonemes /s/ and /f/ are different; the meaning of the word *sat* is different from the meaning of the word *fat*” (p. 116).

Brady<sup>16</sup>Brady, S. (2020). Perspective on Research Findings on Alphabetics (Phoneme Awareness and Phonics): Implications for Instruction. *The Reading League Journal* in the September/October 2020 issue, 20-28. contended that phonemic awareness, the ability to detect, identify, and manipulate phonemes in spoken words, is the most sophisticated and essential level of phonological awareness and a predictor of reading achievements among early grade learners. It should be made clear that phonemic awareness is not the same as phonics.

Phonemic awareness is the understanding that spoken language can be broken down into phonemes while phonics is the understanding of the relationship between phonemes and graphemes, the letters that represent the sounds in written language<sup>17</sup>Honig, B., Diamond, L. & Gutlohn, L. (2018). Teaching Reading Sourcebook, (3rd Ed.). California: Arena Press.<sup>18</sup>

Cardenas-Hagan, E. (2020). Literacy Foundations for English Learners: A Comprehensive Guide to Evidence-Based Instruction. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul Brookes Publishing

### *Levels of Phonological Awareness*

Phonological awareness is realised and taught at four developmental levels: the phoneme level, syllable level, intrasyllable level, and word level<sup>19</sup>Honig, B., Diamond, L. & Gutlohn, L. (2018). Teaching Reading Sourcebook, (3rd Ed.). California: Arena Press..

A phoneme, as a component of phonological awareness, is perceived as “the smallest unit of spoken language that makes a difference in a word’s meaning”. When parents and teachers begin to teach their children the sounds of letters of the alphabet in their local languages or English, they are already teaching phonemes. For instance, the English language alphabet has twenty-six letters that are used singularly and in combination to represent about forty-two to forty-four

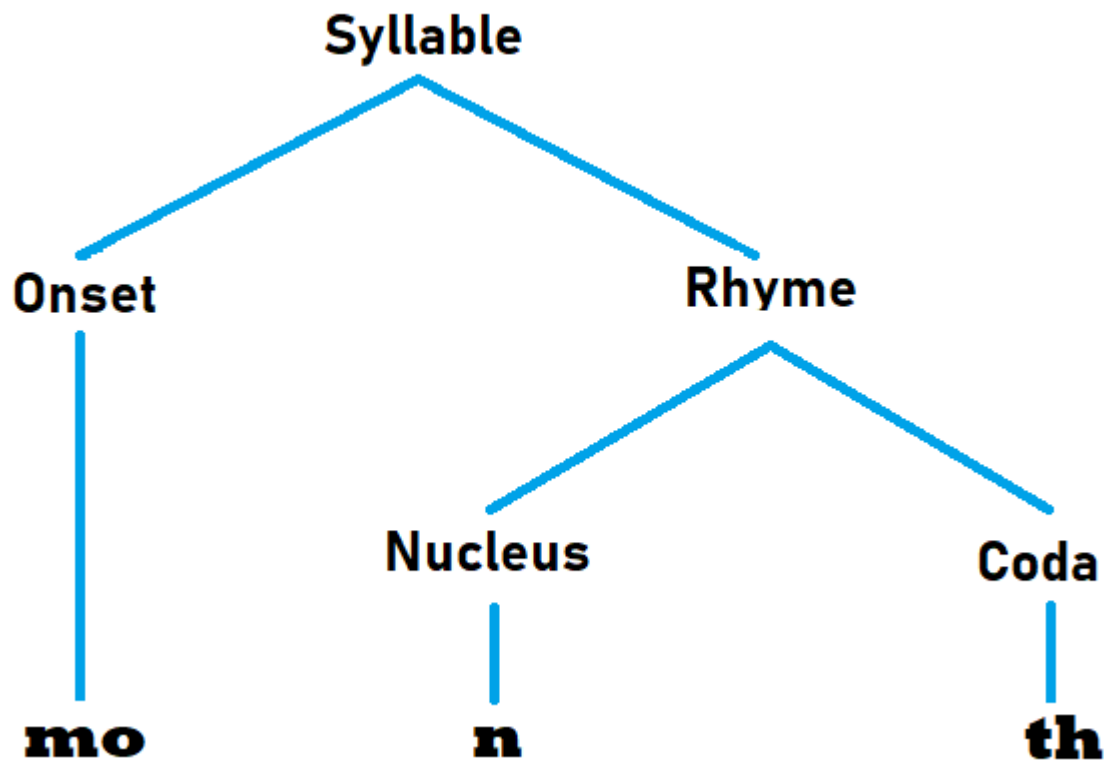
different sounds or phonemes<sup>20</sup>. Mkandawire, S. B., Simwinga, J., Mwansa, J. M., Musonda, B. L., Muyangana, A., Mukonde-Mulenga, E. & Mwendende, B. (2021). English versus Zambian Languages: Exploring some Similarities and Differences with their Implication on the Teaching of Literacy in Primary Schools of Zambia (in press).. The sound /p/ as in *pit* is different from the sound /b/ as in *bit*. Similarly, the sound /c/ as in *cat* is different from /ch/ as in *chat*. In every alphabetic language, there are vowel phonemes and consonant phonemes. In addition, languages also have digraph and trigraph phonemes made of two and three letters to make one sound respectively. In most alphabetic languages, short vowel phonemes include the following vowel letters or graphs: *a, e, i, o, u*. Consonant phonemes vary across languages but may include the following letters or graphs: *b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z*. Other phonemes made of two letters (digraphs) may include *sh, ch, th, ng, zh, wh, ph, kh, oi, ou, ow, oy*. Some phonemes made of three letters (trigraphs) in some languages may include *tch, dge, oor, igh, nkh, phw, ndw*, and others. It is important to note that some letter combinations are called blends, and these may include *bl, tr, cl, gr*, and others. The development of reading skills is dependent on the learner's knowledge of the relationship between graphemes (letters or letter combinations) and sounds<sup>21</sup> Mkandawire, S. B., Simwinga, J., Mwansa, J. M., Musonda, B. L., Muyangana, A., Mukonde-Mulenga, E. & Mwendende, B. (2021). English versus Zambian Languages: Exploring some Similarities and Differences with their Implication on the Teaching of Literacy in Primary Schools of Zambia (in press)..

A syllable is a word or part of a word that contains a vowel and is pronounced as a unit<sup>22</sup> Honig, B., Diamond, L. & Gutlohn, L. (2018). Teaching Reading Sourcebook, (3rd Ed.). California: Arena Press.. The English language has about six types of syllables while most African languages have far fewer. The



open syllable type is the most common type of syllable in African languages that ends in a vowel. For example, in the Nyanja/Chewa language of Zambia, Malawi, and part of Mozambique, the word *mutu* (*head, part of the human body*) has two syllables: *mu+tu*. The syllable division is consonant-vowel plus consonant-vowel, or consonant-vowel division. Most words in African languages follow the consonant-vowel structure while some have vowel- syllables only and others have vowel-consonant. In Nyanja/Chewa again, the word *atate* (*father*) has three syllables: *a-ta-te*.

Intrasyllable refers to the analysis of each syllable to its constituent parts using terms such as onset, rime (rhyme), nucleus, coda, and body. Practically, each syllable has one vowel sound and may contain a consonant before it or after it. The example word *atate* in Nyanja has three syllables: *a-ta-te* where *a*=vowel/nucleus/rime, *ta* and *te* are syllables made of *t*=consonant (onset), and *a/e*=vowel/nucleus/rime). Coda is more pronounced in English and other languages as it refers to a consonant after a vowel in a syllable. In a word, each syllable is made of either rime (rhyme) only with zero coda(s) or may have an onset and rime in African languages. Onset is usually a consonant that is followed by a vowel. In the English language, the syllable structure has more parts, as exemplified in the word *month* below.



In the Silozi language of Zambia, the word *nja*, meaning *dog*, is made of one syllable. The syllable *nja* is made of onset (*nj*) and rhyme/rime (*a*). The nature of the rhyme is a nucleus (*a*), giving us a word, *nja*. All African languages have a similar syllable structure with a few exceptions. When teachers begin to teach the blending of sounds or syllables, they need to know the dynamics of the syllable structure in the target language so that they can guide their learners informatively.

Words are among the important aspects of phonological awareness. As learners advance in mastering letter sounds, they begin to develop skills of blending sounds into words, segmenting them, and manipulating the sounds in words. In other words, there are multiple activities at the word level that learners may use to practise certain phonological awareness skills. These may include phoneme deletion and syllable and sentence segmentation. For example, the teacher may ask learners to segment phonemes in a word. Before that, the teacher should have demonstrated how to segment phonemes

in a word such as *shop*. The teacher may demonstrate using fingers that should correspond to the phonemes when segmenting a word, emphasising each sound. Instead of using fingers, the teacher may ask students during the demonstration to repeat the actions of the teacher. For example:

Teacher:                *Shop*    (/sh/ /o/ /p/)                *keep*        (/k/ /e/ /p/).

