ISSN: 2642-4002

Volume 5, July 2025

# International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025**

# Editorial Team

## About the Journal

The *International Journal of Literacy, Culture and Language Education (IJLCLE)* is an open-source peer-reviewed international journal dedicated to publishing research in the field of literacy, culture, and language education from multi- inter-and trans-disciplinary perspectives. Its mission is two-fold: (1) to promote the exchange of ideas and dissemination of research, and (2) to facilitate academic exchange between scholars from diverse fields of study worldwide. Authors are invited to submit manuscripts describing scholarly research on a wide range of topics related to language, literacy and culture in education. (ISSN: 2642-4002)

Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/ijlcle/

### Focus and Scope

*IJLCLE* is multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary and focuses on all aspects of language, literacy and culture in education worldwide. Theoretical and conceptual study, empirical and applied research using qualitative and/or quantitative methodologies, critical papers, special issues and book reviews are all invited. Contributions from a host of disciplines such as sociolinguistics, sociology of language, psycholinguistics, educational linguistics, applied linguistics, linguistic anthropology, raciolinguistics, literacy studies, cultural studies, language and gender studies, language and political economy, media

and technology, language education, teacher education, educational policy, semiotics, pragmatics, language policy and planning, language revitalization, and linguistic landscapes are very welcome. The intended audience of *IJLCLE* are researchers, scholars, educators, and graduate students from around the world.

## Indexing

*IJLCLE* is indexed in Google Scholar, Crossref, and ResearchGate. The journal is also indexed and discoverable through major search engines, and all non-embargoed work is publicly accessible.

## History

*IJLCLE* was born out of the *Working Papers in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education (WPLCLE)* published in five volumes from 2012 to 2017. This is the reason why the Editorial Team decided to include those five volumes in the archives of *IJLCLE* as background information and evidence of its conception.

## Peer Review Process

Double-blind peer review

## Publication Frequency

We typically publish one volume (five to ten articles) on a yearly basis in December. We also publish special issues depending on Guest Editors' interest in publishing with us.

## Open Access Policy

*IJLCLE* is committed to providing open access for academic work. All the original articles, special issues, and book reviews are free to access immediately from the date of publication. We do not charge any fees for any reader to download articles and reviews for their own scholarly use.



## Sponsors

*IJLCLE* is symbolically sponsored by the Literacy, Culture, and Language Education Program (LCLE) in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction within the School of Education at Indiana University.

## Policies on Conflicts of Interest and Competing Interests

Authors must disclose any financial or personal relationships with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence their work. All potential conflicts of interest, including specific financial interests and relationships and affiliations relevant to the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript, must be disclosed.

## Policies on Data Sharing and Reproducibility

Authors may need to include a statement in their paper indicating where the data is available, such as a repository, or if data sharing is not possible, providing reasons why

## Ethical Standard

The journal is committed to upholding the highest standards of ethical oversight in the publication process. This includes ensuring that all research published in the journal adheres to ethical guidelines and principles, safeguarding the rights and welfare of research participants, and maintaining the integrity of the research record.

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025**

# Contents

## Book Reviews

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025, pp. 1-4**
**DOI 10.14434/ijlcle.v5i.41960**

# Introduction

Serafín M. Coronel-Molina

The *International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education (IJLCLE)* is a peer-reviewed, open-access international journal committed to publishing research in the fields of literacy, culture, and language education from multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary perspectives. Its mission is to foster the global exchange of ideas and promote the dissemination of research among scholars and researchers across diverse academic disciplines. *IJLCLE* invites manuscript submissions that present scholarly work on a wide range of topics related to language, literacy, and culture in education. Submissions may include theoretical and conceptual studies, empirical and applied research using qualitative and/or quantitative methodologies, critical essays, special issues, and book reviews. The journal welcomes contributions from various disciplines, including sociolinguistics, sociology of language, psycholinguistics, educational linguistics, applied linguistics, linguistic anthropology, raciolinguistics, literacy studies, cultural studies, language and gender studies, language and political economy, media and technology, language education, teacher education, educational policy, semiotics, pragmatics, language policy and planning, language revitalization, and linguistic landscapes. *IJLCLE*'s audience includes researchers, scholars, educators, and graduate students around the world.

This fifth volume features sixth research articles and three book reviews, carefully selected from the 2024 submissions. The first article, titled "Liminality in Immigration-Adjacent Stories: A Critical Content Analysis of Identity Negotiation in Intercultural Graphic Novels" by Chen Su and Jason J. Griffith, explores how intercultural graphic novels serve as powerful tools for identity exploration among historically marginalized and immigrant-adjacent students. Drawing on *Identity Negotiation Theory* and a multimodal analytical framework, Su examines six graphic novels to uncover how characters navigate identity insecurity, inclusion, transformation, and ultimately a form of "satisfactory" identity negotiation within liminal spaces, transitional zones where belonging is fluid and contested. The study highlights how multiple semiotic modes, visuals, text, and layout interact to express complex identity dynamics, providing insights into how these narratives represent the multifaceted experiences of cultural hybridity, migration, and adaptation. Su argues that these graphic novels can function as transformative educational resources that affirm the lived experiences of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. By bringing to the fore underrepresented stories, the research contributes to inclusive practices in multilingual education and culturally responsive pedagogy. This article offers valuable implications for educators and researchers seeking to amplify the voices of intercultural, immigrant, and immigrant-adjacent students. It demonstrates how graphic novels can create meaningful spaces for identity affirmation and dialogue in increasingly diverse classrooms.

**Contact:** Serafín M. Coronel-Molina, Indiana University
E-mail: scoronel@iu.edu

The second article, titled "Culturally Sustaining Literacy Pedagogies within an Anti-CRT Climate: A Mediated Discourse Analysis" by Kelsey Deklerk, explores the impact of culturally sustaining literacy instruction in a politically charged context marked by resistance to Critical Race Theory (CRT). Using a mediated discourse analysis framework, the study focuses on the actions of a student who, after engaging in culturally relevant literacy lessons, responded to anti-CRT rhetoric by writing a letter to the District Board of Education. In this letter, the student advocated for the continuation of culturally inclusive content in the school curriculum, directly challenging claims that such instruction constituted "indoctrination." Deklerk analyzes this mediated action by examining the discourses, historical bodies (i.e., the student's accumulated experiences), and social interactions that informed the student's response. The findings underscore the importance of integrating culturally sustaining pedagogies that acknowledge and address power relations within educational contexts. By understanding the influence of historical experiences and broader societal discourses, educators and policymakers can more effectively support diverse student populations and confront systemic inequities. The article calls for future research into how these elements shape educational experiences across cultural and socioeconomic boundaries. It also highlights the need to incorporate insights from mediated discourse analysis into teacher preparation and policy development to promote equity and inclusivity in schools.

The third article, titled "*We Don't Want Their Yoruba Language to Fade":* Examining the Home Literacy and Cultural Practices of Yoruba Families in the Midwest U.S." by Adetutu Fabusoro and Giselle Martínez Negrette, explores how Yoruba immigrant families support their children's bilingualism and biliteracy in English and Yoruba. Grounded in sociocultural theory and New Literacy Studies, this qualitative study uses ethnographic methods to examine the home literacy and cultural practices used by Yoruba parents and how they view the relationship between language and culture in their children's development. Findings reveal that parents intentionally engage in a range of culturally sustaining practices, such as oral storytelling, poetry, proverbs, songs, and the use of religious texts, to reinforce both languages. These practices are not only educational but also serve to maintain cultural identity, build moral understanding, and foster family cohesion. Parents emphasized that language and culture are inseparable and expressed concern about cultural loss within U.S. society. They also highlighted a disconnect between home practices and school expectations. This research offers valuable insights into the strengths of African immigrant families and calls for greater recognition of home literacy practices in educational settings. It contributes to efforts that bridge school-home divides and promote culturally sustaining pedagogies.

The fourth article, "Multicultural Education Contents, Attitudes, Practices, and Challenges in Nigeria's Social Studies Education" by Adaobiagu Obiagu, Confidence Onyekachi, Roseline Amadi, and Emmanuel Eze explores how multicultural education (MCE) is understood and implemented within the context of Nigeria's diverse and multi-ethnic society. Recognizing the nation's vast cultural richness as a potential driver of inclusive development, the study aims to support peacebuilding and social cohesion amid ongoing regional and ethnic conflicts. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data, the researchers administered closed- and open-ended questionnaires and conducted classroom observations in the Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. The study included responses from 267 students, 31 teachers, and observations in 18 social studies classrooms across six schools. Findings show that while social studies teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward multicultural values, their classroom practices often fall short of effectively implementing MCE. This gap is confirmed by students' responses and direct classroom observations. Contributing factors include teacher skepticism, insufficient training, limited understanding of diversity issues, and a lack of appropriate instructional resources. The authors argue that meaningful policy reforms, professional development, and resource allocation are essential to

bridge this gap. Strengthening MCE practices is vital for promoting inclusive education and fostering unity in Nigeria's complex sociocultural landscape.

The fifth article, "Supporting Young People's Identity through Translanguaging in English as a Second Language Classroom" by Eucharia Okwudilichukwu Ugwu, explores how English-only instruction in Nigerian schools undermines both literacy development and the formation of positive bilingual identities among young learners. Using a narrative qualitative inquiry, this critical case study focuses on elementary school children whose mother tongue is Nsukka Igbo, a regional dialect spoken in southeastern Nigeria. Data was gathered through classroom observations and both formal and informal interactions with the students. The study is grounded in translanguaging as a decolonial framework and pedagogical approach, enabling a nuanced understanding of how imposed language hierarchies shape learners' identities. Through this lens, the author examines how children navigate their English language learning experiences while simultaneously grappling with marginalization of their native language. The research reveals that the rigid monolingual structure of instruction restricts students' self-expression, identity formation, and overall engagement in learning. While the intervention was brief and thus not generalizable, the findings underscored the transformative potential of translanguaging to create more inclusive, identity-affirming classroom environments. The study offers valuable insights for educators and policymakers, advocating for the integration of students' home languages into formal education to support both academic achievement and cultural belonging.

The sixth and final article, "Engaging Comunalidad as Theory and Praxis in Language Reclamation" by María Cecilia Schwedhelm Ramírez, explores comunalidad as a powerful framework for understanding and advancing Indigenous language reclamation. Rooted in the lived experiences, resistance, and collective reflection of Indigenous communities in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, Mexico, comunalidad embodies a way of being, knowing, and acting that is inherently relational and grounded in community life. This essay examines comunalidad as theory, praxis, and pedagogy, and considers its transformative potential for language revitalization. Language reclamation, like comunalidad, is more than a technical endeavor—it is an ongoing, dynamic, and collective process tied to identity, autonomy, and self-determination. Drawing on the work of comunalistas and local grassroots movements in Oaxaca, the author asks: What is comunalidad, and how does it shape language revitalization efforts? She argues that comunalidad reorients language reclamation toward a community-driven purpose that reinforces relational practices and collective responsibility. As a theoretical lens, comunalidad offers insight into the socio-political and cultural dimensions of language; as praxis, it guides actions that integrate language into daily communal life. Ultimately, this perspective emphasizes the importance of locally grounded pedagogies and affirms language reclamation as a vital act of resistance, relationality, and Indigenous resurgence.

This fifth volume of *IJLCLE* concludes with three insightful book reviews. The first review, contributed by Yanjuan Huo, focuses on *Multilingual Education Yearbook 2023: Teaching with Technology in English-Medium Instruction Universities in Multilingual China*, edited by John Corbett, Edith M. Y. Yan, Jackie Yeoh and Juyoung Lee. The second, by Mengjie Lei, examines *An Introduction to Language and Social Justice: What Is, What Has Been, and What Could Be* by Nelson Flores Avineri and Patricia Baquedano-López. The third review, by Christine Anne McLellan, discusses *In Pursuit of English: Language and Subjectivity in Neoliberal South Korea* by Joseph Sung-Yul Park. Together, these reviews offer critical perspectives on recent scholarships at the intersections of language, education, identity, and sociopolitical contexts.

## Acknowledgments

The *International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education (IJLCLE)* is a project close to my heart. While I have dedicated considerable time to overseeing the full production process, including formatting and editing in close communication with all contributing authors, I could not have done this work alone.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the entire *IJLCLE* Editorial Team for their invaluable support in their respective roles: Xin Chen (Associate Editor); Suok Kwon and Jaeho Jeon (Managing Editors); and Melody Lynch-Kimery, Christina L. Romero, and Amy Walker (Assistant Editors). Their dedication and collaboration have been instrumental throughout the editorial process.

I am also deeply grateful to colleagues, friends, and institutions at Indiana University and around the world for helping promote the *IJLCLE* website, Facebook page, and Call for Papers both locally and globally. My sincere appreciation goes to my colleagues in the Literacy, Culture, and Language Education Program in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the IU School of Education, as well as to our international Editorial Board members for their ongoing support and service.

Most importantly, I thank all the contributors to this volume for choosing *IJLCLE* as the venue for their important work. I also extend my deep appreciation to IUScholarWorks for hosting the *IJLCLE* website and supporting this initiative through their publishing platform. Finally, I am especially thankful to the blind reviewers for their thoughtful, rigorous feedback, which enriched the dialogue and sharpened the contributions in this volume. Without the generous support of all these individuals and institutions, this issue would not have been possible.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025, pp. 5-23**
**DOI 10.14434/ijlcle.v5i.37523**

# Liminality in Immigration-Adjacent Stories: A Critical Content Analysis of Identity Negotiation in Intercultural Graphic Novels

Chen Su and Jason J. Griffith

## Abstract

As educators and researchers with experiences related to historically marginalized students, we endeavored to provide a space to reveal their underrepresented stories, and we propose that intercultural graphic novels can serve as an emergent and transformative liminal space to help them navigate multiple identities. As a foundational step in the application of graphic novels in multilingual education, and under the tenets of Identity Negotiation Theory and Multimodality, we conducted a critical content analysis to examine six intercultural graphic novels. This study finds that the characters' identity negotiation process- containing identity insecurity, identity inclusion, identity transformation, and "satisfactory" identity negotiation- forms a dynamic liminal space, and characters navigate in this in-between status. Also, we found that multiple modes contribute to revealing characters' different identities and revealing their stories. Our findings will be helpful to inform additional studies on the use of graphic novels to embrace intercultural, immigrant, and immigrant-adjacent students' voices in multilingual education.