After demonstrating, the teacher may ask learners to segment the phonemes of the following words:

- a. Bag
- b. Rock
- c. Itch
- d. Head

### **Instruction on Phonological Awareness**

Teachers are expected to provide clear instructions to learners. They are expected to model each activity given to learners using a principle called the gradual release model: I do, we do, you do, as a way of providing explicit instruction. The teacher should demonstrate a skill first, then do it together with learners, and, in the end, let learners carry out the tasks by themselves. Teachers are also expected to provide systematic instruction by teaching step by step, starting with simpler topics and moving to more complex ones. For instance, teaching isolated phonemes such /b/, /t/, /a/, /z/ is easier than teaching blended sounds such as /ch/ or /gh/. Similarly, teaching learners about segmenting words or syllables is easier than segmenting phonemes. Isolating initial phonemes in words is easier than isolating final or medial phonemes in words. Blending or segmenting words with two phonemes is easier than blending or segmenting words with three or four phonemes. Furthermore, blending words with continuous sounds is easier than blending words with stop

sounds. When teachers take these points into consideration, they are using an explicit and systematic approach to the teaching of reading. All these skills of phonemic awareness as a component of phonological awareness are important in helping learners learn to read<sup>23</sup>Tunmer W.E., Myhill M.E. (1984) Metalinguistic Awareness and Bilingualism. In: Tunmer W.E., Pratt C., Herriman M.L. (eds) Metalinguistic Awareness in Children. Springer Series in Language and Communication, vol 15. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.<sup>24</sup>National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read (00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. and it is important for teachers to continue exploring other ways in which phonemic awareness can assist learners to learn reading.

## **Morphological Awareness**

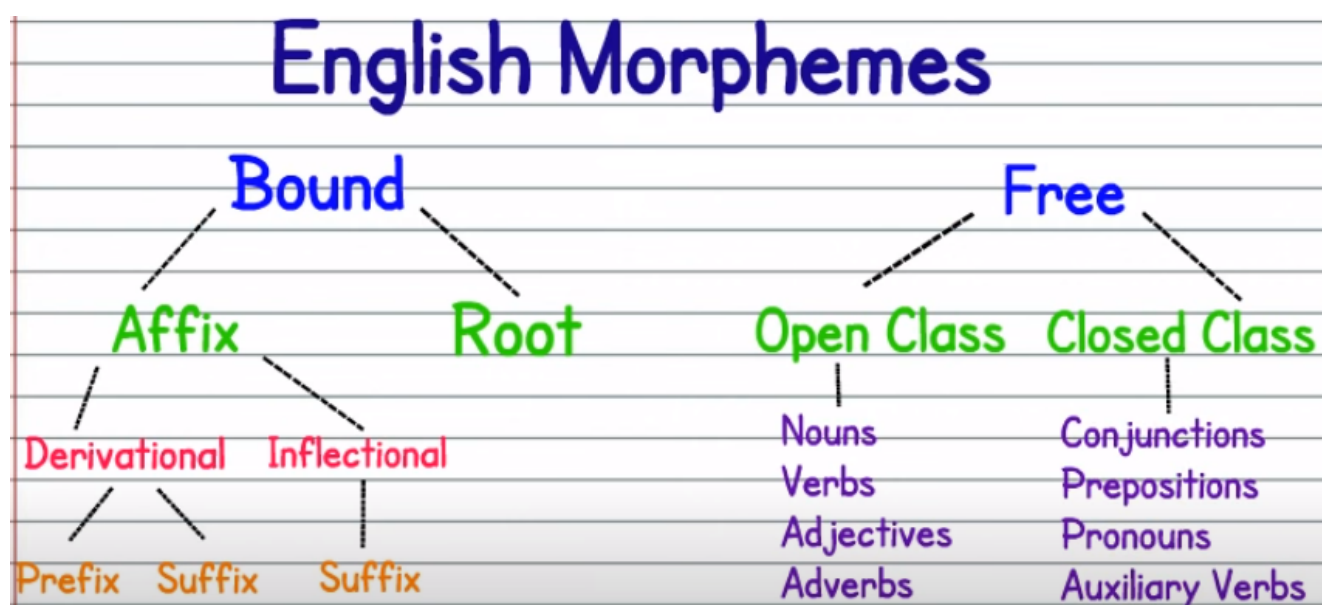
Carlisle<sup>25</sup>Carlisle, J. F. (1995). Morphological awareness and early reading achievement. In Feldman, L. B. (Ed.), Morphological aspects of language processing (pp. 189–209). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. defined morphological awareness as the “conscious awareness of the morphemic structure of words and their ability to reflect on and manipulate their structure.” Fracasso et.al.<sup>26</sup> Fracasso, L. E., Bangs, K., & Binder, K. S. (2016). The contributions of phonological and morphological awareness to literacy skills in the adult basic education population. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 49, 140–151. further noted that “there is reason to believe that morphological awareness is an important factor in terms of reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition because, for every word learned, children can learn another one to three morphologically related words by exploiting morphological awareness.” Morphological awareness is a significant unique predictor of reading comprehension for children and adults with low literacy skills and indicates

that, in order to comprehend what is being read, students need to be able to decode it first. Together, these findings support the contribution of morphological awareness to vocabulary and reading comprehension, respectively<sup>27</sup> Fracasso, L. E., Bangs, K., & Binder, K. S. (2016). The contributions of phonological and morphological awareness to literacy skills in the adult basic education population. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 49, 140–151..

Before we dive deep into morphological awareness, it is imperative that we understand morphology as a level of linguistic analysis alongside phonology, syntax, semantics, and other linguistic features because its meaning and scope are the basis of morphological awareness. Bowers et.al.<sup>28</sup> Bowers, P. N., Kirby, J. R., & Deacon, S. H. (2010). The effects of morphological instruction on literacy skills: A systematic review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 80, 144-179. noted that “morphology is the conventional system by which the smallest units of meaning, called morphemes (bases, prefixes, and suffixes), combine to form complex words.” A base is any word form to which can be added an affix (any derivational or inflectional morpheme). For example, the word *faith* is a base because we can add affixes (prefix and suffix), a prefix (*un-*), and a suffix (*-ful*) to form a new word, *un+faith+ful*.

Morphology is the study of word formation and structure while a morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in a language that cannot be further divided. Words that have meaning by themselves, such as *boy*, *food*, *door*, and *go* are called lexical morphemes. However, the words that function to specify the relationship between one lexical morpheme and another, such as *at*, *in*, *on*, *-ed*, *-s*, are called grammatical morphemes. There are morphemes that can stand alone as words with meanings, and these are called free morphemes (e.g., *boy*, *run*, *jump*, *food*, *in*, *on*). The morphemes that occur only in combination are called bound morphemes (e.g., *-ed*, *-s*, *-ing*). Bound

grammatical morphemes can be further divided into two types: inflectional morphemes (e.g., *-s*, *-est*, *-ed*, *-ing*) and derivational morphemes (e.g., *-ful*, *-like*, *-ly*, *un-*, *dis-*) (<http://www.mathcs.duq.edu/~packer/Courses/Psy598/Ling-Morphology.pdf>). Children begin to learn about bound and free morphemes early in their lives when they begin to realise that the plural for a *boy* is *boys* or that to talk about what is happening now you need to add *-ing* to a doing word. The figure below summarises the discussion on bound and free morphemes.



Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnRzmI4zK\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnRzmI4zK_Q)

### Summary of Research-Based Evidence on Morphological Awareness

Research suggests that morphological awareness is best taught with explicit instruction and that it immensely improves the vocabulary of learners and reading achievements<sup>29</sup> Carlisle, J. F. (1995). Morphological awareness and early reading achievement. In Feldman, L. B. (Ed.), *Morphological aspects of language processing* (pp. 189–209). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.<sup>30</sup>

Fracasso, L. E., Bangs, K., & Binder, K. S. (2016). The contributions of phonological and

morphological awareness to literacy skills in the adult basic education population. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 49, 140–151.

<sup>31</sup>Bowers, P. N., Kir. Morphological awareness also helps with spelling and improves the pronunciation of words. Research also suggests that the whole class benefits from morphological awareness with clear and explicit instruction. However, researchers expressed concern that overemphasis on phonological awareness has caused neglect of the important role that morphology and morphological awareness play in the development of reading<sup>32</sup>National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read (00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office..

### **How Teachers Can Teach Morphological Awareness in Class**

Teachers have been teaching morphological awareness for a long time. However, most teachers may not have realised that they have been teaching it. When teachers teach certain parts of speech to their classes, such as nouns or verbs, they directly teach morphological awareness. For instance, when teaching about nouns – countable and uncountable – they are already teaching morphological awareness.

There are multiple ways morphological awareness can be taught in class. One way is to tell the class that they will learn about word parts. A list of base words is provided by the teacher, and by extension, the meaning of each of these words can be discussed with the class. Afterward, the teacher can introduce the addition of affixes (prefixes and suffixes) to the base words already discussed by the class by further explaining what the words mean after the addition of either prefixes or suffixes. For example, in one lesson, a teacher may focus on the use of two prefixes (*un-* and *dis-*) and provide a list of base words, such as *happy*, *agree*, and *pack*, that go with certain prefixes for the lesson. The meaning of these base words can be discussed with learners with a teacher playing the role of facilitator. Once learners know the meaning of each word, the lesson can proceed to the next step where affixes are added one at a time. The teacher may ask the class for the meaning of *un+happy* (*unhappy*), *un+pack* (*unpack*) or *dis+agree* (*disagree*), and these can be discussed. It is important for the teacher to use a variety of words that may carry the prefixes for that particular lesson.

When learners have understood what prefixes are and how they work in words, the teacher can proceed to suffixes in another lesson. The teaching of suffixes is relatively the same as teaching inflectional morphemes. In this lesson, the teacher may focus on inflectional morphemes (*-s*, *-ed*, and *-ing*) to first- or second-graders or any grade level in primary schools. The teacher may focus on one or more inflectional morphemes at a time or per lesson, depending on the grade level. The teacher may ask pupils to brainstorm names of anything they know and then list items such as *dog*, *cat*, *book*, *pencil*, *desk*, and *tree*. If the class consists of young learners, images for each of the nouns may be provided where possible. Then the teacher may ask the class what happens when an *-s* (which may be the focus of this lesson) is added to each of these nouns. Pupils may respond with the teacher emphasising the suffix.



All these are lessons on morphological awareness, which are more helpful when the teacher demonstrates what they want learners to do and go through the instructions step by step. When one morpheme like -s is completed, the teacher can proceed to the morpheme -ed and later -ing. These must be taught explicitly and systematically, or step by step. After inflectional morphemes are concluded, the teacher can proceed to teach derivational morphemes and later words from a story. More activities can be added to practise these items.

What is observed about morphological awareness is that there is a close connection between morphological awareness and phonological awareness, the two being intertwined. Therefore, an emphasis on one component may be a disservice to learners as they develop their reading skills.

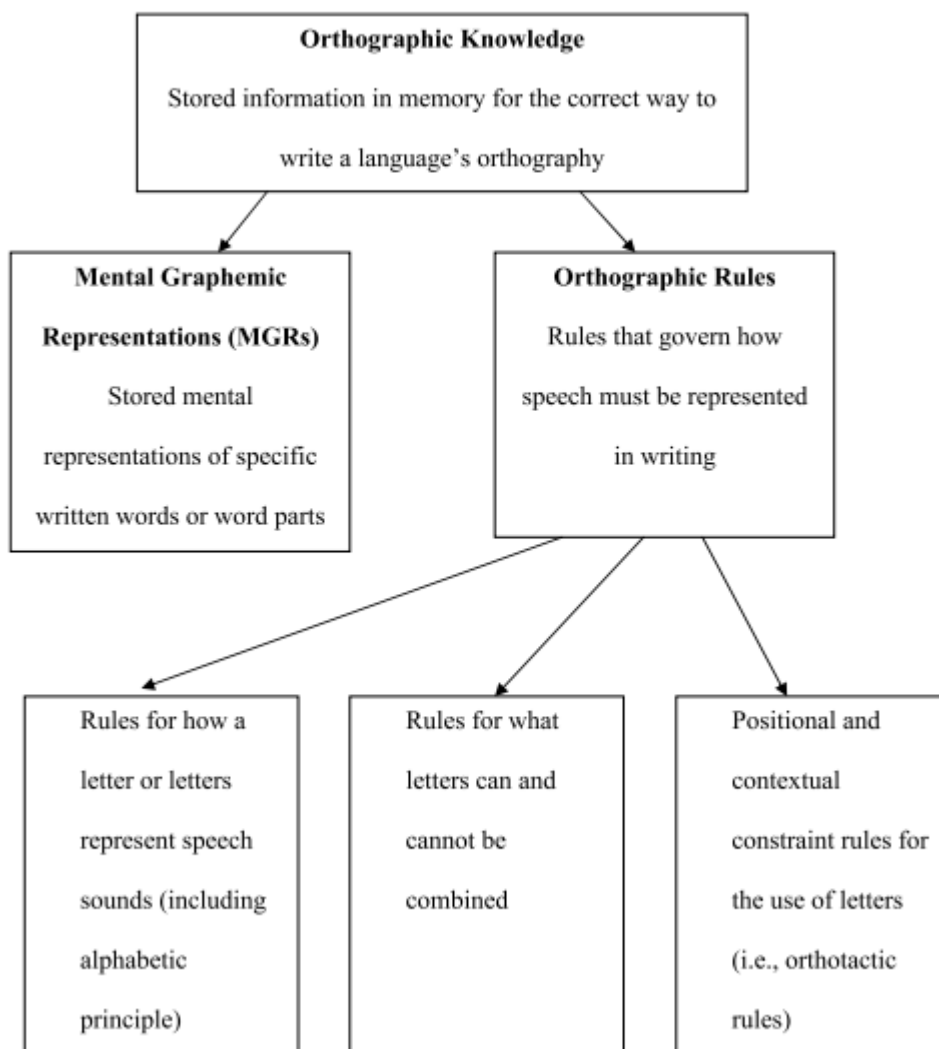
### **Orthographic Knowledge**

Orthography is a set of rules or conventions for writing a language. It includes rules for spelling, hyphenation, capitalisation, and word breaks. “Orthographic knowledge refers to the information that is stored in memory that tells us how to represent spoken language in written form”<sup>33</sup>Apel, K. (2011). What Is Orthographic Knowledge? Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools. Vol. 42. 592–603.. Orthographic knowledge includes alphabetic principles, knowledge of letter-sound correspondence rules, mental graphic representation, and the conventions of spelling, capitalisation, and word breaks<sup>34</sup>Bernin Furthermore, Apel<sup>35</sup>Apel, K. (2011). What Is Orthographic Knowledge? Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools. Vol. 42. 592–603. observed that when researchers have attempted to assess orthographic knowledge in more detail, they typically have used tasks that require some level of orthographic awareness; that is, the tasks – such as determining whether words follow certain orthographic patterns – require individuals to consciously consider their orthographic knowledge. It is important to note that there are

several inconsistent definitions of orthographic knowledge found in the literature and, therefore, the activities or tasks used to measure this knowledge base have varied. However, most definitions have included two vivid concepts: mental graphic representation and orthographic rules.

Apel<sup>36</sup>Apel, K. (2011). What Is Orthographic Knowledge? *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*. Vol. 42. 592–603. has attempted to illustrate in detail the definition and components of orthographic knowledge as shown below.

. Definitions of orthographic knowledge and its components.



Source: Apel<sup>37</sup>Apel, K. (2011). *What Is Orthographic Knowledge? Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*. Vol. 42. 592–603.

## The Contribution of Orthographic Knowledge to Literacy

## Development

Some researchers have investigated orthographic knowledge as a possible contributor to literacy development and found that orthographic knowledge contributes uniquely to reading and spelling development<sup>38</sup>Roman, A. A., Kirby, J. R., Parilla, R. K., Wade-Woolley, L., & Deacon, S. H. (2009). Toward a comprehensive view of the skills involved in word reading in grades 4, 6, and 8. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 102(1), 96–113.<sup>39</sup>

Walker, J., & Hauerwas, L. B. (2006). Development of phonological, morphological, and

orthographic knowledge in young spellers: The case of inflected verbs. *Reading and Writing*, 19(7), 819–843.

<sup>40</sup>21.Castles, A. & Coltheart, M. (2004). Is there a causal link from phonological awareness to success in learning to read? *Cognition*. 91, 1, 77-111.. Many of the assessments of orthographic knowledge have been reported to also assess phonological awareness or aspects of morphological awareness. This explains why there is a correlation between phonological awareness, morphological awareness, and orthographic

knowledge. For example, when discussing rules for how letters correspond to sound or rules for how letters combine to form words in orthographic knowledge, these rules also imply phonological and morphological awareness. Therefore, there is no doubt that metalinguistic skills contribute to the development of reading.

## **Conclusion**

This article has used evidence-based literature to discuss metalinguistic skills (phonological awareness, morphological awareness, and orthographic knowledge) and the role they play in the development of word reading among learners. Where possible, teachers' roles in fostering metalinguistic skills in learners have also been explained. Some classroom pedagogical strategies have been highlighted under phonological awareness and morphological awareness as a starting point for effective metalinguistic instruction in schools.

## **Research briefs**

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# Multilingual Competence

In a nutshell

- A multilingually competent person is one who can speak three or more languages and convey information in these languages appropriately.
- Language is not only a means of communication and expression of ideas but also an accumulation of the values of a culture, a reflection of the experience of people and their history,
- It is highly beneficial to not only view multilingualism as a great resource on its own but also to set the fostering of multilingual literacy skills as one of the main objectives of language education.

## Introduction

This is a conceptual article about multilingual competence. It tackles the subject matter from a definitive and practical point of view and correlates it to literacy instruction in diverse and multilingual classes. Some views about multilingual children are also presented with trends emerging globally. Terms and concepts related to multilingual competence, such as language, monolingualism, bilingualism/multilingualism, multilingual literacy, and communicative competence, are also explained.

### **The Meaning of Multilingual Competence and Its Related Terms**

Multilingual Competence is also known as multicompetence, which refers to the complex, flexible, integrative, and adaptable behaviour that multilingual individuals display.

According to Franceschini<sup>41</sup>Franceschini, R. (2011). Multilingualism and Multicompetence: A Conceptual View. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95(3), 344–355., “a multicompetent person is an individual with knowledge of an extended and integrated linguistic repertoire who is able to use the appropriate linguistic variety for the appropriate occasion.” In other words, a multilingually competent person is one who can speak three or more languages and convey information in these languages appropriately. Multilingual competence, therefore, is the system of linguistic knowledge, understanding the mechanisms of functioning of language and algorithms of speech actions, good command in metacognitive strategies, and developed cognitive ability.

Language is the main recognised means of communicating information, behaviour, knowledge, and ideas. It is also a mode through which the culture of the community is transmitted from one generation to another<sup>42</sup>Mkandawire, S. B., Simooya, M. S., & Monde, P. N. (2019). *Zambian Culture: Harnessing Cultural Literacy with a focus on Myths and Taboos*, 2nd Ed. Lusaka: UNZA Press.. Language is not only a means of communication and expression of ideas but also an accumulation

of the values of a culture, a reflection of the experience of people, their history, and their material and spiritual existence. Some members of communities confine themselves to one language (monolinguals) while others learn more languages within the same culture and across borders (multilinguals).

Monolingualism is a state of knowing or being able to use only one language in speech or written form. The prefix *mono* means *one, alone, or solitary*, and *glotta* means *tongue or language*. A *monoglot* is one who can speak or write in one language only. Such a monolingual person is contrasted with a multilingual person.