**Keywords:** identity negotiation, graphic novels, critical content analysis, multimodality, liminality, multilingual education

**Contact:** Chen Su, Penn State University
E-mail: cms8316@psu.edu
Jason J. Griffith, Penn State University
E-mail: jjg5321@psu.edu

## Introduction

After saying goodbye to the undergraduate teacher education students, my first teaching section as a Graduate Assistant Instructor was over. I (Author 1) locked the door, walked back to the office, and sighed, "What a disaster!" I was silent when students mentioned that Jimmy O. Yang would come to the university because I did not know that he is a well-known Asian American comedian. It was an overwhelming moment for me as I realized I was no longer a teacher working in a middle school in my native China. Instead, I was a Ph.D. student, studying abroad in an American research university and working as a teaching assistant. Without a familiar cultural and language environment, I have struggled with an identity transition process, that has involved emotional vulnerability and identity insecurity.

Then, when I read the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006) for my Teaching Children's Literature class, I was drawn to the story of protagonist Jin Wang struggling with his dual ethnic identities, American and Chinese. I related to the Chinese culture, especially the story of the Monkey King depicted in it. When I talked with Author 2 about my identity negotiation experiences in reading and teaching *American Born Chinese*, it sparked a conversation about identity and interculturality in graphic novels. As a lifelong reader of comics, Author 2 had recently served on the Lynd Ward Graphic Novel Prize jury as well as publishing several columns on comics and education (Griffith, 2019, 2021, 2022), so he strongly believes in the power of comics and other visual literature in the classroom. As a White American male, he provided a different perspective, relating to identity negotiation from a distanced and relatively normative coming-of-age experience. Author 2's role in this research became that of a "critical friend" (Costa & Kallick, 1993), recommending graphic novels and scholarly readings, helping to select texts and refine methods, and providing feedback.

Without a unified definition for the genre of intercultural graphic novels, we refer to the term *intercultural* in our paper as "the communication process between members of different cultural communities" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 16). Due to their multiple identities, characters in graphic novels can encounter intercultural processes in various contexts. In the intercultural process, instead of belonging to one community or identity, characters are floating in what Land et al. (2014) call a "tunnel" (p. 204): a fluid and dynamic liminal space. Liminality is characterized as "a liquid space, simultaneously transforming and being transformed by the learner as he or she moves through it" (Meyer & Land, 2005, p. 380). What we argue is that characters in intercultural graphic novels exist within this creative, emergent, and provisional space, where they experience tensions, confusion, and transformation.

In intercultural graphic novels where characters negotiate their multiple identities and struggle within this emergent tunnel, characters may enter a liminal or in-between space where "people struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and their inner relationships with it" (Tuana & Scott, 2020, p.122). Characters may move back and forth in the identity negotiation process, walk through insecurity and security, and create their liminal spaces, but we wonder how characters interact with their liminal spaces and how these spaces are constructed in multimodal graphic novels.

The term "identity" has been widely studied in social science, and researchers from various fields have proposed identity theories that draw from nuanced directions. However, to align with our research interest in the exploration of identity negotiation within intercultural graphic novels, we identified identity negotiation theory (INT) (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005, 2015) to be the overarching framework that guided our study. "Identity" in INT refers to "our reflective views of ourselves and other perceptions of our self-images–at both the social identity and the personal identity level" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 212). Social identity includes cultural or ethnic memberships, and personal identities

cover unique attributes related to individuals. The theory consists of ten core assumptions of identity negotiation, which clarify the process and outcome components in intercultural contexts. For instance, Ting-Toomey explains the contexts of identity emotional security and identity emotional vulnerability in assumption 3 and identity differentiation in stigmatized membership identity in assumption 4. To grapple with the identity negotiation process, we discuss the negotiation of sociocultural and personal identities based on these ten core assumptions.

Furthermore, considering how characters' identities were presented in multiple modes in graphic novels, we additionally utilized the theory of multimodality as a secondary framework to describe potentials and affordances in visual sociocultural contexts in which characters are embedded. Multimodality considers how information is delivered through complementary modes including visual images, design elements, and written language (Jewitt &Kress, 2003, as cited in Serafini, 2010, p. 87). Each mode can express divergent meanings, and choices extend and overlap in multimodal texts, offering the expanded potential for meanings (Kress & Selander, 2012, p. 267). Because multiple modes, including linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, tactile, and spatial, contribute to making meanings (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013, p. 10), we drew from these resources to interrogate how multimodality represents the identity negotiation process and how mankind produce signs, symbols, and narratives-as producers and interpreters, and as learners (Kress & Selander, 2012, p. 267).

Therefore, drawing from identity Negotiation Theory (INT) (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005, 2015) and Multimodality (Kress, 2004; Serafini, 2010), we conducted a critical content analysis of six selected texts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do characters negotiate their multiple identities in intercultural contexts in graphic novels?
2. How do multimodal features of graphic novels contribute to showing identity negotiation?

## Literature Review

As one of the most circulated categories in libraries (MacDonald, 2013), graphic novels have been recognized for prestigious literary awards. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (Spiegelman, 1986) was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, which first legitimized and validated graphic novels as serious literature with great promise, but it would take until 2020 for a graphic novel, *New Kid* (Craft, 2019) to win the Newbery medal. Yang (2008) described the popularity of graphic novels everywhere in daily life, including classrooms, bookstores, and popular culture in his panel (as cited in Brozo et al., 2014, p. 4). Though the study of graphic novels is rapidly growing, there is a lack of consensus on the terminology around graphic novels. In our study, we adopted *graphic novel* as our primary term, which is defined as book-length comics that read as stories (Weiner & Eisner, 2012) and encompass multiple genres and highlight more topics and themes in intricate narratives and dynamic images (Brozo et al., 2014, p. 5). As we explained generally in the introduction, graphic novels embrace liminal space through their conventions, including gutters and layout. We examined more features in the following sections to reveal the role of liminality in graphic novels and unpack identity in graphic novels utilized in education.

### Liminality in Graphic Novels

The term liminality, which was first coined by Arnold van Gennep and defined by Victor Turner (1967) as "the state of being betwixt and between" (p. 93), is intertwined with Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of a borderland, which she introduced as a "vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary...a constant state of transition" (p. 3). Jacobs (2016) noticed liminality in children's books in the gap of texts by focusing on the page break—a physical

space between pages—which signifies something unsaid and filled in by readers. Her analysis extended liminality to narratives, and centers readers in her explanation of liminal spaces as moments where "the audience is simultaneously being pushed outward by the temporal and spatial divide from one opening to the next and pulled into a more active role in the making of meaning" (Jacobs, 2016, p. 359).

Like in the reading of picture books, graphic novels' medium opens possibilities of liminal spaces for readers because of the physical act of turning pages. Readers "fill in the natural gaps created by the page breaks to make meaning and to construct a continuous narrative by speculating on what might have happened between the pages" (Sipe & Brightman, 2009, p. 68). As Chute (2008) argued, pages in comics are a deviation from the regular intervals compared to other literature, providing space and time challenging the dominant storytelling (p. 456). Low (2012) also argued that readers must take on the role of figurative co-author to construct meanings and fill the gaps as they turn the pages (2012, p. 373).

However, unlike picture books, unique conventions, including panels and the gutter, contribute to the complex multimodal system in comics. Interpreting meaning in comics depends on linking panels and blank spaces between each panel, named the gutter, which serves as the liminal space for readers to construct meanings. McCloud (1993) emphasized the crucial role of the gutter, which "plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics" (p. 67).

Low (2012) described the communication between readers and the gutter as "gutterance" (p. 372). Readers are invited to fill the gap with their linguistic and cultural repertoires, contributing to a divergent and fluid liminal space where readers collaborate in the storytelling. In Ghiso and Low's (2013) study on revealing students' stories in multimodal texts, they argued that students' detailed immigration experiences are hidden in the gutters, working as the liminal space, which opens boundless possibilities and meanings (p. 30). Sanders (2021) also emphasized gutters in comics and advocates a "Gutter Future," in which readers "embrace fluidity, the messy ebbs and flows of un/learning and be/coming" (p. 315).

The gutters and page breaks offer the spatial and temporal space where readers can speculate and become, where readers can break the boundary of linear reading in traditional literacy texts, and where readers, especially multilingual readers, can negotiate their multiple identities and offer alternative narratives. Moreover, compared to non-visual texts, the medium of graphic novels invites readers to transit from one panel to another, "not always linearly depending on page layout" (Rodríguez-Astacio & Low, 2023, p. 640). The nonlinear and multidirectional reading approaches contribute to liminality as readers transact with the texts. Readers are invited to choose any reading paths they want and enter the texts without following the path predetermined by the authors in non-visual texts (Kress, 2004, p. 114; Jewitt, 2005, p. 329).

Other than the liminality in the gutter and the act of turning the page, we argue that liminality exists in the boundaries between written languages and images. As "flatlanders" (Sousanis, 2015), readers are trapped in boundaries and limitations of sight. However, as Sousanis (2015) commented that "borders become links" (p. 37), we argue that with multidimensional and multimodal approaches, boundaries, presented in liminal spaces, encompass connectedness. The underrepresented and hidden immigration-adjacent stories about characters' identity negotiation in these intercultural graphic novels will emerge by moving back and forth across the boundaries between text and image.

### Identity in Graphic Novels and Its Significance to Education

Given the unique conventions of graphic novels, researchers have noticed students' various identities reflected in their dialogue with graphic novels. Meek (1982) assumed readers have dual identities: the teller and the told (p. 290). Readers are told stories by the author, but they also become tellers as they interpret the words to construct their own meanings. In research related to intercultural contexts in graphic novels, identity representation is prominently featured. Schwarz and Crenshaw (2011) displayed how graphic novels can touch on questions of identity. Ghiso and Low (2013) argued that valuing multimodal narratives invites multiple representations, offering students a space to produce their own stories related to their inherent immigration repertoires (p. 33). Low (2017) investigated the medium of graphic novels in a participant's reading and composing practices where a student "repositions himself as an accomplished reader and writer" (p. 41) to reflect on their identities and restore themself. Helsel (2018) regarded the graphic novel as a vital medium for immigrant adolescents by unveiling the acculturation process (p. 138). Additionally, graphic novels give voice to minority students by presenting their alternative views of culture, history, and human life (Schwarz, 2002, p. 264).

The affordances of graphic novels to reveal stories stem from the interplay of visual narratives and written languages. McCloud (1993) wrote, "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (p. 9), and pictures in graphic novels are expressive and informative for identity and cultural representations. For example, multilingual students have been encouraged to tell their family stories in a multimodal way (Chun, 2009, p. 151), and Danzak (2011) observed that students included flags, national colors, and food in their graphic journals to express their cultural heritage and represent their cultural identities (p. 192). Even without proficiency in a written language, students can relate their immigration stories to a graphic novel through images (Kelly & Ascuitto, 2022, p. 42).

As depicted, well-described research on graphic novels has affirmatively acknowledged the importance of graphic novels in representing identities, the crucial role of visual narratives in stories unveiled in education, and liminality in graphic novels. However, we identified some gaps that our study contributes to addressing. Previous research identifies liminal spaces in students' interactions with graphic novels, shaped by unique conventions such as gutters, page breaks, and layout, but the boundaries between images and written language can also create liminal spaces where characters in multimodal texts negotiate their identities in order to resonate with marginalized students' experiences. Therefore, we need to create a space to clarify the characters' identity negotiation processes within these liminal spaces. Furthermore, while researchers have recognized the power of visual representation, the nuances of the interplay in multimodal texts deserve further exploration. In this study, we detail how characters in these intercultural graphic novels navigate their identities within the liminal spaces created by the multimodal narratives. In the following sections, we not only highlight the stories revealed in their identity negotiation, but we also examine functions of multimodality.

## Methodology

We conducted a critical content analysis to arrive at detailed and multiple modes of description of the identity negotiation process in intercultural graphic novels. Content analysis was defined by Krippendorff (2003) as "a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter" (p. 3), and we followed Short's (2017) step-by-step guidelines to examine within, though, and beyond the texts. By engaging in the multimodal content analysis within these graphic novels, we revealed characters' ethnic identity navigation represented in multiple modes. Moreover, based on our close reading of the multimodal texts, we moved beyond to unveil their immigration-adjacent stories of

marginalized identities to challenge dominant narratives, with the goal of disrupting stereotypes and bias and making space for historically marginalized identities and stories.

## Data Sources

To address our research questions, shaped by our experience and the gaps identified in the literature review, we aligned two theories for our framework: identity negotiation theory and multimodality. We then identified six intercultural graphic novels based on a specific set of criteria (See Table 1). First, given the requirement of close reading and in-depth analysis in critical content analysis, we selected a small sample of books primarily encompassing recent award-winning and popular graphic novels. Also, to describe identity negotiation in diverse contexts, we selected broadly to include various sub-genres, cultures, ethnicities, languages, and histories. Moreover, to investigate identity negotiation in multiple modes, all six graphic novels unpack stories through full and plain images.

**Table 1**. *This chart lists our selected texts and significant information about each.*
*Selected Books*

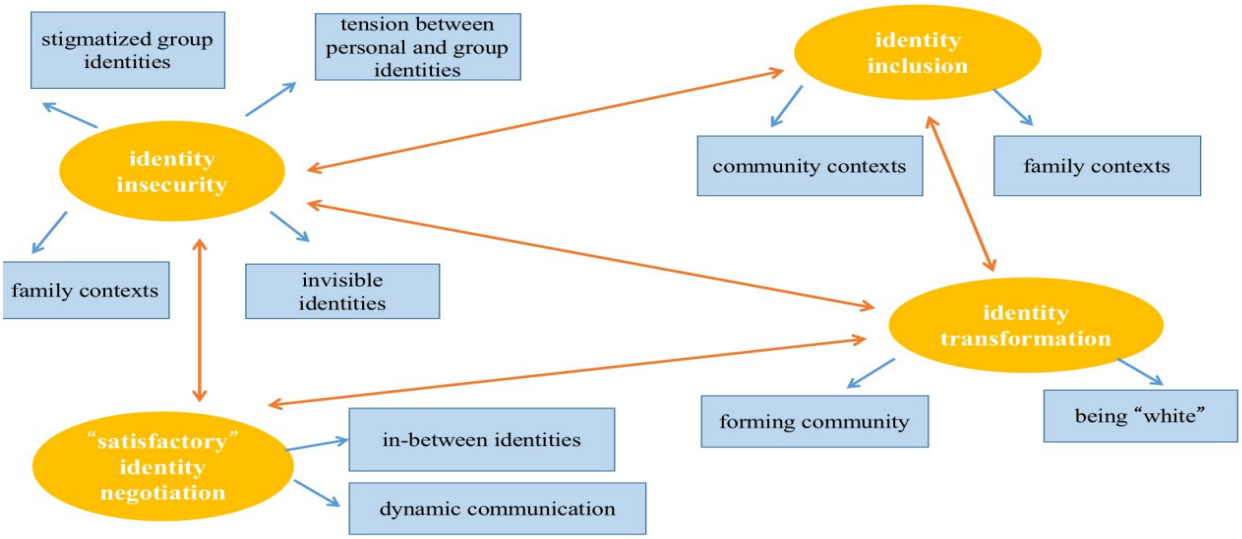
| **Books** | **Awards** | **Cultural Contexts** | **Genres** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006) | 2007 Michael L. Printz Award, 2007 Eisner Award for Best Graphic Album: New, *Publishers Weekly* Comics Week Best Comic of the Year, *San Francisco Chronicle* Best Book of the Year, 2006/2007 Best Book Award from The Chinese American Librarians Association | Chinese, American | Fiction |
| *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei et al., 2019) | Will Eisner Award for Best Reality-Based Work, Asian/Pacific American Award for Young Adult Literature, 41st Annual American Book Awards, National Cartoonists Society Award for Excellence in Graphic Novels, Dwayne McDuffie Award for Diversity in Comics | Japanese, American | Memoir |
| *The Complete Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2007) | French version: 2001 Angoulême Coup de Coeur Award, 2002 Angoulême Prize for Scenario<br>English version: Time magazine "Best Comics of 2003", 2019 47th on The Guardian′s list of the 100 best books of the 21st century | Iranian, Austrian | Memoir |
| *I Was Their American Dream* (Gharib, 2019) | 2020 The Arab American Book Award | Filipino, Egyptian, and American | Memoir |
| *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007) | 2008 ALA Notable Books for Children, 2008 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Winner, 2008 ALA Best Books for Young Adults, 2008 ALA Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens, 2008 ALA Great Graphic Novels for Teens, 2008 American Booksellers Award – Children's Literature Honor Book | Unclear | Fiction |
| *The Unwanted: Stories of the Syrian Refugees* (Brown, 2018) | Sibert Honor Medalist, New York Public Library Best of 2018, The Horn Book Fanfare 2018, Kirkus Reviews Best Books of 2018, 2019 YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Winner, 2019 Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal | Syrian, European, American | Nonfiction |

**Data Analysis**

After selecting six intercultural graphic novels, we analyzed these texts in two major phases: reading first as readers followed by reading as researchers. In the first phase, we read books to immerse ourselves in their stories and to capture our initial response. We identified the main characters and identities in each book. Then, as researchers, we read deeply with our theoretical frameworks in mind and identified a specific set of theoretical tenets that are related closely to our research questions. For example, the ten assumptions from INT provided an effective lens to help us focus on the identity negotiation process, such as identity emotional security, identity emotional vulnerability, identity transformation, and identity competence. Also, we identified crucial modes in multimodality, including linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial elements. After identifying theoretical tenets and multiple relevant modes, we examined the visual and written narratives in a close reading to determine units to code for further analysis. Considering that "researchers usually select key illustrations based on the research purpose for close analysis rather than the entire book" (Short, 2019, p. 16), we identified scenes to align with the identity negotiation process and multimodality.

After reading, we developed an additional close examination of the identified units or visual images. First, we transcribed the multimodal scenes, including the exact words along with a description of corresponding images. Then, we worked through the twelve principles in *Picture This: How Pictures Work* (Bang, 2016) as our main approach to facilitate visual critical analysis. These principles describe the impact of visual domains, such as size, color, position, and distance. For example, Bang (2016) claimed that "diagonal shapes are dynamic because they imply motion or tension" (p. 58). Next, we detailed the characters' identity experiences and tagged them based on the core assumptions in identity negotiation theory, such as identity insecurity and identity inclusion. See Tables 2-8 for examples of our analysis chart. Though we utilized Bang's principles as a starting point to notice visual features, such as shapes, colors, sizes, and locations, Bang (2016) argued that, in context, each individual visual feature is combined with others (p. 73), which indicates that we cannot separate each principle. Instead, we should regard images in context. Kress (2009) also expressed a similar argument that meaning is constructed through an ensemble (p. 28). So, the interplay of visual and written languages and even visual features within one page communicate contextually. In other words, there is not just one fixed or overarching set of principles for interpreting visual and multimodal texts, since texts and interpretations of those texts are situated in ever-shifting contexts. Finally, we identified broad themes or categories by creating a thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 90) (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1**. *This is a map of themes emerging from tags and assumption analyses. Thematic Map*




## Findings

After conducting the analysis, we found that characters generally navigate an identity negotiation process that includes phases of identity insecurity, identity inclusion, identity transformation, and "satisfactory" identity negotiation. This journey unfolds in a circular, fluid, and diverse liminal space where characters continuously experience, traverse boundaries, and transform. For instance, when a character feels insecure about one group's identity, that influences an emotional inclination toward another group's identity, resulting in identity transformation. However, the transformation could lead to "satisfactory" identity negotiation, encountering renewed identity insecurity, or reaching inclusion. Thus, identity negotiation emerges as a recursive, communicative process where characters actively explore their multiple identities. During this process, the combination of written language and visual narrative is productive in depicting characters' identities negotiation. Some of these specific findings are numbered and detailed as follows.

### Forming a Dynamic Liminal Space: Identity Insecurity, Identity Inclusion, Identity Transformation, and "Satisfactory" Identity Negotiation

Our data shows that characters experience a dynamic and recursive cycle of identity negotiation, with identity insecurity, inclusion, transformation, and "satisfactory" negotiation. This interaction shapes the characters' identities, emphasizing the fluid and evolving nature within the narrative.

#### *Identity Insecurity and Inclusion Between Ingroup and Outgroup*

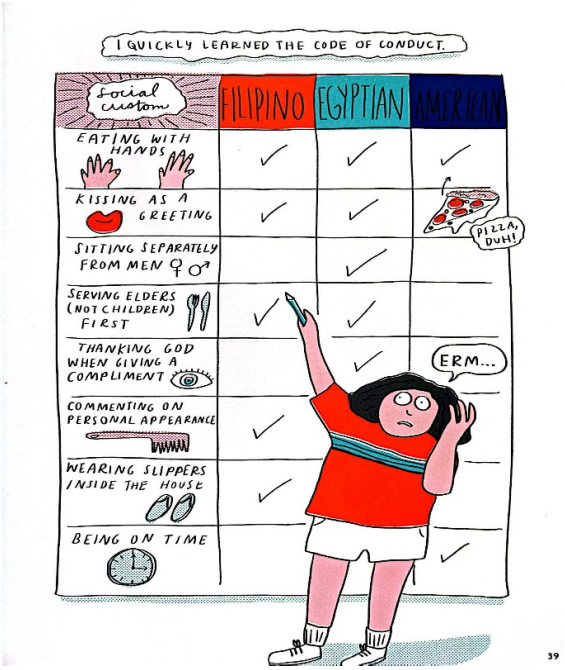
In Assumption 3 in INT, individuals tend to feel emotional insecurity in a culturally unfamiliar environment. Also, if their group membership identities are stigmatized, they will experience differentiation (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 5). In our data analysis, characters experience identity insecurity related to several elements, such as family contexts, stigmatized group identity, the tension between personal and group identities, and invisible identity. For example, in Table 2, though Malaka was born and raised in America, she lives with her Filipino family, and she is aware of the differences between her family and normative American families portrayed on TV. She struggles with her multiple identities:

Filipino, Egyptian, and American. Malaka draws a table to "learn" the code of negotiating these three identities. Being multicultural is not natural for her. Instead, she needs to learn how to be according to her identity. Her frustration is well-presented through her facial expressions, such as her frown and wide-open eyes, and her body language, such as scratching her hair (see Figure 2). She is stuck at finishing the chart and feels insecure because of her intersecting familial context. However, identity insecurity and identity inclusion are always intertwined. The table she draws, and the word "learned" demonstrate her efforts to include (and feel included in) all three groups.

**Table 2.** *In this scene, Malaka showcases her identity negotiation among Filipino, Egyptian, and American by drawing a table. I Was Their American Dream* (Gharib, 2019, p. 39)

| Page | Written Transcription | Visual Transcription | Visual Analysis | Assumption Analysis | Tag |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **39** | "I quickly learned the code of conduct" (Gharib, 2019, p. 39). | Malaka draws a chart of different social customs for Filipino, Egyptian and Americans. | She is checking at the table but scratches her hair with her eyes wide open. She is stuck with the checking. | According to Assumption 4, she feels identity tension as she negotiates her personal identity with three ethnic identities, as there are ingroup and outgroup boundaries in identity inclusion. | Identity insecurity (tension between personal and group identities) and identity inclusion |

**Figure 2.** *This scene from I Was Their American Dream*[1] *shows teenaged protagonist Malaka making a confused expression as she points to a chart listing social customs with various checkmarks in three columns of her intercultural identities: Filipino, Egyptian, and American.*
*I Was Their American Dream (Gharib, 2019, p.39)*




[1] Graphic Novel Excerpt from I WAS THEIR AMERICAN DREAM: A GRAPHIC MEMOIR by Malaka Gharib, copyright © 2019 by Malaka Gharib. Used by permission of Clarkson Potter Publishers, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

We also found that characters' identity insecurity can be the result of a stigmatized group identity. For example, in Table 3, though the girl is not doing anything hazardous to American society, she is regarded as a member of the enemy Japanese community, which determines her identity insecurity. Even though George, the protagonist in *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei et al., 2019), survives the hostile attitudes towards Japanese Americans in World War II and moves out of the internment camps, he still feels identity insecurity due to the lasting influence of the stigmatized group identity. For example, his fourth-grade teacher ignores him whenever he raises his hand, and she calls him "little Jap boy" (Takei et al., 2019, p. 171). Similarly, in Table 4, Jin Wang, a Chinese American boy, encounters insecurity in *American Born Chinese*. When he is new to the class, the teacher introduces him as Chinese, obscuring his American identity. His insecurity is evident in his facial expression. Compared to the teacher's smile, Jin Wang squints his eyes without smiling or looking at his classmates. The teacher's stereotyped assumptions about the character's cultural identity membership influence his identity insecurity.

**Table 3.** *In this scene, the girl feels identity insecurity due to her stigmatized group identity representation. They Called Us Enemy (Takei et al., 2019, p. 21)*

| Page | Written Transcription | Visual Transcription | Visual Analysis | Assumption Analysis | Tag |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **21** | "The mayor of Los Angeles testified that 'They are Japanese and nothing else... Regardless of how many generations may have been born in America" (Takei et al., 2019, p. 21). | The little girl looks at the label "No Japs" on the window sadly while white Americans look at the girl and her mom contemptuously and angrily. | Others glare at the girl and her mom. The girl's innocent eye looks in sharp contrast with the squint. Also, the label "No Japs" in large font is standing out. | The group membership identity is stigmatized. They are experiencing identity negotiation as a whole group. | Identity insecurity; stigmatized group identity |

**Table 4.** *In this scene, Jin Wang experiences identity insecurity in the communication with his teacher. American Born Chinese (Yang, 2006, p. 30)*

| Page | Written Transcription | Visual Transcription | Visual Analysis | Assumption Analysis | Tag |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **30** | "He and his family recently moved to our neighborhood all the way from China" "San Francisco" "San Francisco" (Yang, 2006, p. 30) | Jin Wang closes his eyes as he corrects the teacher's pronunciation of his name and squints while his teacher introduces his hometown as China. The teacher smiles all the time. | The contrast between the teacher's and Jin Wang's facial expressions highlights Jin Wang's experience of repeatedly facing similar situations without the power to change them, while the teacher's smile suggests her unawareness of his diverse cultural identity. | In Assumption 1, the identity is formed through communication. Jin Wang constructs his understanding of his group membership identities based on the interactions with the teacher. | Identity insecurity |

## *"Satisfactory" Identity Negotiation in the Identity Transformation*

According to Assumption 7 in INT, individuals tend to experience identity transformation once they have identity inconsistency in a new or unfamiliar cultural environment (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 5). In

these intercultural contexts, some characters aim to be white presenting through their transformation or to form a community while adapting to new contexts. For example, Malaka wants to be more like "them" (white students) (Gharib, 2019, p. 96); Jin Wang changes his hair color and gives himself a new, Americanized name- Danny (Yang, 2006, p. 198); Wei-Chen tries to accustom himself to American culture about romance (Yang, 2006, p. 89); Marji starts to explore her Iranian girl identity in Austria (Satrapi, 2007, p. 182); Syrian refugees shout, "Europe is life, Europe is love!"(Brown, 2018, p. 62) to demonstrate their desire to live there; and, Japanese-Americans form a community among themselves (Takei et al., 2019, p. 76).