Multilingualism refers to the ability or state of knowing or using more than one language in written or spoken form by an individual or a community. It also means the languages spoken in a particular community, as well as language competencies of individuals in a variety of languages<sup>43</sup>Burcu, Y.N., Fannin, J., Montanera, M. Cummins, J. (2014). A multilingual and multimodal approach to literacy teaching and learning in urban education: a collaborative inquiry project in an inner city elementary school. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 5.. Currently, there is an abundance of international and local literature on multilingualism as a marker of democracy, equity, inclusion, and social justice in linguistically diverse societies. Moreover, the educational benefits of multilingualism are widely recognised. Multilingualism in education is often used interchangeably with bilingual education as a concept. However, *bi* means *two*, and, therefore, bilingualism is the use of two languages in a community. A bilingual person is one who knows and uses two languages. It is important to note that multilingualism and bilingual education are becoming more and more pronounced in education. Researchers and scholars globally are now discussing the concept of multilingual literacy instruction and the dynamics that go with it.

Multilingual literacy refers to all the linguistic and

cognitive resources of a multilingual individual<sup>44</sup>Kiramba, L.K. (2017). Multilingual Literacies: Invisible Representation of Literacy in a Rural Classroom. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 61, 3, 267-277.. Multilingual literacy defines the practises of teaching literacy to multilingual and diverse learners with a view to embracing diversity and differences in classes.

The concept of multilingual competence as explained above means to be familiar with two or more languages on the basis of how these languages are used in different contexts to communicate appropriately. Research-based evidence suggests that multilingual practises systematically develop multilingual competence and literacy skills in learners.

### **Arguments for Promoting Multilingual Competence**

In many places around the world multilingualism has become a norm at all education levels. Even where multilingualism is absent from official educational policy, learners often arrive at school with a repertoire of multiple languages, and most of them are encouraged to learn additional languages, whether through schooling or through interaction with peers outside school.

It is, therefore, highly beneficial to not only view multilingualism as a great resource on its own but also to set the fostering of multilingual literacy skills as one of the main objectives of language education. Teachers play a key role in this process. They not only operate and direct learning processes through their teaching practises, but they also serve as models of linguistic behaviour to students. Thus, one of the first steps towards the objective of multilingual literacy is to equip teachers with the means to achieve this goal.

Comparing regions with regard to multilingualism, Banda (2009) asserts that in the West one can survive on one language; in



Africa, it is virtually impossible to do so. This view correlates to a study by Iversen and Mkandawire<sup>45</sup> Banda, F. & Mwanza, D.S. (2017). Language-in-education policy and linguistic diversity in Zambia: An alternative explanation to low reading levels among primary school pupils. In Banja, Madalitso Khulupirika (ed.). Selected readings in education, 109-132. Lusaka: University of Zambia Press. where similar claims were made: "The findings indicated that the Zambian in-service teachers were more open to including students' multilingualism in the classroom than the Norwegian pre-service teachers. While the Zambian in-service teachers displayed a pragmatic ideology, where the main purpose of education is for students to learn regardless of language, the Norwegian pre-service teachers are more concerned with students' proficiency in the language of instruction, Norwegian.<sup>46</sup> Myers-Scotton, C. (1993a). Duelling languages: Grammatical structure in codeswitching. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press" concluded, after extensive research in Africa, that knowing and speaking more than one language in one conversation is a rule rather than the exception in Africa. In short, multilingualism in Africa should be looked at and embraced as a social practise and not as the addition of one language on top of what is already in use. Multilingualism is a norm in Africa and should, therefore, be used to foster multiliteracy to further education and socioeconomic mobility. Sufficient evidence has, however, shown the need for teachers in Western countries, especially those at kindergarten level, to have knowledge of the languages immigrant learners come with to school so that the learners are properly integrated and acceptably assessed at their correct level.

There should, therefore, be a paradigm shift in the way we think about multi/bilingual learning. It should not entail learning indigenous languages as optional subjects but as a resource for teaching and learning content matter. In fact,

Banda's<sup>47</sup> Banda F. (2009). Towards Multilingual Models of Education in South Africa: In Prah K.K and Brock-Utne (2009), Multilingualism An African Advantage: A paradigm Shift in African Languages of Instruction Policies. CASAS. Cape Town. definition of bilingual education entails an education in which learners learn content matter in and through at least two languages and not an education where languages are taught as additional or optional subjects.

Most countries in the sub-Saharan region have made positive strides through their language in education policies towards teaching literacy in familiar languages. This goes for early childhood education (ECE) and early grade learners (Grades 1 to 3 or 1 to 4). Then, the instruction transitions to the formal language of teaching, which is either French, English, or another language, for the rest of the person's education. This still ends up promoting monolingual bias as the indigenous languages are done away with after the switch, except when a student chooses the given languages as optional subjects. Ideally, even though there is a given local language of literacy instruction for a given province, teachers should still embrace the different (other) languages learners come with to class so that learning can take place for each child. And as the teacher embraces and encourages the different languages children come with to school, the other learners in the classroom get the opportunity to learn these languages, thereby increasing their cognitive competencies. Banda<sup>48</sup> Banda F. (2009). Towards Multilingual Models of Education in South Africa: In Prah K.K and Brock-Utne (2009), Multilingualism An African Advantage: A paradigm Shift in African Languages of Instruction Policies. CASAS. Cape Town. argues that "the current pedagogical prescriptions and models have a monolingual bias. This is because one language, albeit the mother tongue, is expected to be used for 3–4 or 6–7 years depending on the model, and thereafter, English is expected to be the main language of instruction for the majority," if not

all learners. This falls short of what multilingual education for multiliteracy entails. The problem, then, is that the claim to promote multilingualism ends up becoming the promotion of multiple monolingualism rather than multiple multilingualisms <sup>49</sup>Banda F. (2009). Towards Multilingual Models of Education in South Africa: In Prah K.K and Brock-Utne (2009), *Multilingualism An African Advantage: A paradigm Shift in African Languages of Instruction Policies*. CASAS. Cape Town.<sup>50</sup>Heller M. (2007) Bilingualism as Ideology and Practice. In: Heller M. (eds) *Bilingualism: A Social Approach*. Palgrave Advances in Linguistics. Palgrave Macmillan, London..

In order to have a highly productive teaching and learning programme, teachers should not restrict learners to what is considered the one language of literacy instruction in the given region. Learners come to school with various linguistic repertoires, and if teachers use only one of the mother tongues or only one language of literacy instruction, it is counterproductive and restricts learners who use two or more languages.

A growing body of research literature shows that drawing on students' home languages and cultural backgrounds in classroom teaching validates their identities and provides a strong foundation for additional language learning. International agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the European Commission contend that multilingual education can play a significant role in engaging diverse learners and can foster positive identities associated with their home culture.

Assuming that the purpose of reading and writing instruction is to build students' ability to understand and express themselves in written and formal language, it would seem necessary to start instruction by referring to a language the learners know. Learning the code – that is to say graphophonemic (grapheme to phoneme) correspondences or, more simply, the relationship between sounds and letters – in an

unknown language essentially restricts learning to decoding. Such an approach excludes work on comprehension. Likewise, it prevents the writing of texts, even short ones, or of exercises. This has the consequence of restricting how learners construct a representation of what reading and writing mean. Writing is not conceived as a means of producing language other than orally but as a transcoding technique.

### **The Problematic and Deficit Way of Viewing Multilingualism**

Some scholars and policymakers view multilingualism and bilingual children as a problem. Such people view language as a problem. [McNelly<sup>51</sup>](#) McNelly, C.A. (2019). Language learning policy through the lens of language as a problem, as a right, and as a resource. NABE Journal of Research and Practice. 6:1, 5-26. noted that "...language as a problem surrounds the ideas represented in deficit thinking. This practice is the assumption that students who have a low social-economic status, belong to a minority ethnic or racial group, or do not have proficiency in the dominate language are deficient in their ability to think and learn. Deficit thinking leads to assumptions that bilingual students are mentally inferior, slower to learn the majority language, confused, and that the new language is a burden on the brain." Additional deficit thinking assumptions include the notions that bilingual students have a split identity, cultural dislocation, low self-esteem, feel alienation, emotional vulnerabilities, a poor self-image, and language anxiety. Stereotypes emerge that support a deficit approach of allowing students to acquire multiple languages. The fear from these stereotypes is that multiple languages within a societal group of people may cause more conflict, antagonism, and less cohesiveness; contribute to poverty; cause students to have low test scores in school; and prevent them from integrating into the society's majority, leading them to have less social and vocational capital. Educators who view students with a deficit in their ability to think and learn are generally proponents of monolingual

education programmes<sup>52</sup>Mkandawire, S. B. (2021). A Comparative Assessment of Grade One Learners' Initial Reading Achievements and the Teaching of Literacy in Multilingual and Monolingual Settings Among Speakers and Non-speakers of the Language of Instruction in Lusaka and Katete Districts of Zambia. Unpublished doctoral thesis from the University of Zambia and Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences.. Monolingual language policy programmes favour learning the dominant language at the expense of losing students' home languages and promote an assimilationist agenda<sup>53</sup>McNelly, C.A. (2019). Language learning policy through the lens of language as a problem, as a right, and as a resource. NABE Journal of Research and Practice. 6:1, 5-26..

According to [McNelly](#)<sup>54</sup>McNelly, C.A. (2019). Language learning policy through the lens of language as a problem, as a right, and as a resource. NABE Journal of Research and Practice. 6:1, 5-26. "The outcome of having monolingual forms and weak forms of the bilingual education programme is monolingualism and limited bilingualism. The goal of these forms of bilingual education language policy is for minority students to succeed in transitioning into accepting the majority language and the values of the majority society which controls the school. The specific outcome for students is that they are blamed for failing by implying that they are not smart enough, motivated, or appreciate the educational opportunities the school system gives them"<sup>55</sup>Mkandawire, S. B., Simooya, M. S., & Monde, P. N. (2019). *Zambian Culture: Harnessing Cultural Literacy with a focus on Myths and Taboos*, 2nd Ed. Lusaka: UNZA Press.<sup>56</sup>McNelly, C.A. (2019). Language learning policy through the lens of language as a problem, as a right, and as a resource. NABE Journal of Research and Practice. 6:1, 5-26..