In intercultural communication, Ting-Toomey (1999) argued that "satisfactory identity negotiation outcomes include the feeling of being understood, respected and supported" (p. 41), and she highlighted that "satisfactory" depends on the willingness to interact with dissimilar others. In the graphic novels we studied, though characters undergo identity insecurity and experience identity transformation several times, they all have achieved "satisfactory" identity negotiation. Table 5 provides an example of successful identity negotiation in graphic novels. Set against a bilingual background, where the café sign is displayed in both English ("café") and Chinese ("餐厅"), Jin Wang and Wei-Chen's silent communications, captured through their facial expressions and body language, reflect a joyful connection. This interaction symbolizes how both characters embrace their multifaceted identities and find a connection in their shared experience.

All characters in our data achieve "satisfactory" identity negotiation by being able to adopt various identities at will. However, as we previously argued, identity negotiation is a non-linear process situated in a transitory liminal space, where characters constantly transgress the boundaries, engaging fluidly with their multiple and evolving identities. For example, though Malaka draws the chart of rules she feels she is expected to follow, she speaks English in Egypt while speaking Tagalog at school in America. And for Takei, though the novel acknowledges American democracy as valued, a sign of "satisfactory" identity negotiation, Takei depicts that a similar problem related to a new group of immigrants begins to resurface at the end of the story. The "satisfactory" identity negotiation could be repositioned as the start of another negotiation for the contemporary group.

**Table 5.** *In the scene, both Jin Wang and Wei-Chen achieve "satisfactory" identity negotiation. American Born Chinese (Yang, 2006, p. 233)*

| Page | Written Transcription | Visual Transcription | Visual Analysis | Assumption Analysis | Tag |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **233** | No written text on this page | At last, Jin Wang and Wei-Chen talk happily in the bakery café. | The café is pictured both in Chinese and English. Though Jin Wang and Wei-Chen are sitting in the opposite direction, they are facing each other and laughing together, which symbolizes the connection in identity negotiations. Though there is tension and opposition, there is always a connection. | Jin Wang and Wei-Chen are having competent identity negotiation. | Competent identity negotiation |

## Making Identities Visible: Multimodality Represents Characters' Identity Negotiation

Kress (2004) noted that words are relatively vague, but, by contrast, images are full and 'plain' with meaning (p. 112). By employing visual tools in our research, we found that multimodality embedded

through the combination of images and written languages contributes to representing characters' invisible identities.

### *"Faces" Tell Their Stories*

McCloud (1993) explained that the abstract faces depicted in graphic novels allow readers to picture themselves because "the more cartoony a face is, the more people it could be said to describe" (p. 31), and this better allows readers to imagine themselves as the cartoon character (as opposed to hyper-realistic illustrations which cannot be mistaken for anyone else). Among six intercultural graphic novels, five are depicted in a cartoony style that aims to allow readers to resonate with the characters. McCloud (1993) also argued that "cartooning isn't just a way of drawing, it's a way of seeing!" (p. 31). There is an exception to cartoonish presentations in one of the books in our data, *The Arrival.* All the faces depicted are realistic (p. 1), which we argue is to "force" readers to see an Other through a window rather than to picture themselves in a "mirror" (Bishop, 1990).

Characters' multiple identities are also illustrated in the various techniques used to portray their faces. For example, in *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei et al., 2019), people's faces are clearly illustrated (p. 76). Though Japanese Americans are portrayed in ill-treated conditions in camps, and they suffer from identity insecurity due to their stigmatized and hostile contexts, they choose to form a community within the camp to have identity inclusion and identity transformation. By facing readers directly, their entire identities are visible to readers, along with hostile biases towards them. In contrast, people are always depicted as faceless in *The Unwanted: Stories of the Syrian Refugees (*Brown, 2018). For example, in Table 6, powerless people in the boat are faceless and floating in the compelling water. Syrian refugees, depicted as faceless people, suffer identity insecurity about their cultural and national identities, which are hidden in the night and water. But at the end of the story, when they arrive in America, and their identities are acknowledged, their faces shift to be depicted clearly. Not only does the shift from being faceless to having faces visually indicate their immigration journey but according to McCloud's principles, the parts of the book in which the characters are faceless allow readers to imagine themselves vicariously in place of the characters.

**Table 6.** *Refugees' struggle with identity insecurity is depicted in the faceless portrait. The Unwanted: Stories of the Syrian Refugees (Brown, 2018, p. 25)*

| Page | Written Transcription | Visual Transcription | Visual Analysis | Assumption Analysis | Tag |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **25** | "Later he joins seventy others and is taken to a small boat that sneaks them into nearby Greece" (Brown, 2018, p. 25). | No faces can be recognized from the boat. Only a small boat is presented against the background, the immersive water. | Principle 8 focuses on the size of objects. The tiny boat that carries over seventy refugees is floating against an overwhelming large background. Faceless people are immersed in powerful water. | Assumptions 2 and 3 assert that individuals experience emotional security regarding their identity in culturally familiar environments. Refugees are sailing to a new world to them, symbolizing insecurity, unpredictability, and exclusion. | Identity insecurity (tension between personal and group identities) |

### *Colors Distinguish Identities*

As McCloud (1993) noted, "when used well, color in comics can—like comics itself—amount to far more than the sum of its parts" (p. 192). In our research, we examined the effect of multimodality on interpretations of identities and found that colors play a crucial part in representing identity negotiation.

Texts are colored to show the characters' various identities. Some colors are varied in portrayals of skin, hair, objects, and backgrounds. For example, in *I Was Their American Dream* (Gharib, 2019), Makala's and her community's skin color is pink, while white groups are colored white. But in *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006), though characters share similar skin tones, they are differentiated by their hair colors. The colors of hair vary depending on their different identities. Most of Jin Wang's hair is black, but the middle is white, which divides the black hair into two parts (p. 38). His black-and-white hair color symbolizes his in-between American and Chinese identities, and his hair color change reflects the challenges he faces in his interpersonal relationship. Initially, Jin Wang regards Wei-Chen, a Taiwanese boy, as his friend. However, when he struggles with challenges in navigating their relationship, Jin Wang experiences identity insecurity related to his dual identities. Following an argument with Wei-Chen, Jin undergoes an identity transformation as seen in Table 7. He has a preference toward American culture, seeks to adopt more features of being white, and is depicted changing his hair from black to blonde.

**Table 7**. *In this scene, Jin Wang decides to change his hair from black to blonde. American Born Chinese (Yang, 2006, p. 194)*

| Page | Written Transcription | Visual Transcription | Visual Analysis | Assumption Analysis | Tag |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **194** | Now what would you like to become? Click, Clack, … 變 | When the Chinese herbalist's wife asks Jin Wang what he wishes to become, he changes his hair color from black to blonde. | The traditional Chinese script 變 is depicted as prominently as the characters' depiction, aligning with Jin Wang's transformation process. | According to Assumption 7, Jin Wang experiences an identity change in a new or unfamiliar cultural environment. | Identity transformation |

In *The Unwanted: Stories of the Syrian Refugees* (Brown, 2018), most colors are dark, such as grey and blue; while red, yellow, and orange are used sparingly. Red is used to depict a bomb explosion (p. 24), representing danger and blood- a sign of the characters' identity insecurity in an unfamiliar environment. However, white or light colors create a feeling of safety and warmth (Bang, 2016). So red is also depicted in the illustrations of refugees using bonfires to warm themselves (Brown, 2018, p. 76), an apple given by a policeman (Brown, 2018, p. 87), the American flag (Brown, 2018, p. 89), and of the clothing belonged to a kind woman who donates it to a child (Brown, 2018, p. 45).

In these stories, we noticed that elements in pictures, including facial expressions and colors, distinguish their identity struggles and help to tell immigrant-adjacent stories. Jin Wang's in-between colored hair, Japanese Americans' firm eye contact, and red bombs compared with the red flag, without textual explanation, are all examples of how multimodal features reveal characters' invisible identities, which are hidden in the boundaries between words and images, constituting the liminal spaces which are created through multimodality.

## Discussion

Drawing from INT and Multimodality, we conducted a critical content analysis to examine multimodal texts- namely, six intercultural graphic novels- to explore the characters' identity negotiation process. Our study revealed that characters undergo interactive identity negotiation processes encompassing identity insecurity, identity inclusion, identity transformation, and "satisfactory" identity negotiation. Also, we noticed that multimodality, including languages, how faces are portrayed, and how colors are used, all contribute to representing the identity negotiation processes. Based on these findings, we further discuss the following implications for further study as well as the limitations of this research.

### Intersectionality

Though our study mainly focused on ethnic identity representation, we found that some characters experience identity negotiation not only in ethnicity but also in gender. For example, Marji goes through a complex gender identity negotiation process when she first arrives in Austria. A sharp contrast emerges between Marji's and her Austrian friend Lucy's perspectives on women's bodies. Marji is initially shocked when she sees her female friend greeting people with kisses, focusing on her appearance, and using makeup. Confronted with her insecurities as an Iranian girl with limited sex education, Marji gradually begins to notice and appreciate her own body and femininity (see Table 8). Jin Wang, Wei-Chen, and Malaka also explore their gender identity through romantic relationships. Though Takei does not explore gender too much within the plot of his story, he reveals at the end of the book that he belongs to the LGBTQ community. Crenshaw (2013) proposed the theory of intersectionality to remind us of overlapping identities and how to embrace the complexities of compoundedness, especially while considering marginalized groups. For further study, we would like to explore the intersectionality of multiple identities since identity negotiation is a complex and interactional process that engages multiple identities, such as ethnicity, gender, religion, etc. Utilizing feminist theory, Queer theory, and additional critical theories, we might continue exploring the dynamics of power in the representation of intersectionality among characters' gender and sexuality intertwined with ethnic identities as well as other frequently marginalized identities.

**Table 8**. *In this scene, Marji observes her body.*
*The Complete Persepolis (Satrapi, 2007, p. 182)*

| Page | Written Transcription | Visual Transcription | Visual Analysis | Assumption Analysis | Tag |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **182** | I had a big behind too, and I wasn't even taking contraceptives. | Marji looks at her hip. | Compared to the black background, Marji's body is highlighted. She turns her head to observe her back and hip. | When Marji feels insecure about her identity as an Iranian girl in Austria, she becomes more aware of and appreciative of her feminine body. | Identity transformation |

### Translingualism

In our data analysis, we found that mixed languages are depicted to represent characters' multiple identities. For example, in the description of the Monkey King in *American Born Chinese*, traditional Chinese scripts mix with English, such as "Giant, 大" (Yang, 2006, p. 58). In *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei et al., 2019), code-meshing between English and Japanese is also prevalent. For example,

George's father talks with his mom in Japanese, Shikata Ga Nai [It can't be helped] (p. 67). In *I Was Their American Dream (*Gharib, 2019), Tagalog, Arabic, and English are code-meshed with an English translation or explanation with asterisk reminders such as "Yuck! Cold Siopao*for lunch! *Pork buns" (p. 39).

Mixed languages employed in these intercultural graphic novels aim to represent characters' and even authors' identities and to have their voices acknowledged by the Other. Like with Ray Gwyn Smith's quote, "[w]ho is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?" (as cited in Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 53), languages cannot be divorced from identities. "Voice is not an extra for communication. It is everything in communication" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 80). Translingual phenomena in these intercultural graphic novels contribute to a liminal space that provides readers and characters with a versatile method for negotiating the meanings. The interplay of visual modes and written languages further enhances this space, allowing readers to negotiate meanings fluidly. Anzaldúa urged us to learn to dwell in liminalities (Tuana & Scott, 2020, p. 125), and we argue that, through these intercultural graphic novels, all readers could construct their interpretative meanings in a similar in-between space.

## Multilingual Education

Each reader is actively involved in the transaction with texts and makes sense of them based on their past experiences and specific contexts. Multilingual students may experience tensions between personal and socio-cultural identities in intercultural contexts, and they may struggle with the process of identity negotiation. Our findings indicate that characters are undergoing identity negotiation processes in these intercultural graphic novels, which can be employed in the classroom as accessible reading resources for multilingual students to reflect on their identity negotiation process and to help them articulate alternative stories.

Also, since multimodality, including written languages and visual representations, can be combined to facilitate the meaning-making around identity negotiation, we further argue that these intercultural graphic novels are valuable tools for teachers in multilingual education. Teachers could employ strategies unveiled from our research findings to help students tell their own stories in their response to the stories of the characters featured in the texts. For example, multimodality and translingualism could be employed to help multilingual students better articulate their voices and showcase the liminal spaces of their intercultural identities. Teachers can use graphic novels to value students' full repertoires and voices in this dynamic, co-constructed, and multimodal liminal space.

## Limitations

At this time, much of our focus has been put on graphic novels themselves. We acknowledge that a lack of students' responses to these graphic novels is one limitation of our study. However, this study can be conducive to further research on multilingual education which explores students' identity negotiation experiences as readers of graphic novels and provides liminal spaces for multilingual students who are negotiating multiple identities. Additionally, because we aimed to unpack the characters' negotiation process, it is a limitation that we did not include contextual information about the authors (biographies, interviews, etc.) of the graphic novels, though we acknowledge that authors' cultural and ethnic identities influence the writing of their books. However, this study is a foundational step. We plan to build upon it in a future study to consider how authors negotiate their identities in the liminal spaces they created by extending the analysis to the authors' backgrounds, and we look forward to engaging in a follow-up study with multilingual students to examine whether and how their

experiences with intercultural characters negotiating identity tensions in graphic novels reflect their own identity negotiation processes.

## Conclusion

Historically and currently, without equal access to a high quality of education and even suffering from microaggressions and stereotypes, historically underrepresented student identities related to cultures, languages, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations are marginalized and erased, and their stories are silenced and regarded as Other by dominant and normative identities. As educators and researchers with experiences related to students who navigated multiple identities related to cultures, languages, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations, we endeavored to provide a space to reveal their underrepresented stories, and our study demonstrated that intercultural graphic novels can serve as part of an emergent and transformative liminal space to help them narrate their experiences and navigate multiple identities.

Therefore, as a first step in applying graphic novel interpretation in multilingual education, our work explored the identity negotiation narratives in characters' immigration-adjacent stories. Through the framework of identity negotiation theory and multimodality, we conducted a critical content analysis of six graphic novels, and we found that though characters are encountering an identity negotiation process, containing identity inclusion, transformation and competent negotiation, the process is a non-linear and emergent liminal space. Characters are navigating in the in-between status. Also, multiple modes contribute to the meaning construction in revealing characters' stories and surfacing their identities. This study encourages teachers to utilize graphic novels as a tool to embrace students' voices and invite students to draw from the reading of intercultural graphic novels as mentor texts and models for narrating, authoring, and sharing their stories and identity-negotiation journeys.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interests were reported by the authors.

## References

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/la frontera: The new mestiza.* Aunt Lute Books.

Bang, M. (2016). *Picture This: How Pictures Work*. Chronicle Books.

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom,* 6(3), ix-xi. https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, D. (2018). *The unwanted: Stories of the Syrian refugees*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Brozo, W. G., Moorman, G., & Meyer, C. (2014). *Wham! Teaching with graphic novels across the curriculum*. Teachers College Press.

Canagarajah, A. S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. Routledge.

Chun, C. W. (2009). Critical literacies and graphic novels for English-language learners: Teaching *Maus*. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(2), 144–153. https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.53.2.5

Chute, H. (2008). Comics as literature? Reading graphic narrative. *Pmla*, *123*(2), 452-465.

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2013). "Multiliteracies": New literacies, new learning. In *Framing languages and literacies* (pp. 115-145). Routledge. https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=818655a077f7ad921d496bfeea6dcb8dad97120f

Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (1993). Through the lens of a critical friend. *Educational Leadership, 51*(2), 49-51.https://ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/through-lens-critical-friend/docview/224848975/se-2

Craft, J. (2019). *New kid*. HarperCollins.

Crenshaw, K. (2013). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. In *Feminist legal theories* (pp. 23-51). Routledge. https://philpapers.org/archive/CREDTI.pdf?ncid=txtlnkusaolp00000603

Danzak, R. L. (2011). Defining identities through multiliteracies: EL teens narrate their immigration experiences as graphic stories. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *55*(3), 187-196. https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/JAAL.00024

Gharib, M. (2019). *I was their American dream*. Clarkson Potter.

Ghiso, M. P., & Low, D. E. (2013). Students using multimodal literacies to surface micronarratives of United States immigration. *Literacy*, *47*(1), 26-34. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4369.2012.00678.x

Griffith, J. J. (2019). Visual mentor texts: Teaching middle school writers with graphic novels. *Voices From the Middle, 26*(4), 64-66.

Griffith, J. J. (2021). Visual storytelling and empathy: An interview with graphic novelist and voices from the middle cover artist Sophie Escabasse. *Voices From the Middle*, 29(1), 10-13.

Griffith, J. J. (2022). Embracing identity through visual storytelling: A conversation with graphic novelist and voices from the middle cover artist Jamar Nicholas. *Voices From the Middle, 30*(1), 11-13.

Helsel, P. B. (2018). Comics and in-between kids: Immigration-themed graphic novels as a resource for second-generation adolescents. *Pastoral Psychology*, *67*(2), 125–139. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-017-0769-x

Jacobs, K. E. B. (2016). The (untold) drama of the turning page: The role of page breaks in understanding picture books. *Children's Literature in Education*, *47*, 357-373. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10583-016-9282-6

Jewitt, C. (2005). Multimodality,"reading", and "writing" for the 21st century. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, *26*(3), 315-331. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300500200011

Kelly, L. B., & Ascuitto, S. (2022). Welcoming migration stories and silence in the English classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *66*(1), 40-45. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1237

Kress, G. (2004). Reading images: Multimodality, representation and new media. *Information Design Journal*, 12(2), 110–119. https://doi.org/10.1075/idjdd.12.2.03kre

Kress, G. (2009). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.

Kress, G., & Selander, S. (2012). Multimodal design, learning and cultures of recognition. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 15(4), 265–268. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.12.003

Krippendorff, K. (2003). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Sage.

Land, R., Rattray, J., & Vivian, P. (2014). Learning in the liminal space: A semiotic approach to threshold concepts. *Higher education*, *67*, 199-217. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9705-x

Low, D. E. (2012). "Spaces invested with content": Crossing the 'gaps' in comics with readers in schools. *Children's literature in education*, *43*, 368-385. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10583-012-9172-5

Low, D. E. (2017). Not to be "destoried": How an academically marginalized student employs comics and multimodal authorship to claim a counter-identity. *Ubiquity: The Journal of Literature, Literacy, and the Arts*, *4*(2), 6-56. https://ed-ubiquity.gsu.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Low_4-2.pdf

MacDonald, H. (2013). How graphic novels became the hottest section in the library. *Publishers Weekly*, 260(18), 20-25.

McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. Harper.

Meek, M. (1982). What counts as evidence in theories of children's literature? *Theory into Practice*, 21 (4), 284-292. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405848209543020

Meyer, J. H., & Land, R. (2005). Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (2): Epistemological considerations and a conceptual framework for teaching and learning. *Higher education*, *49*, 373-388. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-6779-5

Mitchell, K. (2013). Race, difference, meritocracy, and English: Majoritarian stories in the education of secondary multilingual learners. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *16*(3), 339-364. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2011.645569

Pollock, M. (2004). Race bending: 'Mixed' youth practicing strategic racialization in California. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *35*(1), 30-52. https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2004.35.1.30

Rodríguez-Astacio, R. M., & Low, D. E. (2023). Using superhero graphic novels to foreground transitions in our teaching with upper elementary and Middle-Grade readers. *The Reading Teacher*, *76*(5), 640-645. https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2189

Sanders, S. (2021). Gutter futures. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *18*(3), 315-316. https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2021.1954215

Satrapi, M. (2007). *The complete Persepolis*. Pantheon Books.

Schwarz, G. E. (2002). Graphic novels for multiple literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 46(3), 262–265. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40017133

Schwarz, G., & Crenshaw, C. (2011). Old media, new media: The graphic novel as bildungsroman. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 3(1), 13. https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=jmle

Serafini, F. (2010). Reading multimodal texts: Perceptual, structural and ideological perspectives. *Children's Literature in Education*, 41(2), 85–104. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-010-9100-5

Short, K. G. (2017). Critical content analysis as a research methodology. In H. Johnson, J. Mathis, & K. G. Short (Eds.), *Critical content analysis of children's and young adult literature: Reframing perspective* (pp.1-15). Routledge.

Short, K. G. (2019). Critical content analysis of visual images. In H. Johnson, J. Mathis, & K. G. Short (Eds.), *Critical content analysis of visual images in books for young people: Reading images* (pp.3–22). Routledge.

Sipe, L. R., & Brightman, A. E. (2009). Young children's interpretations of page breaks in contemporary picture storybooks. *Journal of Literary Research*, 41, 68–103. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10862960802695214

Sousanis, N. (2015). *Unflattening*. Harvard University Press.

Spiegelman, A. (1986). *Maus: A survivor's tale*. Pantheon Books.

Takei, G., Eisinger, J., & Scott, S. (2019). *They called us enemy*. IDW Publishing.

Tan, S. (2007). *The arrival*. Arthur A. Levine Books.

Tenenbaum, H. R., & Ruck, M. D. (2007). Are teachers' expectations different for racial minority than for European American students? A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *99*(2), 253. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.2.253

Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating across cultures*. Guilford Press.
Ting-Toomey, S. (2005). Identity negotiation theory: Crossing cultural boundaries. In W.B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 211–233). Sage.
Ting-Toomey, S. (2015). Identity negotiation theory. In J. Bennett (Ed.), *Sage encyclopedia of intercultural competence* (pp. 418-422). Sage.
Tuana, N., & Scott, C. E. (2020). *Beyond philosophy: Nietzsche, Foucault, Anzaldúa*. Indiana University Press.
Turner, V. (1967). *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Cornell University Press.
Weiner, S., & Eisner, W. (2012). *Faster than a speeding bullet: The rise of the graphic novel*. NBM Publishing.
Yang, G. L. (2006). *American born Chinese*. First Second.

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025, pp. 24-41**
**DOI 10.14434/ijlcle.v5i.36357**

# Culturally Sustaining Literacy Pedagogies within an Anti-CRT Climate: A Mediated Discourse Analysis

Kelsey Deklerk

## Abstract

This paper uses a mediated discourse analysis when viewing the action of a student after their involvement in a culturally sustaining pedagogical approach to literacy instruction. The instruction took place in a time where the political push was an anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) narrative that claimed these lessons were aimed for "indoctrination". However, this student wrote a letter to the District Board of Education in response to the anti-CRT rhetoric, asking the Board of Education to continue to allow lessons involving culture to be allowed at their school. This mediated action is analyzed for the discourses, historical bodies, and interactions that helped to shape the action. The findings emphasize the need for educational practices to integrate culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017) and address power dynamics to create more equitable and inclusive learning environments. Recognizing and addressing the influence of historical bodies and discourses (Gee, 1990) can help educators and policymakers develop strategies that better support diverse student populations and challenge systemic inequalities. Future research should investigate how historical bodies, discourses, and power dynamics within interactions shape educational experiences across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Additionally, studies should explore effective strategies for integrating mediated discourse analysis findings into teacher training and policy development to enhance educational equity and inclusivity.

**Keywords:** Mediated Discourse Analysis, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, Culturally Inclusive

**Contact:** Kelsey Deklerk, Salt Lake Community College
E-mail: kelsey.deklerk@slcc.edu

## Introduction

The 2020-2021 school year was one like no other. If students were in person, they began their year wearing masks, many coming from tumultuous experiences from the onset of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic earlier that year. While on break from in-person learning at the end of the previous school year, Americans, including many school-aged children, witnessed the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent civil right movement take shape. Schools, community organizations, and individuals alike were questioning how we got to this point and how we could work to make things better. But like any civil rights movement in history (see for example Finley, 2003), the countermovement started to become apparent within the school year as well.

The push for civil rights from within, and on behalf of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and their communities around the nation led to an evaluation of education practices, curriculum and teaching strategies. Teachers, schools, and communities alike looked for ways to improve the quality and outcomes of the education system for those outside of the dominant culture and language. Likewise, when it seemed like these efforts would result in an inspection of the education system, or unjust practices in place, opposition labeled many of these efforts as racist and divisive. Critical Race Theory (CRT) became the trigger word of divisive indoctrination under which all other inclusive pedagogies were labeled (Green, 2022) and continue to be undermined. In a time when many were asking for a reevaluation of teaching practices, an opposition formed, aiming for most of its focus on classroom inclusive, equity pedagogies aimed to avert disparities in educational outcomes between white and BIPOC students. In other words, the opposition was aimed at pedagogies and teaching approaches that were working to support the inclusion of cultures and languages outside of those of dominant European American culture. When equity pedagogies were noticed they were often labeled as CRT and divisive, saying these approaches were putting blame on white students, or making white students feel guilty for their privilege (see legislation such as the Stop CRT Act, 2021).

## Theoretical Framework

### Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Asset-based approaches to education emphasize the strengths, skills, and cultural knowledge that students bring to the classroom, rather than focusing on perceived deficiencies or gaps (Carter & Welner, 2013). This educational philosophy views students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and community experiences as valuable resources that can enhance learning. Rather than adopting a deficit perspective that sees students from marginalized communities as lacking, asset-based approaches recognize and build upon the rich cultural capital that all students possess (Carter & Welner, 2013). By leveraging the assets that students already have, educators can create more inclusive, responsive, and effective learning environments that affirm and sustain students' identities and experiences (Moll et al., 1992).

Culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) goes further in asking for explicitly multicultural and multilingual student academic outcomes (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014; Paris, 2016). CSP builds on previous asset pedagogies which recognize the cultures and languages of students as valuable and important (Ladson-Billings, 1995, see also Gay, 2018; González et al., 2009). CSP asks for teachers to not only respond to student's cultures and languages (Gay 2018), or for them to be viewed as relevant to their education (Ladson-Billings, 1995) but for the languages and cultures of our students to be sustained and to be built upon.

As defined by Paris and Alim (2017), culturally sustaining pedagogies challenge the notion of assimilation and instead promote the idea that schools should be sites where students' cultural and

linguistic practices are maintained, expanded, and celebrated. These pedagogies are rooted in the understanding that students' cultural backgrounds are not deficits to be remedied but assets to be leveraged in the learning process. By fostering an educational environment that sustains and values diverse cultural practices, culturally sustaining pedagogies aim to create more equitable and inclusive educational experiences (Paris & Alim, 2017).

**Discourses and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies**

Discourses refer to the various ways in which people communicate, think, and understand their experiences in the world (Gee, 1990; 1999; 2018). According to Gee (1990), discourse is not just a way of speaking, but a way of being in the world that encompasses language, culture, and social practices. He argues that we all participate in different discourses, or social languages that shape our thinking, our actions, and our understanding of the world around us. Gee (1999) analyzed the ways in which discourse shapes and is shaped by social practices, cultures, and power.

Gee (1999) defines discourse as a "social language" that is made up of a set of practices and ways of thinking that are specific to a particular group or community. These practices and ways of thinking are often unconscious and implicit, but they shape the way we understand and interact with the world. Different discourses are associated with different forms of social power, and that the ability to navigate and participate in different discourses can give individuals greater access to social power and opportunities (Gee, 1999; 2004). Much in the same way that different cultures and languages are associated with different access to power (Alim & Paris, 2017). Learning and understanding the dominant language, or discourse can support student's access to a lifetime of growth (Alim & Paris, 2017; Gee, 1999; 2004).

When researching culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017), discourses become crucial because they help us understand how language and cultural practices are intertwined in educational settings. Culturally sustaining pedagogies aim to maintain and develop the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices of students, particularly those from marginalized communities (Paris & Alim, 2014). By focusing on discourses, researchers can explore how educational practices either support or undermine the cultural identities of students.