Bilingual children have an enhanced ability to analyse their own knowledge of the language and have greater control of language processing than monolinguals, and thus bilingualism

may encourage *earlier* reading acquisition and could lead to higher academic performance<sup>57</sup> McNelly, C.A. (2019). Language learning policy through the lens of language as a problem, as a right, and as a resource. NABE Journal of Research and Practice. 6:1, 5-26.. Marian and Shook<sup>58</sup> Marian, V., and A. Shook. (2012). The cognitive benefits of being bilingual. Cerebrum: the Dana forum on brain science, vol. 13. reported that "Researchers have shown that the bilingual brain can have better attention and task-switching capacities than the monolingual brain, thanks to its developed ability to inhibit one language while using another. In addition, bilingualism has positive effects at both ends of the age spectrum: Bilingual children as young as seven months can better adjust to environmental changes, while bilingual seniors can experience less cognitive decline." In learning to read and write, children discover the possibilities for communication afforded by script Serpell<sup>59</sup> Serpell, R. (2020). Literacy and Child Development in a Contemporary African Society. Child Development Perspectives. 14, 2, 90-96.

Multilingualism may have small benefits for cognitive functions. For example, a meta-analysis showed a significant small-to-medium population effect size of 0.20 in favour of greater working memory capacity for bilinguals than monolinguals<sup>60</sup> Grundy, J.G.; Timmer, K. (2017). Bilingualism and working memory capacity: A comprehensive meta-analysis. Second Language Research, 33(3), 325-340.. However, a larger meta-analysis<sup>61</sup> Lehtonen, M.; Soveri, A.; Laine, A.; Järvenpää, J.; de Bruin, A.; Antfolk, J. (2018). Is bilingualism associated with enhanced executive functioning in adults? A meta-analytic review. Psychological Bulletin, 144(4), 394-425. found only a very small bilingual advantage for inhibition, shifting, and working memory, which disappeared after correcting bias in the results. On the contrary, they found a small bilingual disadvantage for verbal fluency, which may reflect less

exposure for each individual language when using two languages in a balanced manner. Although cognitive and social class differences in childhood may explain the later cognitive functioning and probability of learning a second language, there is some weak evidence that learning a second language is related to better conflict processing, e.g., in Simon tasks<sup>62</sup>Cox, S.R.; Bak, T.H.; Allerhand, M.; Redmond, P.; Starr, J.M.; Deary, I.J.; MacPherson, S.E. (2016). *Bilingualism, social cognition and executive functions: A tale of chickens and eggs. Neuropsychologia*, 91, 299-306.<sup>63</sup>

Bialystok, E.; DePape, A.-M. (2009). Musical Expertise, Bilingualism, and Executive Functioning. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 2009, 35(2), 565–574..

Although the cognitive benefits of multilingualism may be small or nonexistent, having knowledge, understanding, and literacy in multiple languages may benefit individuals by widening their view of the world and enabling their participation in communication more widely.

Since multilingualism is undoubtedly a resource for learning and education, teachers should take interest in being trained to teach content matter in at least two indigenous languages. If teachers are able to teach and use two or more languages systematically as languages of literacy teaching and content matter subjects, it would enhance the multilingual competencies of learners. The idea is to have learners who are able to speak, read, write, and synthesise information at a high cognitive level in two or more languages. The languages in question should also form part of the assessment



package<sup>64</sup>Banda F. (2009). Towards Multilingual Models of Education in South Africa: In Prah K.K and Brock-Utne (2009), Multilingualism An African Advantage: A paradigm Shift in African Languages of Instruction Policies. CASAS. Cape Town..

The European Commission paper on education and training<sup>65</sup>Comission of the European communities (1995). White paper on education and training. Teaching and learning. Towards the learning society. Brussels , 29.11. 1995. COM (95) 590 final. supports the idea that in-service training helps teachers build their capabilities and resources to teach children who don't speak the language of instruction, and this improves the achievements of these children. With the understanding that learners come to school with different language backgrounds and even when it is understood that teachers may face difficulty learning indigenous languages proficiently, they should at least achieve some level of comprehension so that the languages learners come with to school are enhanced and shared across peers. Most importantly, the needs of learners should be somewhat more effectively met if learners are at least able to be understood by the teacher.

A teacher has to locate his or her teaching in the context of the learner, a notion that has been coined in educational circles as instruction that begins with what the learner already knows. When children come to school, they have already absorbed and processed huge amounts of information about the language(s) and customs of their society and the variety of objects and experiences their environment offers. What they come with from this environment can then be used as a basis of instruction. For instance, their context experiences revolve around utility and purpose instead of being based on a paradigm that emphasises the inherent morphological attributes of a given concept<sup>66</sup>Alberts M., (2000), The Harmonisation of Nguni and Sotho: Terminological Perspectives: In Prah K.K., (2000), Between Distinction and Extinction: The Harmonisation



and Standardisation of African Languages. CASAS. Cape Town..

Serpell<sup>67</sup>Serpell, R. (2020). Literacy and Child Development in a Contemporary African Society. *Child Development Perspectives*. 14, 2, 90-96. has the same opinion: "The pedagogical rationale for providing initial literacy instruction in a familiar language is to build on a child's existing communicative competence...As children develop they discover possibilities for action afforded by particular features of the environment."

In a plurilingual society, literate adults legitimately use multiple linguistic codes flexibly to communicate. Building on this practise, instructional practises for early literacy may benefit from adopting a more flexible approach to nurturing multilingual communicative competence, "including hybrid forms, to ensure pupil involvement in classroom practises, and hence a learner-driven and centered pedagogy"<sup>68</sup>Banda, F. & Mwanza, D.S. (2017). Language-in-education policy and linguistic diversity in Zambia: An alternative explanation to low reading levels among primary school pupils. In Banja, Madalitso Khulupirika (ed.). *Selected readings in education*, 109-132. Lusaka: University of Zambia Press..

Teachers should take it upon themselves to encourage bilinguals because, as learners have a greater ability to think abstractly than monolinguals since they can distance themselves from a particular language and see things from more than one point of view. Bilingual children have greater analytical awareness, because they are constantly organising and inspecting their languages, which indicates a difference in the way bilinguals process language. Other research has shown that bilinguals are better at relating stories and expressing concepts within the stories, an attribute that points to the greater sensitivity bilinguals have towards verbal and nonverbal feedback cues<sup>69</sup>Mkandawire, S. B. (2021). A

Comparative Assessment of Grade One Learners' Initial Reading Achievements and the Teaching of Literacy in Multilingual and Monolingual Settings Among Speakers and Non-speakers of the Language of Instruction in Lusaka and Katete Districts of Zambia. Unpublished doctoral thesis from the University of Zambia and Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences..

Learning and achieving higher competencies in several languages (bi/multilingualism) is widely believed to provide cognitive benefits, including the ability to learn, higher intellectual capabilities, and higher abilities into older age. There is evidence from bilingual learning and from Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) that there are wider benefits in terms of attainment in other subjects, motivation, and other skills for employability from learning through many languages. There is also a greater gain of intercultural competence from the greater knowledge and awareness of other cultures learners have gained through language learning.

Children and adolescents have a strong ability for language learning, and even young children have coped with as many as three languages simultaneously. Children are less inhibited than adults and achieve native-like competence much more frequently than adults do; therefore, it makes good sense to encourage language learning at an early stage. This, then, implies that the foundational teachers (ECE/Early grade teachers) should have a more open mind to love and appreciate the local languages and not feel shy to code switch during lessons.

The development of African languages to cater to scientific enterprises would have to be underpinned by values inherent in our languages and culture, a culture that inculcates the communal spirit versus the individualistic practises which characterise our education<sup>70</sup> Alberts M., (2000), The Harmonisation of Nguni and Sotho: Terminological Perspectives:

In Prah K.K., (2000), *Between Distinction and Extinction: The Harmonisation and Standardisation of African Languages*. CASAS. Cape Town.. The use of multiple African languages to teach would provide a vehicle that effectively appreciates indigenous technologies and integrates them with modern technology.

### **Approaches to Teaching in Multilingual Classrooms**

One of the most successful approaches to bilingual teaching and learning has been the purposeful and simultaneous use of two or more languages in the same classroom, a process that is referred to as translanguaging. Garcia<sup>71</sup>García O., Wei L. (2014) *Language, Bilingualism and Education*. In: *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Palgrave Pivot, London. explains translanguaging in education as a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practises that include all the language practises of students in order to develop new language practises and sustain old ones, communicate and appropriate knowledge, and give voice to new sociopolitical realities by interrogating linguistic inequality.

A range or continuum of practise is possible in translanguaging work, including oral to written, receptive to expressive, and encourages learners to use their understanding in one language to inform their understanding in another<sup>72</sup>Hornberger, N.H. & Link, H. (2012) *Translanguaging and transnational literacies in multilingual classrooms: a biliteracy lens*. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 15:3, 261-278. Two or more languages are used in a systematic and integrated way to mediate understanding and grasp metacognitive languaging processes. The way that languages are used will depend on the specific classroom environment and the language repertoires of learners and the teacher.