Discourses shape and reflect power relations in society (Gee, 1990). They play a key role in defining whose knowledge, language, and culture are valued in educational settings. Culturally sustaining pedagogies then challenge dominant discourses that marginalize certain groups (Alim & Paris, 2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogies emphasize the importance of students' home languages and cultural practices (Paris, 2016). Discourses provide a framework for understanding how language is used to either include or exclude students based on their cultural backgrounds (Gee, 1999). Understanding the discourses present in educational settings helps educators create environments that validate and sustain students' cultural and linguistic practices. Examining discourses allows researchers and educators to critically reflect on the underlying assumptions and ideologies that shape educational practices. This reflection is essential for developing pedagogies that are truly culturally sustaining, as it requires challenging and changing the discourses that perpetuate inequities in education. By critically analyzing these discourses, researchers and educators can work toward creating more equitable and affirming educational practices for all students.

**Research Approach/Role**

During this school year, I engaged in an active, collaborative role with classroom teachers across an urban school district, focusing on the integration of culturally sustaining pedagogies into literacy instruction. Moreover, my collaboration with teachers extended beyond classroom instruction. I

facilitated workshops and provided ongoing support to help educators around the district to critically examine their existing teaching practices, curricula, and materials. Together, we explored ways to make these elements more inclusive, ensuring that they reflected the diverse cultural narratives and languages of the student population. This involved not only incorporating texts and materials that resonated with students' lived experiences but also fostering classroom environments where students felt empowered to share and celebrate their cultural identities.

Throughout the school year, I served as a resource and advocate for culturally sustaining pedagogies, helping teachers to reframe their approach to literacy instruction in ways that validated and built upon the cultural knowledge and linguistic strengths that students bring to the classroom. This work was guided by the understanding that culturally sustaining pedagogies are not merely add-ons but are essential components of an equitable and effective educational practice. By partnering with teachers in this endeavor, we collectively sought to create learning spaces where all students could see themselves reflected in the curriculum and feel valued for their unique cultural contributions.

**Research Participants/Setting**

For the purposes of this paper, I focus on a single sixth grade elementary classroom, and actions that occurred during the 2020-2021 school year. The classroom was located within one of the more diverse schools within the district I was working in, though the population in the region is much less diverse than other areas. This school was one of the Title I schools located in this suburban city. 54% of students at the time were receiving free or reduced lunch. There was an English Learner (EL) population of 11% within the school, as well as a homeless student population of 14%. The overall student body at the school was also characterized by racial diversity, with 49% of students identifying as racial minorities. The classroom in focus consisted of 18 sixth-grade students, whose demographic composition closely mirrored that of the larger school population. This setting provided a rich context for exploring the implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogies, given the diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds of the students. The classroom environment, with its varied student needs and identities, served as an ideal microcosm for examining how culturally sustaining pedagogies can be effectively integrated into literacy instruction to create an inclusive and affirming educational experience. Through this focused case study, insights were gained into how these pedagogical approaches could address the unique challenges and opportunities present in such a diverse learning environment. But here, I take a closer look at how this setting, the participants and the environment, both inside and outside of the classroom, influenced the actions of a student during the study.

I collected data within the classroom through multiple perspectives. Methods included observations and conversations, lessons conducted by the teacher or me, surveys, interviews, and student work. These different sources of data were used as a reflection piece to guide instruction with the classroom teacher. By changing my role during the research, this allowed a space for me to research on a continuum, from the lens of an outsider to that of an insider (Cresswell & Poth, 2018).

To facilitate a smooth entry into the classroom and connect with the students, I conducted an initial visit to introduce myself, explain the research I was undertaking, and outline the research process. During this visit, I engaged in a brief conversation to learn more about the students. This served as a foundational step in building relationships, which would support their engagement in future activities and discussions when I returned. I also collected data from social media and current public sources as I addressed the larger conversations happening in the community around culture in the classroom.

For the purposes here, I focus on a single piece of data collected in the classroom, that of a letter written by a student. Additional data has been extracted from social media posts outside of the classroom to analyze the layers of influence the classroom experienced.

**Research Questions**

In collaboration with the classroom teacher, I conducted research and gathered data on the implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogies. In a period marked by significant national political divides, particularly around inclusive pedagogical practices often mislabeled as Critical Race Theory (CRT), this research seeks to answer the following question:

1. How do external forces beyond the elementary classroom influence the incorporation of culture in an education setting, such as culturally sustaining pedagogies?

**Mediated Discourse Analysis**

In order to examine varying layers of classroom influences, within the classroom and outside of it, I used a mediated discourse analysis (MDA) approach. MDA is a way to study the relationship between discourse and social interactions, focusing on the ways in which discourse shapes our understanding of power relations, social and psychological phenomena (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). "Mediated discourse theory unpacks how bodies, actions, and materials activate raced and classed expectations in discourses that converge within a local place and how these expectations circulate along the currents and undertows of global histories and imagined futures that swirl into and emanate from a given moment." (Wohlwend, 2021, p. 12). Different levels of social, political and cultural expectations set up expectations of what was appropriate within elementary, literacy classrooms (Wohlwend, 2009). This determined how teachers and eventually how children participated in literacy practices in the classroom. In this context, literacy practices eventually became a "contested site where competing discourses overlap and invoke conflicting expectations, creating dilemmas for teachers who want to do what they believe is best for children and fulfill their school's writing targets" (Wohlwend, 2009, p. 341).

Mediated discourse analysis looks at social action and discourse as being impossible to disentangle while also understanding that these connections are "sometimes not at all direct or obvious, and therefore in need of more careful theorization" (Scollon, 2001, p.1). Scollon (2001) exemplifies mediated discourse in the common practice of grabbing a cup of coffee with a friend from a popular, global chain. In this example, one could say that the single action of grabbing a cup of coffee is taking place. On the other hand, Scollon (2001) argues that this can also be viewed as a complex, nested sets of actions taking place like standing in line, ordering, paying, waiting, receiving your order, selecting a place to sit, having a conversation, and cleaning the area or disposing of your cup. Just like action, one can say that the discourse in place is having a conversation with a friend, or that many complex and interconnected discourses are taking place at once. These discourses may include the marketing and branding of the coffee in question, the different language uses and patterns present, and so forth. Wohlwend (2021) draws further on this example by asking how something as ordinary as getting a cup of coffee may "enact core beliefs about belonging and the literacies we use to make sense of actions, materials and spaces" (p. 4).

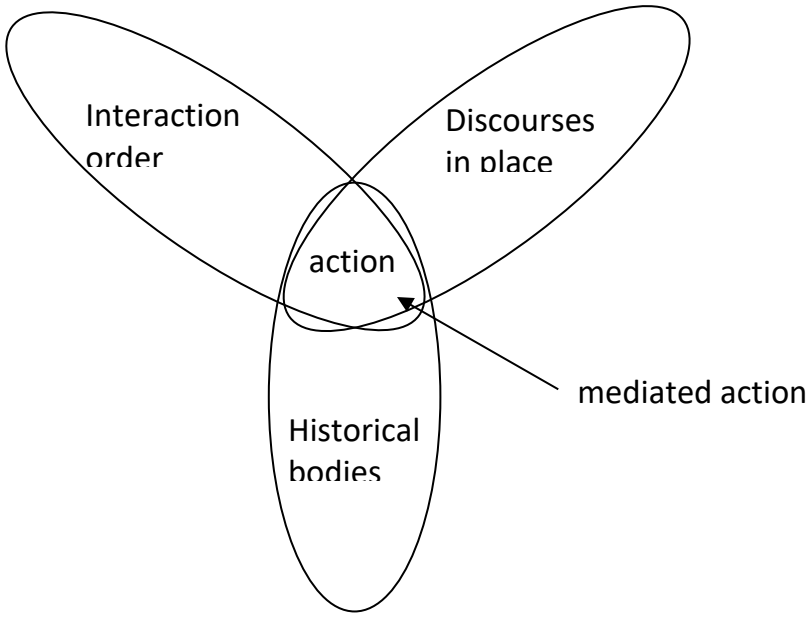
In the classroom, actions may be viewed from the surface, like grabbing a cup of coffee, or as the complex, many, and constant actions taking place. Classroom discourse can be viewed as the single classroom under observation, or from the complex, outside discourses that may also influence the discourse of the classroom and the actions taking place within it. "Mediated discourse analysis is a position which seeks to keep all of this complexity alive in our analyses without presupposing which

actions and which discourses are the relevant ones in any particular case under study" (Scollon, 2001, p. 1). This allows the researcher to uncover some of the inherent issues of power, social practices, and positioning present in everyday classroom practices (Wohlwend, 2021).

With multiple layers of influence and discourses in mind, I used mediated discourse analysis to evaluate all the levels of discourses that were present within the classroom of focus. These discourses could, at times, be visible. Others could be outside discourses with an influence on the classroom. Analyzing the data from the understanding that these multiple discourses influence the classroom setting situates the data within the understanding of a nested design (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The nested design understands that multiple layers of influence exist outside of the classrooms, therefore, mediated discourse analysis takes this into consideration within the data analysis process. Wohlwend (2021) notes that mediated discourse analysis "uniquely equips you to understand how bodies, actions, and global discourses come together" (p, 11). It provides a space to analyze the intersections of discourses, literacy practices, and culture present in the classroom (Wohlwend, 2021), as well as how these practices are situated within overlapping and intersecting social situations (Wohlwend, 2008). It also allows for analysis of micro-actions present within the classroom and how they are linked to macro-discourses (Scollon, 2001).

In order to analyze the data from the classroom, while also having looked at the larger bodies of discourse outside of the classroom, I also sought to understand how an action or moment is shaped and influenced by three components: interaction order, discourses in place, and historical bodies (Scollon, 2001). Interaction order can be understood as being who or with whom the interaction is taking place and for what purpose. This allows a closer examination of social relationships and their convergence in the discourse. The examination of discourses in place allows for an understanding of which discourses are present and even contesting with one another. Finally, the historical bodies of what actions are expected. Historical bodies, being actions that are so often used, often become automatic, including the engrained or learned cultural actions or knowledge. Each component "molds an action through a set of expectations for who should act and how things should be done in a particular place" (Wohlwend 2021, p. 28). Each action can then be viewed as that moment as well as each component's influence on that action. Figure 1 below demonstrates the overlap of these three components on an action, and how this overlap will be viewed and examined. The overlapping has been configured to examine the overlapping systems nested within the classroom.

**Figure 1.** *(Adapted from Figure 2.2 Three Flows that Constitute Mediated Action, Wohlwend, 2021)*




**Mediated Action Within the Data**

To analyze the mediated actions within the data, I focus on a specific moment during the school year that reveals the complex interplay of influences both inside and outside the classroom. This moment stands in stark contrast to similar actions which took place in the community, such as the push for anti-CRT classrooms. However, I argue that the action within the classroom, along with those occurring outside of it, were largely shaped by the same interactions, historical bodies, and discourses. The specific action I have analyzed is that of a student who wrote a letter to the School Board of Education about the research we were conducting and the lessons which took place within their classroom.

**The Letter**

At the end of the year, a few students wrote letters to the District and State board of Education to discuss the lessons in which they had taken part during the school year. This occurred during a period marked by a peak in anti-CRT sentiment within the community. One student in particular wrote:

> Dear Board of Education
>
> I am an 11-year-old girl, mixed and have loved being more open to culture. In Ms. D's class we were able to talk about ourselves openly. Although I've been open about my culture before, I've never related to a lot of it. My mom is white yes, but I mostly like involving myself in my dads' culture. Because I grew up surrounded by my Mom's.
>
> Most of this school is white and I've always felt like the odd one out. I look like my Dad and you can't always tell that I'm half white. Our school is diverse and I don't feel like I've been treated differently, but this class has still helped amazingly. Not only has Ms. D's class made me feel less closeted [about my culture] but [my teacher] too. They have always honestly talked with us and have made me realize how different cultures are, and how amazing it is to learn about them. There's not much I would change but may be in the future there could be more activities or programs like this that We could participate in to learn more about us,

Thanks for your time.

The classroom teacher and I worked diligently to keep the anti-CRT narrative out of the classroom and continue lessons as usual. However, after several school board meetings at the district level that were commandeered by large groups of parents with the narrative that we were "indoctrinating" children, the students started to notice some of the rhetoric taking place. In response, they inquired about how they could get involved and how they could share what it was "really like" to participate in the lessons that were being highlighted as examples of indoctrination.

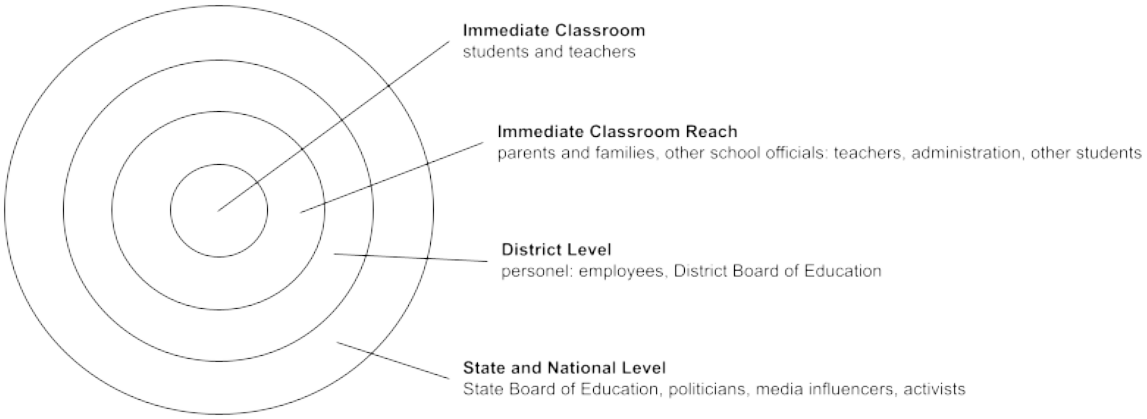
**Mediated Discourse Analysis of the Data**

In analyzing the data, I focus on this single mediated action, arguing that this action was influenced by the same historical bodies, rhetoric, and discourses that were present within the classroom and the broader community. By examining the components of mediated discourse analysis—interaction order, discourses in place, and historical bodies—we can see how these factors shaped the student's decision to write a letter to the school board of education. This action was deeply intertwined with the broader sociopolitical climate and the ongoing debates surrounding culturally sustaining pedagogies (though it was debated along with Critical Race Theory). While this letter represents a positive affirmation of the classroom experience, it was nonetheless shaped by the same external pressures and narratives that fueled opposition to inclusive educational practices or pedagogies.

**Interaction Order**

In the case of this classroom, interactions took place on multiple, varied levels. The most meaningful level of interaction occurred in the immediate classroom. This interaction included the students, the classroom teacher, and at times, myself as a visiting district level teacher. The next layer of influence involved those with immediate classroom contact, though outside of the classroom. This layer included parents and families of those in the immediate classroom, but also other school officials and personnel (teachers or administrators) who also had frequent interactions in the classroom. Next, there was a district level of interaction. This included myself when not an immediate part of the, but it also included my colleagues at the district level. This included personnel like the district level Board of Education as well. Finally, we have a state and national level of interaction. Though this interaction level was the most removed from the classroom, it also had a great influence because of its interaction at all levels as well. The people interacting from a state and national level included the State Board of Education members, politicians, as well as media influencers and activists. These individuals had the ability to greatly influence this classroom through interacting with various levels of influence, like district personnel, parents, families and even the students themselves. See figure 2 for an example of these layers and their level of interaction with the classroom.

**Figure 2**. *(Adapted from Figure 1.1 Classroom Layers of Influence, Deklerk 2022)*




Within these levels of influence, were parameters that influenced the mediated action of the said student. The interaction order dictates who or with whom the interactions are taking place and for what purpose (Wohlwend, 2021). The student wrote a letter after the interactions had taken place in the immediate classroom between the other students, the teacher, and myself as the researcher. Interactions, however, also took place between the parents of this student and others. There were parents in question who were active within the district and contributed to the anti-CRT narrative that lessons involving culture should be removed from the classroom. Arguably, this interaction was also influenced by the state and national levels. Shortly before this mediated action, a new State Board of Education member issued a statement directed to my employment and work in particular. The board member publicly posted on social media saying,

> Warning Parents: The Edgewood School District has Culture & Diversity (indoctrination) Specialists that have begun doing classroom training sessions… If you are not okay with this, write an opt-out form saying you do not consent to your child participating in lessons, programs, activities, trainings or discussions on the topics of: Cultural Proficiency/ Competency/Relevance, Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, Privilege, White Fragility, Intersectionality, Anti-Racism, Systemic Racism, Bias (conscious or unconscious), Critical/ Crucial Conversations (i.e. Critical Race Theory), Racial Justice, Social Justice, Black Lives Matter, 1619, etc., etc.

Here is one example of how Critical Race Theory was used as a "catch all" term for any lessons taking place in the classroom, no matter how loosely tied they were to an actual CRT approach. Shortly after this post, among others, the attitude within the district, the classroom, and among parents started to change. This is when we observed protests at school board meetings, I received threatening emails, all the time while trying to negate large amounts of misinformation on what lessons we were teaching. This course of action demonstrated the influence that the state and national levels had within the classroom, the district and the parents through social media and other avenues.

These same levels of influence impacted students and parents alike. However, their reactions to the interactions varied greatly. For some parents, this resulted in angry emails and phone calls, claiming indoctrination. For the student who wrote the letter, their experience with these interactions differed greatly. This student interacted with the immediate classroom. The experiences at this level influenced the experiences they gained, which prompted them to write the letter. Some of the angry

emails I received were from individuals outside of the classroom who had no interactions with students, the teacher, or myself.

As the student mentioned through their letter, their interactions in their home also differed compared to other students, or community members, based on the racial makeup of their parents and the cultures they embodied inside of their home. This interaction in the home may have influenced their action based on their experiences, beliefs, and culture(s) held in the home. These could have influenced the student's feelings about the lessons and conversations taking place within the classroom. It is also evident that the student was influenced by the anti-CRT rhetoric and the District, State and National levels of influence because they noted some of the protests, board meetings, and other attributes shaping the future of culturally sustaining pedagogies and other inclusive practices in the classroom. Their reaction to these interactions was to support the inclusion of culturally sustaining pedagogies in the classroom and reach back out to the District and State Board of Education to offer their input to what culturally sustaining pedagogies was really like in the classroom. This student recognized the influence happening within the multiple layers, and these layers' impact on the classroom, and took steps to ensure culturally inclusive teaching such as culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017) could continue.

An examination of interaction order allows for an examination of social relationships in and outside of the immediate classroom and their convergence in the discourse within the classroom. Each experience, belief, and interpretation of interactions at each level influenced the ultimate action of this student. The same way that these interactions influenced the parents with opposite reactions. The School Board Member's post, and the student's letter juxtaposed to one another demonstrate the social relationships in and outside of the classroom and how they converge on the classroom and those involved. See table 1 for a summary of the interaction order of the mediated action below.

**Table 1.** *Interaction Order Elements of the Mediated Actions*

| **Interaction Level** | **Mediated Action: Writing a Letter** |
|---|---|
| Immediate Classroom | teacher<br>classmates<br>myself (district employee in the classroom)<br>experiences within interactions influenced action |
| Immediate Classroom Reach | parents and family<br>other students at the school<br>other personnel at the school: administration, teachers, volunteers, etc. |
| District Level | myself (employed at a district level)<br>my colleagues at the district<br>other district personnel: employees, superintendent.<br>District Board of Education and their interactions with parents and board meetings |
| State and National Level | policy makers and politicians<br>The State Board of Education<br>activist: anti-CRT, Black Lives Matter |

**Discourses in Place**

The examination of the discourses in place within interactions allows for an evaluation of which discourses are also present in the classroom (Scallon, 2001). These discourses present can impact events and actions that take place within the classroom (Wohlwend, 2021). In the case of the mediated action, when we observe the various discourses in place, we can pinpoint discourses which may have had an impact on the action.

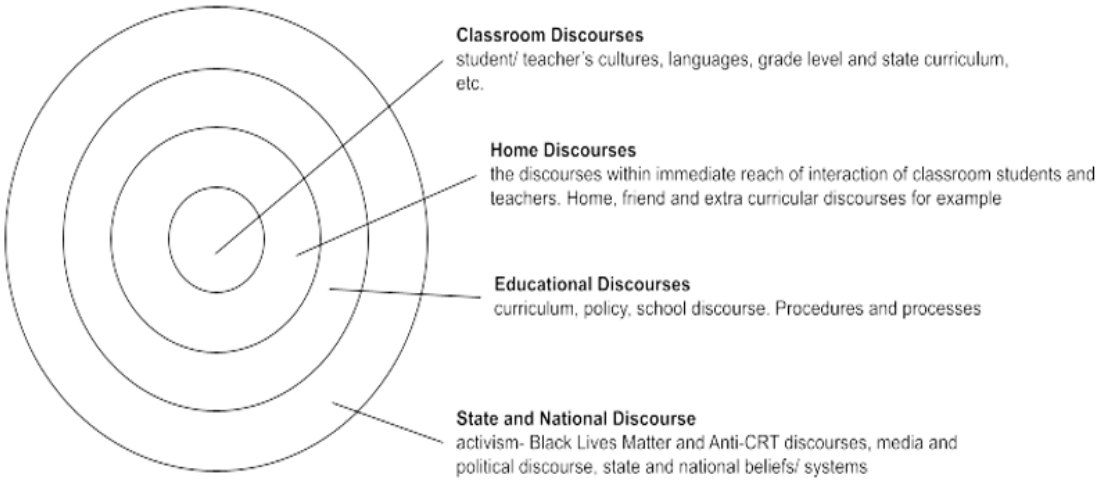
The various discourses in the classroom for instance, can include the various discourses of everyone in the room. This could also include the discourses for students' families or friends who are not in the room. For example, the student who wrote the letter drew on their parent's racial and ethnic backgrounds and the influence these cultures, language, and power relations have on them as they speak of their experience interacting with and learning of culture. These discourses and the interactions within these discourses also shaped the experience and meaning this student gained while engaged in our classroom lessons.

The various discourses surrounding education and the broader educational system are also deeply embedded in the classroom environment. Some of these discourses include facets like the curriculum, but also the discourses involved in the creation of curriculum and lessons, the language expectations, hierarchical power structures, and the roles of individuals employed at the school or district level. These discourses shape and are shaped by perceptions within the classroom. In the student's letter, for example, the mention of the school's racial makeup and the feelings of isolation it could cause reflect how these discourses can influence student experiences at school. The student's reflections in the letter suggest an awareness of how these discourses affected their senses of belonging and engagement within the classroom. The power dynamics and linguistic expectations embedded in these discourses played a significant role in shaping the student's experiences and their subsequent action of writing the letter.

These classroom discourses were also influenced by broader discourses at the state and national levels. For instance, political discourses, such as those surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement, intersected with and influenced the anti-CRT rhetoric prevalent in the community and across the country (Furrey, 2023). These larger political and social discourses shaped, and were shaped by the political landscape, language, and the various layers of discourse that permeated the educational environment through the layers of influence in the interaction order.

The student who wrote the letter was situated within these many layers of discourse, each with its own language, implications, power dynamics, and experiences. The classroom, as a microcosm of these broader societal influences, was subject to the complex interchange of discourses from local, state, and national levels, all of which impacted the student's perception and actions. The classroom is subject to influence nested within the multiple layers of influence that exist outside of the classrooms (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). See Figure 3 for an illustration of the layers of discourse that influenced this class and the student's ultimate decision to write the letter.

**Figure 3**. *(Adapted from Figure 1.1 Classroom Layers of Influence, Deklerk, 2022)*




## Historical Bodies

The final component for analysis within mediated discourse analysis are the historical bodies in place. In the context of historical bodies, mediated discourse analysis looks at how media texts construct representations of historical events and people and how these representations shape our understandings of the past. Historical bodies are actions that are so frequent and expected that they can become ingrained and gradually automatic (Wohlwend, 2021).

Historical bodies play a significant role in shaping media representations of historical events and people. The dominant groups in society, with their access to power and resources, often shape the media's depiction of marginalized groups, which lead to biased and distorted representations (Hall, 1992). This results in a perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and limited perspectives that marginalize certain groups and uphold the status quo. For instance, the media's portrayal of people of color has often been characterized by negative stereotypes, such as criminality, inferiority, and danger, which serve to justify systemic oppression and discrimination. Over the summer of 2020, protests through the Black Lives Matter movement were often portrayed in the same light. These representations have lasting impacts on how people perceive marginalized and dominant groups and reinforce and perpetuate systemic inequalities (Hall, 1992). Thus, it is crucial to examine how historical bodies influence media representation and to challenge these distorted depictions in order to promote more equitable and accurate representations.

Education plays a crucial role in challenging and changing historical bodies. A culturally sustaining approach, which incorporates a diverse range of voices, perspectives, and experiences, and an analysis of societal norms and expectations, can help to challenge dominant narratives and provide alternative viewpoints (Alim & Paris, 2017). These kinds of practices can help to disrupt the automatic and ingrained nature of historical bodies and open up spaces for new and critical understandings of the past. By exposing students to a range of perspectives and narratives, education can promote empathy and understanding. Welcoming students' primary languages and cultures while also providing access to the dominant language and culture, fosters a more nuanced understanding of historical events and people. Culturally sustaining pedagogies actively work to center students' cultures, languages, and perspectives, and can help to disrupt the power dynamics that often shape media representations of the past (Paris & Alim, 2014). This can lead to a more equitable and just society,

where broader histories and cultures are incorporated into the dominant narrative. However, I would argue that because of the dominant discourses that were in place and the historical bodies from the dominant culture in this research study, the lessons that were working to challenge these actions became a battleground of political divides. The removal of access to culturally sustaining or inclusive pedagogies was a common tactic to remove pedagogies that could challenge the historical bodies. This was evident through the introduction of legislation meant to ban "CRT" or any other discussions on racism, sexism, or other systemic inequities (Schwartz, 2024).

Historical bodies and connections exist for the student of focus' action within this research. In this case, the student was asking those in positions of power to uphold the adjusted curriculum. The student was advocating to allow for marginalized voices, representation and critical issues to be allowed within the parameters of education. At the same time, certain politicians, and conversations around historical bodies in place pushed back on the idea that racism, injustices, or even a need for representation existed. Van Diijk (1992) found that though instances and reproduction of racism were prominent in media and society, as was the denial of its existence, especially among elites and those in power. Van Diijk also identified several denial tactics, including the use of disclaimers, euphemisms, excuses for racism, victim blaming, and the reversal of accusations by claiming that those in power are the true victims of racism or discrimination. Additionally, van Dijk found instances of positive self-promotion embedded within negative discourse and discussions about those combating or experiencing racism. This rhetoric was present in the historical bodies experienced by the student in this study as well. These experiences, interpretations, and even denial tactics within the experiences of racism are dramatically influenced by power. This power is also a historical body with an expectation of who has access, and how one behaves with or without said power. When educational systems worked to challenge the historical body and powers, they were often labeled as CRT, and efforts were made to remove these practices.

For the student in this study, it could be argued that the experiences of racism and marginalization led to their letter and their asking for continued support through the curriculum, something outside of the historical norms for their experiences in the classroom. On the other hand, it could be said that the existence of racism, and thereby, the denial of its existence and the denial rhetoric in our society led to an even larger push back by those in power and by some of those within dominant discourses.

The analysis of historical bodies within Mediated Discourse Analysis reveals how deeply entrenched power dynamics and societal norms shape both media representations and individual actions. The student's letter, which advocated for the inclusion of marginalized voices and critical issues in the curriculum, serves as a direct challenge to these ingrained historical bodies. It highlights the critical role education can play in disrupting entrenched norms by offering alternative perspectives and fostering a more inclusive understanding of history.

## Findings

The findings from this research reveal the intricate ways in which actions are shaped by various factors, including historical bodies, power dynamics, and personal interpretations. Each of these elements, as examined through Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA), plays a crucial role in understanding how students navigate educational settings and respond to the discourses and interactions they encounter. Each component of MDA shapes an action through the expectations for how things should be done and who should act a certain way (Wohlwend, 2021).