Some of the other appropriate teaching concepts used to integrate learners' multilingual resources into the classroom to their advantage include language awareness, language comparison, and intercomprehension. The use of all of the above approaches helps multilinguals to develop metalinguistic and metacognitive abilities when appropriately supported. The language awareness of learners increases and facilitates the learning and improvement of targeted learning outcomes. Language learning awareness and language learning competence of learners are promoted to support the development of learners' autonomy; the learning motivation of learners is increased. The increased motivation of learners to learn results in their increased participation and pleasure in the lessons.

Having texts available in the various languages represented in the school classroom can go a long way to raising the status and use of the languages learners bring to the classroom. Teachers can encourage learners to tell stories or describe the pictures in the available books in the different languages they come with to school. They can engage the learners' parents in developing short stories to be used in the classroom. Flashcards with words from the languages represented in the classroom can also be useful. Teachers can also encourage learners to express themselves in their own languages through poetry, rhymes, songs, and so forth. Teachers are encouraged to be as creative as possible in integrating all learners' linguistic abilities. It is important to use multilingual resources of learners in the classroom to the advantage of the learner.

### **Assessing Multilingual Learners**

Assessing multilingualism using a monolingual language view is not ideal. Multilingualism is generally assessed based on a monoglossic view of languages as separate entities, a view that tends to ignore the complex communicative practises of multilingual learners and their simultaneous use of multiple

languages. It is important that teachers set assessments that correspond with the language(s) that the learners know from an environment familiar to those given learners. Sufficient evidence has shown that many learners, especially immigrant learners, have more often than not received wrong assessments and been placed in special needs classrooms when in fact the language barrier could explain the cause of their poor performance. The consequence of such is frustration and high learner dropout. What is an assessment if it cannot communicate what it is meant to communicate? In the countries of the sub-Saharan region, the languages have the attribute of mutual intelligibility and share root forms and loan words, they are intertwined and know no boundaries, and code-switching is high among peers. So teachers could take advantage of these characteristics while sticking to what is prescribed in the curriculum. To assess a learner, it is acceptable to code-switch, even to use loan words and hybrid forms in order for the learner to understand the questions. A teacher should not ignore their language competencies and stick to one language in multilingual settings if the learners do not understand it<sup>73</sup>Lopez, A.A., Turkan, S., & Guzman-Orth, D. (2017). Assessing Multilingual Competence. In E. Shohamy et al. (eds.), *Language Testing and Assessment*, Encyclopedia of Language and Education. Springer International Publishing.<sup>74</sup>Fitzgerald, J., Grant, R. A., & Wong, S. D. (2003). Multilingual Literacy: Helping Students and Teachers. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 47(2), 116–120..

## **Multiliteracies pedagogy and multilingualistic practices**

In a nutshell

- In classrooms, multiliteracies propose a multimodal approach to teaching literacy where all representations of meaning, including linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural are expected to be used for instruction.
- The aim of multiliteracies pedagogy is to create a “learning environment in which the blackboard, textbook, exercise book, and tests are augmented and at times replaced by digital technologies”.
- Four major dimensions of multilingual pedagogy are situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice.

## **What Are Multiliteracies?**

The concept of multiliteracies was developed in the early 1990s by the New London Group, and it stresses literacy theory and pedagogy. It is an approach that focuses on principles underlying the analysis and understanding of how literacy works (literacy theory) and on teaching methods and practises that can be used to help learners understand how to read and write using appropriate texts, depending on the task (literacy pedagogy). In classrooms, multiliteracies proposes a multimodal approach to teaching literacy where all representations of meaning, including linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural, are expected to be used for instruction<sup>75</sup> New London Group. (2000). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures, in B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds) Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures, 9-38. South Yarra, Victoria: Macmillan..

Multiliteracies pedagogy refer to a set of pedagogical principles and practices. Cope and Kalantzis emphasise that the critical point of the multiliteracies pedagogy is the educational position or approach that includes both theory and

practise and how they are used to promote the “pedagogical acts” or “knowledge processes” of experiencing, conceptualising, analysing, and applying<sup>76</sup>2.Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2009). “Multiliteracies”: New literacies, new learning. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 4, 164-195..

The aim of multiliteracies pedagogy is to create a “learning environment in which the blackboard, textbook, exercise book and tests are augmented and at times replaced by digital technologies”<sup>77</sup>Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2008). Digital communications, multimodality and diversity: Towards a pedagogy of multiliteracies. *Scientia Paedagogica Experimentalis*, XLV(1), 15-50.. This pedagogy recognises that not every learner brings the same life experiences, linguistic ability, sociocultural resources, and interests to their learning. It supports a multimodal approach where learners move between linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial modes of meaning-making and learning<sup>78</sup>Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2008). Digital communications, multimodality and diversity: Towards a pedagogy of multiliteracies. *Scientia Paedagogica Experimentalis*, XLV(1), 15-50..

## **Dimensions of Multilingual Pedagogy**

There are four major dimensions of multilingual pedagogy that include situated practise, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practise.

- Situated practise is about providing meaningful experiences for learners to participate in their own learning by building on their lived experiences<sup>79</sup>New London Group. (2000). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures, in B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds) *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*, 9-38. South Yarra, Victoria: Macmillan.. In this pedagogical strategy teachers start

or run their lessons by capitalising on what learners already know. Learners' background experiences can offer diverse and rich material that may inform the lessons.

- Overt instruction occurs when the teacher provides active intervention and scaffolding to help learners gain conscious understanding and control of their learning. In overt instruction, explicit and systematic reading instruction is provided. One way to teach explicitly is to use the "I do, we do, you do" model of teaching.
- Critical framing helps learners analyse what they are learning from a critical perspective in relation to the "historical, social, cultural, political, ideological, and value-centered relations of particular systems of knowledge and social practice"<sup>80</sup>New London Group. (2000). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures, in B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds) Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures, 9-38. South Yarra, Victoria: Macmillan.. In critical framing, teachers model a rubric for analysing various issues in the society by addressing one issue at a time. In critical framing, critical consciousness is raised, and learners apply these skills in their classes by addressing major issues in their communities.
- Transformed practise occurs when learners apply what they have learned in new contexts by transforming existing meanings to design new meanings<sup>81</sup>Mills, K. A. (2006). Critical framing in a pedagogy of multiliteracies. In Proceedings Australian Literacy Educator's Association/Australian Association of the Teaching of English National Conference 2006: Voices,



Vibes, Visions, Darwin.. Whenever learners begin to apply what they learn in class to the immediate environments and communities to change existing trends, environments can be transformed.

Multiliteracies pedagogy promotes learner engagement in the transformed practise stage by designing multimodal texts. These are texts that combine two or more communication modes (e.g., print, image, music, film, etc.) or semiotic systems (e.g., linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial) to enhance or transform the meaning of a text<sup>82</sup>Anstey, M., & Bull, G. (2010). Helping teachers to explore multimodal texts. Curriculum & Leadership Journal, 8,16..

Multiliteracies pedagogy has received significant attention in international literacy research<sup>83</sup>Mills, K. A. (2006). Critical framing in a pedagogy of multiliteracies. In Proceedings Australian Literacy Educator's Association/Australian Association of the Teaching of English National Conference 2006: Voices, Vibes, Visions, Darwin. because research has found that it helps foster learning environments for knowledge generation, especially in diverse classrooms.

The use of this pedagogy helps to create the space for languages of the community and children's voices to be recognised and heard in classrooms. Studies have called for the increased use of new forms of literacy practises such as multimodal literacies among multilingual learners<sup>84</sup>Lotherington, H. (2011). Pedagogy of multiliteracies: Rewriting Goldilocks. New York: Routledge.. However, some studies have noted that the lack of awareness among practitioners and education stakeholders of the potential benefits of engaging English Language Learners (ELLs) in multiliteracies-based language teaching pedagogies<sup>85</sup>Yi, Y. (2014). Possibilities and challenges of multimodal literacy practices in teaching and learning English as an Ad., creates

discomforts in some learners.

Literacy as conceptualised within current educational curricula and pedagogical practises needs to be conceptualised to encompass the multilingual, multiliterate practises that learners bring into the classroom. Multiliteracies is considered a small representation of changes that have taken place in generation of knowledge, which contrast to more traditional approaches.

The ways in which we communicate are changing. This suggests that multiliteracies may become increasingly used in institutionalised learning. For example, the Zambian educational climate has seen an increase in standardised testing to check and raise literacy attainments; schools are challenged to rethink what forms of literacy to teach and what pedagogical options are most appropriate to teach linguistically diverse learners<sup>86</sup>Sampa, F. K. (2005). Zambia's Primary Reading Program (PRP): Improving access and quality of education in basic schools. In *African Experiences: Country Case Studies*. Paris: Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA).<sup>87</sup>Iversen, J. Y. & Mkandawire, S. B. (2020). Comparing Language Ideologies in Multilingual Classrooms Across Norway and Zambia. *Multilingual Margins*, 7(3), 33-48<sup>88</sup>Cummins, J., Brown, K., & Sayers, D. (2007). *Literacy, technology, and diversity: teaching for success in changing times*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.. Improving literacy levels among diverse learners is a fight of every country on earth. One way to take advantage of the current state of affairs is to embrace and foster diversity (i.e., students' linguistic and cultural resources). A conceptualisation of pedagogy that builds on these resources is important, and it also recognises the types of "knowledge" learners need for their future.

### **Thematic Areas in Multilingual and Multiliteracies Pedagogy**

## Learners' Involvement and Ownership of Learning

Research findings highlight that multiliteracies pedagogy acknowledges the role of learners' agency in the meaning-making process and views learners as active originators of meaning, as opposed to traditional views of literacy which position learners as passive receivers of information<sup>89</sup>Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2005). Learning by design. Melbourne: Victorian Schools Innovation Commission & Common Ground. According to Hepple, et. al.<sup>90</sup>Hepple, E., Sockhill, M., Tan, A., & Alford, J. (2014). Multiliteracies pedagogy: Creating claymations with adolescent, post-beginner English language learners. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(3), 219-229., multiliteracies pedagogy highlights the "transformative effects of an approach to literacy that is student-led and generative. It encompasses joint activities supported by strategic assistance, rather than the traditional 'remediation' practices of preplanned, scripted, generic practice of basic skills."

In a study conducted by Hepple et al.<sup>91</sup>Hepple, E., Sockhill, M., Tan, A., & Alford, J. (2014). Multiliteracies pedagogy: Creating claymations with adolescent, post-beginner English language learners. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(3), 219-229., three hundred newly arrived immigrant and refugee students were engaged in a post-beginner class of a multiliteracies-based project that required them to create multimodal Claymation (the stop-action filming of clay figures) texts around the theme of *Jurassic Park*. They found that the learners exercised their involvement and took ownership of the project by leading the different stages of production and negotiating choices in the storyline and composition to achieve their own personalised and particular version of the text. They further observed that using multiliteracies pedagogy resulted in construction of knowledge and understanding in which all class members played an active

role<sup>92</sup>Hepple, E., Sockhill, M., Tan, A., & Alford, J. (2014). Multiliteracies pedagogy: Creating claymations with adolescent, post-beginner English language learners. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(3), 219-229..

Similarly, Ntelioglou<sup>93</sup>Ntelioglou, M. B. Y. (2012). *Drama pedagogies, multiliteracies and embodied learning: Urban teachers and linguistically diverse students make meaning* (Doctoral dissertation). Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, Toronto. found in her ethnographic research examining the experiences of ELLs in three drama classrooms that learners become active generators of their own knowledge and active inverters of meaning by critically reading and writing texts through an embodied drama pedagogy. Learners who participated in this multiliteracies-based drama pedagogy were required not to just passively read texts, as is commonly done in many traditional language classrooms, but to actively engage in the collective creation of the story which led up to the drama.

Ntelioglou's<sup>94</sup>Ntelioglou, M. B. Y. (2012). *Drama pedagogies, multiliteracies and embodied learning: Urban teachers and linguistically diverse students make meaning* (Doctoral dissertation). Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, Toronto. findings emphasise that this approach provided learners with a platform to integrate their own words, ideas, interests, and perspectives into their multimodal writing and that, as their sense of writing developed, so did their "sense of possibility as an active agent" in their own learning and life.

## **2.2 Language and Literacy Development**

Multiliteracies pedagogy stresses the need for language and literacy education to take into account multimodal forms of expression and learning. Ntelioglou<sup>95</sup>Ntelioglou, M. B. Y. (2012). *Drama pedagogies, multiliteracies and embodied*

learning: Urban teachers and linguistically diverse students make meaning (Doctoral dissertation). Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, Toronto. found that the drama/play pedagogy was a very strategic and valuable means of language and literacy learning because it afforded learners the opportunity to explore the specifics of reading, writing, listening, and speaking while expanding this connection to multiple modes of meaning-making through drama/play. For learners who “have trouble reading” or “get stuck with pen/pencil and paper,” drama/play offers an entry point to language and literacy learning which is unavailable in traditional classrooms.

The study findings by Hepple et al.<sup>96</sup> Hepple, E., Sockhill, M., Tan, A., & Alford, J. (2014). Multiliteracies pedagogy: Creating claymations with adolescent, post-beginner English language learners. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(3), 219-229. support the use of multiliteracies pedagogy as a way of meeting learners’ diverse language and literacy needs within the constraints of the teaching context.

The Claymation texts that learners produced in the project used a “synesthetic” or “mode shifting” approach, which combined different modes to represent meaning in drawing, photographs of clay figures, or captions. Developing students’ synesthetic abilities allowed them to engage effectively in disciplinary content and tasks across the curriculum. At the same time, each stage of the Claymation project offered learners significant language development opportunities. For example, through the writing of the dialogue, learners learned how to use language appropriate to the characters, gained awareness of dialogue structure, began to understand the balance of narration and direct speech, and learned how to use complex clauses and a range of verb tenses. These were significant opportunities for them to learn how to manipulate language for literacy outcomes<sup>97</sup> Hepple, E., Sockhill, M., Tan, A., & Alford, J. (2014). Multiliteracies pedagogy: Creating

claymations with adolescent, post-beginner English language learners. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(3), 219-229.. Similarly, the study of Angay-Crowder, et al.<sup>98</sup> Angay-Crowder, T., Choi, J., & Yi, Y. (2013). Putting multiliteracies into practice: Digital storytelling for multilingual adolescents in a summer program. *TESL Canada*, 30(2), 36-45. demonstrated that multiliteracies practises can lead to significant literacy outcomes for second language learners.

Angay-Crowder et al.<sup>99</sup> Angay-Crowder, T., Choi, J., & Yi, Y. (2013). Putting multiliteracies into practice: Digital storytelling for multilingual adolescents in a summer program. *TESL Canada*, 30(2), 36-45. found that both the conventional print-based and computer-based multimodal composing activities used in the project helped learners expand a range of their literacy skills and means of expression. The study found that learners learned how to compose free-writing texts and structured narratives during situated practise and overt instruction.

Learners were also encouraged to think about how nonlinguistic elements contributed to the overall meaning of their texts and to transfer their knowledge of both linguistic and nonlinguistic modes of communication into the digital storytelling task.

An important finding from Angay-Crowder et al.'s<sup>100</sup> Angay-Crowder, T., Choi, J., & Yi, Y. (2013). Putting multiliteracies into practice: Digital storytelling for multilingual adolescents in a summer program. *TESL Canada*, 30(2), 36-45. study was that although learners' narratives at first lacked a clear sense of audience or purpose, when they were encouraged to integrate their home and community-based languages and discourses into their stories, the stories became more meaningful and incorporated a wider range of literacy abilities.

## **2.3 Affirmation of Learners' Languages, Cultures, and Identities**

By suggesting topics that are related to learners' own experiences, multiliteracies pedagogy promotes learning that recognises learners' own knowledge, values their linguistic and cultural resources, and affirms their identities<sup>101</sup>Chun, C. W. (2009). Critical literacies and graphic novels for English language learners: Teaching Maus. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(2), 144-153..

An ethnographic study done by Giampapa<sup>102</sup>Giampapa, F. (2010). Multiliteracies, pedagogy and identities: Teacher and student voices from a Toronto elementary school. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 33(2), 407-431. studied how a Grade 3 teacher developed a multiliteracies pedagogy by drawing on her own and her learners' identities as well as their linguistic and cultural resources to create learning opportunities for all of her learners. The demographic landscape of the classroom in Giampapa's study included new immigrants from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and China. These learners brought their diverse languages, cultures, religions, and varying degrees of English language skills into the classroom.

During Giampapa's<sup>103</sup>Giampapa, F. (2010). Multiliteracies, pedagogy and identities: Teacher and student voices from a Toronto elementary school. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 33(2), 407-431. interviews with the learners, they acknowledged the importance of their first languages in promoting relationships with their family members and friends from their community. However, these narratives were compared with their feelings of embarrassment and fear about being teased or bullied for speaking in their home languages at school.

The teacher attempted to help the learners overcome these feelings by making the classroom "a space that affirmed



student identities and challenged the mainstream curriculum". She was able to do this by making alternative pedagogical choices and introducing a variety of multiliteracies strategies, such as the creation of multimodal poetry around issues of identity, language, etc.

Likewise, Danzak's<sup>104</sup> Danzak, R. L. (2011). Defining identities through multiliteracies: EL teens narrate their immigration experiences as graphic stories. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(3), pp. 187-196. research discovered that multiliteracies pedagogy created a space to acknowledge learners' experiences and solidify their identities. Danzak's study is a report of the Graphic Journeys project, a multimedia literacy project in which thirty-two ELLs in Grades 6–8 researched their families' immigration stories and depicted them as graphic stories (comics). Throughout the project, the learners expressed themselves through various linguistic modalities and engaged in the multiliteracies components to learn about English, writing, technology, and their individual and family identities.

The creation and publication of the graphic stories allowed the learners to share their stories with friends, families, and members of their school and local community. The process of sharing these stories became a means for them to affirm and reaffirm their individual and group identities.

Ntelioglou<sup>105</sup> Ntelioglou, M. B. Y. (2012). Drama pedagogies, multiliteracies and embodied learning: Urban teachers and linguistically diverse students make meaning (Doctoral dissertation). Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, Toronto. asserts that in second language classrooms, so much attention is devoted to learning the new language that students' home languages and cultures are rarely utilised as relevant resources. Multiliteracies pedagogy, which prioritises students' linguistic and cultural diversity, is powerful for multilingual learners as it allows them to reflect on and



recreate their multicultural and multilingual lives, thereby validating and affirming their identities.

## **2.4 Learner Engagement and Collaboration**

In line with Baker's<sup>106</sup> Baker, C. (2011). Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism. 5th edition. Canada: Multilingual Matters. understanding, developing the productive language proficiency of students towards a fluent and authentic use of the second language inside a classroom or outside the school increased group and collaborative learning and the use of the language in leisure activities. Collaborative learning is also reflected by the idea of mutual learning cultures, where learners can become autonomous and learn to work well with each other through helping each other to learn; in this scenario, teachers have a reduced role as the only source of knowledge and rather work more as enablers. Then the students scaffold each other, and the learning becomes an interactive processes in which the pupils learn from each other and not just by showing and telling.

At the outset of Ntelioglou's<sup>107</sup> Ntelioglou, M. B. Y. (2012). Drama pedagogies, multiliteracies and embodied learning: Urban teachers and linguistically diverse students make meaning (Doctoral dissertation). Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, Toronto.0 project, there was conflict between group members, and many of them confessed that it was challenging for them to try to incorporate all the group members' ideas into their drama or play performances. However, this conflict opened up a space for them to discover ways to navigate their differences and come to an agreement. They gained an appreciation of the multiple viewpoints and experiences of their group members and built a strong sense of solidarity among themselves. Towards the end of the study, all of the learners interviewed referred to their drama/play project as a "space they felt connected to because of the friendships they developed through extensive dialogue and

sharing of what matters to them most". Sophie, one of the ELLs in the study, even described the project as a refuge from her social isolation in the world outside the classroom.

## **What Teachers Can Do to Facilitate Learning in a Linguistically Heterogeneous Class**

### **Know Your Learners**

Very often teachers don't realise the diversity that is present in their class, and they limit their teaching to the interest of a few students. It would be worthwhile to conduct a linguistic survey of your class right at the beginning to make your lessons culturally and linguistically relevant. The survey would enable you to become more sensitive to the needs of the learners who may not even want to acknowledge their language due to negative stereotypes attached to it. In other words, on entry of each learner into your class, you need to carry out a diagnostic assessment, either orally or in writing or both depending on the grade level, in order to establish the skill levels and language background of the learners. This way, you might figure out ways to help all learners from various backgrounds.

### **3.2 Listen to Your Learners**

Languages are learnt best when learners feel emotionally at ease in the class. Krashen argues for monitoring the emotional state of the children or keeping the affective filter low in the class for maximum language learning to occur. Allowing learners to speak freely and spontaneously in their own language has its own benefits. Many teachers across nations have reported how they observed the free flow of ideas out of class by uncommunicative students happening not in the standard language of the class but in the home language of the child. Allow these communications to occur in your own class, too. It could very well become the starting point for teaching them to communicate in the target language. Build on what they

know: While total immersion in the target language is considered to be a necessary condition for language learning by a number of researchers, the initial classes can be organised in such a way that learners can correlate the target language with their own language.

### **3.3 Follow Multilingual Practises in Your Own Class**

Exhibiting multilingual competence in class is a good idea to create an atmosphere of respect for all languages. In a study by Iversen and Mkandawire<sup>108</sup> Iversen, J. Y. & Mkandawire, S. B. (2020). Comparing Language Ideologies in Multilingual Classrooms Across Norway and Zambia. *Multilingual Margins*, 7(3), 33-48, it was reported that some Zambian in-service teachers exhibited openness in engaging multilingual classes. Their willingness and reported ability to draw on their own and their colleagues' linguistic repertoires can serve as an example for teachers in other contexts. Openness and taking deliberate actions to help learners from diverse backgrounds is an action required and expected of all multilingual teachers. Iversen and Mkandawire<sup>109</sup> Iversen, J. Y. & Mkandawire, S. B. (2020). Comparing Language Ideologies in Multilingual Classrooms Across Norway and Zambia. *Multilingual Margins*, 7(3), 33-48 further indicated that teachers who support diversity in their classes also allow translanguaging and code-switching as a pedagogical practise so that learners can express themselves. Furthermore, a multilingual print environment in class gives the necessary concrete exposure to learners. Strategies like creating a bilingual word wall and labelling common objects in the classroom in multiple languages help build the verbal stock of the learners. Asking learners to collect and bring reading materials in their home languages and making them a part of a reading corner, where a pair and share reading activity can be conducted, can result in collaborative learning.

Once motivated, learners can do a compare and contrast task

between the features of written expressions of various languages, thus arriving at a metalinguistic awareness of the languages. It is of utmost important for teachers to understand the connection between language, multilingualism, and education. A classroom where learner's voices are heard and respected, where practises rooted in multilingualism are incorporated, where culturally relevant teaching materials are used, is bound to create citizens who will be able to participate meaningfully and in an empowered manner in a democratic country like Zambia.

Research in Africa and elsewhere has found clear links between language policy and learning related to student engagement in formal education, cognitive processes, and learner-centred pedagogy. For example, a study by Mkandawire<sup>110</sup> Mkandawire, S. B. (2017). Familiar Language Based Instruction versus Unfamiliar Language for the Teaching of Reading and Writing Skills: A Focus on Zambian Languages and English at two Primary Schools in Lusaka. *Zambian Journal of Language Studies*, 1(1), 53-82., titled "Familiar Language Based Instruction versus Unfamiliar Language for the Teaching of Reading and Writing Skills: A Focus on Zambian Languages and English at two Primary Schools in Lusaka," showed multiple important variables for diverse classes. In this study, Mkandawire studied two classes of the same level; one class at one school used a familiar language (Nyanja) known to the class, and at another school, an unfamiliar language (English) was used. There were differences in learner participation and other variables in class, and this classroom research on language and learning indicated strong links between the language of instruction and the participatory nature of learners in class. Mkandawire<sup>111</sup> Mkandawire, S. B. (2017). Familiar Language Based Instruction versus Unfamiliar Language for the Teaching of Reading and Writing Skills: A Focus on Zambian Languages and English at two Primary Schools in Lusaka. *Zambian Journal of Language Studies*, 1(1), 53-82. concluded that:

Using unfamiliar language such as English for literacy education cripples and destroy the child's productive and mental processes in education...using unknown language for early education as medium of instruction destroys his productive powers and holds his mental abilities. On the other hand, using mother tongue-based instruction as a familiar language to a child empowers the child to think, act and process information faster...local familiar languages break class silence. Multilingualism is viewed as a resource to addressing diverse problems.

This also dictated whether or not classes are learner-centered in a natural classroom<sup>112</sup>Batibo, H.M. (2014). Searching for an optimal national language policy for sustainable development. In H. McIlwraith (Ed.) The Cape Town Language and Development Conference: Looking beyond 2015. London: British Council. Pp 16-20.. Fewer children drop out of mother tongue classes understanding what is being taught and what they are expected to do helps improve children's motivation to continue attending school<sup>113</sup>Laitin, D.; Ramachandran, R.; and Walter, S.L. (2015). Language of Instruction and Student Learning: Evidence from an Experimental Program in Cameroon. Paper presented at the 15th SAET Conference on Trends in Economics. Cambridge, UK, 27-31 July 2015..

Parental understanding of the curriculum and ability to help the child with his or her homework are also considerably heightened. 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<sup>114</sup>Bloch, C. (2014). Growing young readers and writers: underpinnings of the Nal'ibali National Reading-for- Enjoyment Campaign. In H. McIlwraith (Ed.) The Cape Town Language and Development Conference: Looking beyond 2015. London: British Council.. In contrast, using a medium of instruction not understood by the learner significantly

impedes learning<sup>115</sup>Harris, P. (2011). Language in Schools in Namibia: The Missing Link in Educational Achievement? Monograph 1. Windhoek: The Urban Trust of Namibia.<sup>116</sup>Motala, S. (2013). South Africa: Making post-apartheid rights into realities. In Clive Harbor (ed.), Education in Southern Africa. London: Bloomsbury. Pp. 189-206.<sup>117</sup>Trudell, B. (2014). The MLE Network phenomenon: Advocacy and action for minority language communities. Multilingual Education 4.17 doi:10.1186/s13616-014-0017-y..

It is becoming clear that while the choice of the language of instruction plays a crucial role in student learning outcomes, it cannot account by itself for the success or failure of a primary grade curriculum.

Equally important are a range of other features, including:

- teacher-related components, such as physical presence in the classroom, and competency in both pedagogy and content;
- curriculum-related components, such as the number of subjects to be covered in a given grade, time allocated to the various subjects, and the length of the school day and school year;
- effective school and classroom management and leadership;
- infrastructure conducive for learning, including sufficient classrooms, toilets, desks, and chairs;
- pedagogical materials available to the teacher and the learner, and available in multiple grades;
- physical, psychological, and emotional safety in the learning environment and socioeconomic factors that affect health, nutrition and parental support.
- the time allocated for literacy instruction, which may have a bearing on the performance of learners.

Reading and learning interventions by national and international education implementers are demonstrating that the absence of any of these components inhibits learning. Choosing the most appropriate language of instruction for each given classroom context is thus emerging as a necessary but not sufficient component of successful classroom learning.

## Conclusion

Teaching learners from diverse backgrounds demands more concentrated efforts from diverse stakeholders, including teachers, learners, parents, and policymakers. Teachers need to embrace diversity and difference in their classes. They also need to be equipped with knowledge and skills for addressing issues of diversity among learners. Multiliteracies pedagogy is a multifaceted approach to teaching that demands more than just being a mere teacher as it requires creativity, inclusion, empathy, and being sensitive to the environment. Multiliteracy demands the existence of multiple literacies due to the diversity of the class where multiliteracies thrive<sup>118</sup>McClay, J. K. (2006). Collaborating with teachers and students in multiliteracies research: "Se hace camino al andar". *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 52(3), 182-195.<sup>119</sup>Tambulukani, C. and Bus, A. (2012). Linguistic diversity: A contributory factor to reading problems in Zambian schools. *Applied Linguistics* 33.2, 141-160.<sup>120</sup>Van Sluys, K. (2005). *Literacy invitations for multilingual classrooms*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.<sup>121</sup>Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.<sup>122</sup>Cummins, J., & Early, M. (2011). *Identity texts: The collaborative creation of power in multilingual schools*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.<sup>123</sup>Cummins, J. (2001). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society* (2nd ed.). Ontario: California Association of Bilingual Education.<sup>124</sup>Matafwali, B. (2010). The relationship

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## **Reference**

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