The first finding highlights how actions are mediated by the complex interplay of historical bodies, discourses, and social interactions. The second focuses on the influence of historical narratives and legacies on students' actions and experiences, particularly in how these narratives frame their understanding of race and power. The third finding delves into the impact of power relations on shaping students' behaviors and responses to educational content. Finally, the fourth finding emphasizes the importance of personal interpretation and experience in shaping actions, showcasing how individual perspectives can lead to varied outcomes in similar educational contexts. Together, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of student actions within educational environments.

The analysis revealed that this student was influenced by historical bodies around race and power relations, as well as by the student's interactions with others. These interactions, although layered and multifaceted, significantly impacted the student's experiences and subsequent action. Though the student was influenced by each of these components, their experiences within these components, as well as the diversity of the experiences, backgrounds, discourses, and interaction led to their ultimate reaction and action.

Historical bodies, which include the legacies of past events and the representation of historical figures in media and educational content, play a crucial role in shaping actions. Understanding how historical events and representations influence individuals helps to interpret the factors shaping actions (Gee, 2014). For instance, historical narratives about race and power create frameworks through which students interpret their own experiences and actions. This influence highlights the importance of examining how historical contexts are represented and their impact on current educational practices. For students like the one in this study, inclusion of personal and cultural histories plays an important role in their experience in the classroom. These helped lead to the student's action of writing a letter.

Power relations also significantly affected the student's action. The historical bodies surrounding race and power, coupled with the prevailing discourses, shaped the student's perceptions and behaviors. These power dynamics are essential for understanding how students navigate and respond to educational content and societal expectations (Thomas & Aslanian, 2018). The student's action was influenced by the expectations established through these discourses and the layers of interaction both inside and outside the classroom. In the case of the letter, there was a level of request for a disruption to normal discourses and access to power to support students from various cultural backgrounds.

Finally, the study suggests that interpretation and personal experiences are pivotal in shaping actions. How individuals interpret and engage with different discourses impact their actions, which emphasizes the need to consider personal experiences in the analysis of educational practices (Wohlwend, 2021). By examining how students make sense of their interactions and the discourses they encounter, researchers can gain insight into the nuanced ways actions are shaped and influenced. The diverse experiences of the student revealed how different interpretations and interactions lead to varied responses, underscoring the importance of a comprehensive understanding of these components in educational research.

## Implications

The findings of this study highlight several key implications for educational practice and policy, particularly in relation to how power dynamics and discourses influence student experiences and actions within the classroom. The implications demonstrate a need to consider the components of MDA in the classroom, acknowledging power relations, addressing and including culturally sustaining curriculum, supporting critical thinking and content, and the need for professional development and

equitable policy. Addressing the implications is vital for improving educational practices and policies. By acknowledging these influences and implementing strategies to address them, educators and policymakers can work toward creating more inclusive and equitable educational experiences for all students.

This study emphasizes the need to consider the intersections of different components of MDA, such as historical bodies, discourses, power relations, and interactions when analyzing actions. This can help to provide a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which actions are shaped and influenced. This also has implications for education and teacher training programs, as it underlines the importance of understanding the ways in which historical bodies and discourses shape actions and the need to consider the intersections of different components of MDA when analyzing actions. Disseminating this knowledge can help educators and teachers to be more culturally inclusive and to create teacher training programs that include the need to create more culturally sustaining approaches to teaching and learning.

This study underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the power dynamics that shape students' educational experiences. Thomas and Aslanian (2018) emphasize that power relations in educational settings influence how students engage with content and respond to pedagogical practices. Educators and policymakers must be aware of these dynamics to create environments where all students feel valued and supported. This involves critically examining how historical and societal power structures impact students' perceptions and interactions within the classroom.

The influence of historical bodies and discourses on students' actions suggests a need for curricula that are both culturally responsive and inclusive. Culturally sustaining pedagogies, as discussed by Paris and Alim (2017), advocate for educational practices that affirm and build upon students' cultural identities and experiences. Educators should integrate diverse perspectives and voices into the curriculum to better reflect students' backgrounds and to foster more equitable learning environments. This may involve considering the ways in which historical bodies, discourses, power relations, and interactions shape actions and experiences, and can lead to developing strategies to promote more equitable and inclusive actions. It may also involve providing teachers with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students. To effectively address power dynamics and discourses in education, ongoing professional development and training for educators are essential. Professional development programs should focus on building teachers' understanding of the historical and social contexts that affect their students (Gay, 2010). Such training can help educators develop strategies for creating inclusive and responsive learning environments that support all students.

The student's response to educational content, as demonstrated in the study, highlights the importance of supporting critical engagement with learning materials. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), effective teaching practices should encourage students to question and critically analyze the content they encounter. By fostering a critical approach to education, teachers can help students navigate and challenge the discourses and power dynamics that influence their learning experiences.

The research suggests that interpretation and experiences play a role in shaping actions. This can help educators and researchers to better understand the ways in which individuals interpret and experience different discourses, which can inform the development of strategies to promote more equitable and inclusive actions and curriculum approaches in school. This suggests that the experiences of individuals within a given context are complex and multifaceted and that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be effective.

Finally, the study's findings also have significant implications for educational policy. Policymakers should consider the impact of educational policies on power dynamics and discourses within schools. Policies that promote equity and inclusivity, such as those that support culturally sustaining pedagogies and address systemic inequalities, are crucial for creating fair and supportive educational environments (Delpit, 2006).

## Further Research

Further research is essential to deepen our understanding of how historical bodies, interactions, and discourses shape actions and experiences across diverse contexts and populations. Specifically, future studies should explore how these components influence educational experiences and outcomes in varying cultural, racial, and socioeconomic settings. Discourses emphasize the ways in which language and social practices are shaped by cultural, social, and institutional contexts and can support continued research (Gee, 1990). By examining these factors in different contexts, researchers can gain insights into how historical legacies and discursive practices impact student experiences and educational equity.

Research should also investigate how the findings from mediated discourse analysis (MDA) can be effectively integrated into educational practice and teacher training programs. This could include evaluating the effectiveness of various strategies for promoting equitable and inclusive educational practices. For example, studies could examine how integrating MDA findings into professional development can enhance teachers' abilities to create culturally responsive and equitable learning environments.

Further studies should focus on the implementation of culturally inclusive pedagogies and teaching strategies. These include Funds of Knowledge (FOK) (González et al., 2009), which leverage students' cultural backgrounds and experiences as valuable resources for learning; culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018), which adapts instruction to the diverse cultural backgrounds of students; culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994), which aims to affirm students' cultural identities while promoting academic success; and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017), which seek to sustain and build upon students' cultural practices and linguistic skills. Research should assess how these pedagogical approaches impact student engagement and achievement in diverse classrooms.

Additionally, future research should address how the interplay of historical bodies, discourses, and power relations can inform the development of more inclusive and equitable educational policies and practices. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing interventions that address systemic inequalities and promote fair educational opportunities for all students.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of a nuanced understanding of how actions are shaped by various factors, including historical contexts, discursive practices, and power dynamics. By advancing research in these areas, educators and policymakers can better support the development of equitable and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning. Continued exploration in these domains will contribute to more effective educational practices and foster environments where all students can thrive.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the author. The data is not publicly available due to the privacy of the participants.

## References


Alim, H.S., & Paris, D. (2017). What is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and why does it matter? In D. Paris & H. S. Alim (Eds.), *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies teaching and learning for justice in a changing world* (pp. 18-42). Teachers College Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Carter, P. L., & Welner, K. G. (2013). *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance.* University Press.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches. Fourth edition. CA: Sage.

Deklerk, K. C. (2022). Practitioner experiences in enacting culturally sustaining pedagogies in elementary literacy classrooms [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University]. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.*

Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* New Press.

Finley, K. M. (2003) *Southern opposition to civil rights in the United States Senate: a tactical and ideological analysis, 1938-1965*. LSU Digital Commons.

Furrey, G. (2023) Political responses to Black Lives Matter in education. *Ethnic Studies Review,* 46 (3), 3-47. doi:10.1525/esr.2023.46.3.3

Gay, G. (2018) *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice (Third Edition).* Teachers College Press.

Gee, J. P. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses.* Taylor & Francis.

Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method.* Routledge.

Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling.* Routledge.

Gee, J. P. (2018). *The social mind: Language, ideology, and social practice.* Routledge.

González, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (2009). *Funds of knowledge theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Routledge.

Green, P. (2022, February 16) Teacher Anti-CRT Bills Coast To Coast: A State By State Guide. *Forbes.* Retrieved September 22, 2022, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/petergreene/2022/02/16/teacher-anti-crt-bills-coast-to-coast-a-state-by-state-guide/?sh=58c522144ff6

Hall, S. (1992). The politics of representation: dominant and marginalized group images in the mass media. In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 223-237). Sage Publications Ltd.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, 34(3), 159-165. doi:10.3726/978-1-4539-1584-4/43

Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice, 31*(2), 132-141.

Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014.). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review,* 84(1), 85–100. https://doi-org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/10.17763/haer.84.1.982l873k2ht16m77

Paris, D. (2016). On Educating Culturally Sustaining Teachers. Teaching Works working papers. http:// www.teachingworks.org/images/files/TeachingWorks_Paris.pdf.

Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour.* Sage.

Scallon, R. (2001). *Mediated discourse analysis: The nexus of practice.* Routledge.

Schwartz, S. (2024). Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack. *Education Week*. http:// https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06. *Stop CRT Act* (2021) S. 2346 (USA).

Thomas, D. A., & Aslanian, T. (2018). *Understanding the power dynamics in educational settings: Implications for practice and policy*. *Journal of Educational Policy, 33*(2), 145-161. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1307663

van Dijk, T. A. (1992). Discourse and the Denial of Racism. *Discourse & Society*, *3*(1), 87–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926592003001005

Wohlwend, K. E. (2008). Kindergarten as Nexus of Practice: A Mediated Discourse Analysis of Reading, Writing, Play, and Design in an Early Literacy Apprenticeship. Reading *Research Quarterly, 43(4), 332–334*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20068350

Wohlwend, K. E. (2009) Dilemmas and discourses of learning to write: Assessment as a contested site. *Language Arts, 86*(5), 341–351.Wohlwend, K. E. (2021). *Literacies that move and matter: Nexus analysis for contemporary childhoods*. Routledge.

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025, pp. 42-61**
**DOI 10.14434/ijlcle.v5i.35976**

# *"We Don't Want Their Yoruba Language to Fade":* Examining the Home Literacy and Cultural Practices of Yoruba Families in the Midwest U.S.

Adetutu Fabusoro and Giselle Martínez Negrette

## Abstract

This qualitative study engages sociocultural and New Literacy Studies theories to investigate the home literacy and cultural practices utilized by Yoruba parents to help their children develop their bilingualism and biliteracy (English/Yoruba). Using ethnographic methods, the study explored two main questions: 1. What are the home literacy and cultural practices utilized by Yoruba parents to help their children develop their bilingualism and biliteracy in English and Yoruba? 2. How do the focal parents conceive the relationship between language and culture in their children's development of bilingualism and biliteracy in English and Yoruba? The findings revealed that the focal parents employed various home literacy and cultural practices such as sharing poems, folk stories, and teaching from religious texts to help their children develop their bilingualism and biliteracy in English and Yoruba. Furthermore, the findings show that these parents espouse a holistic approach to language learning that considers cultural practices a fundamental element in this process. The findings from this study provide important insights into the understanding of the literacy and cultural practices of African immigrant populations in the U.S. and contribute to the existing literature that seeks to bridge the gap between school and home literacy practices.

**Keywords:** Yoruba, African families, biliteracy, bilingualism, cultural practices, home literacy practices.

**Contact:** Adetutu Fabusoro, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
E-mail: adetutu2@illinois.edu
Giselle Martinez Negrette, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
E-mail: giselle@illinois.edu

## Introduction

According to the UNHCR (2016), the major reasons for non-voluntary migration are forcible displacement, refugee status, statelessness, and economic hardship. The United States is highly impacted by such movement, having by far the most immigrants (Routley, 2022). As of 2015, the U.S. had 47 million immigrants, or "19.1% of the 244 million international migrants worldwide, and 14.4% of the United States' population" (Partners, 2019). The United States Department of Homeland Security reported that in 2017, 1,127,167 people received permanent status in the United States; a total of 53,691 new refugees arrived in the U.S. in the same year, and another 10,523 were granted asylum. Immigration is predicted to drive population growth in the U.S. surpassing natural increases around 2030 (Routley, 2022).

Immigrants in the U.S. face numerous challenges as they seek to maintain their linguistic and cultural heritage. These challenges include lack of institutional support, unfavorable demographics, lack of a "language island", or an area with a concentration of people who share the same language (Riehl, 2010), navigating new sociolinguistic demands, and family dynamics. In addition, generational transfer of the heritage language becomes difficult as opportunities to use and share the language decline. This deprives children of exposure and motivation to learn and use the home language (Ojha, 2020). In such situations, the role of parents in early bilingual development is significant. With this in mind, this research inquiry examines the linguistic and cultural literacy practices of three Yoruba families in the U.S. Midwest to better understand the home literacy and cultural practices the focal parents utilize to support their children's acquisition of both, English and Yoruba language. Two main questions guide this study:

1. What are the home literacy and cultural practices utilized by Yoruba parents to help their children develop their bilingualism and biliteracy in English and Yoruba?
2. How do the focal parents conceive the relationship between language and culture in their children's development of bilingualism and biliteracy in English and Yoruba?

The findings from this study provide important insights into the understanding of the home literacy and cultural practices of African immigrant populations in the U.S. and the significant role that parents play in helping children to develop bilingualism and biliteracy. These findings also contribute to the existing literature that seeks to bridge the gap between school and home literacy practices.

## Literature Review & Guiding Notions

The literature shows that in English-dominant contexts, the linguistic behavior of immigrant parents and children is shaped by communication, family affiliation, community involvement, and careers (Nesteruk, 2010; Ojha, 2020; Wang, 2018). Immigrant parents negotiate between their children's maintenance of their heritage language and proficiency in English to be academically and professionally successful (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010). Thus, immigrant families are always at the crossroads between the heritage and dominant language, particularly when the home language is not "one that has high visibility and status in the surrounding society" (Borland, 2006, p. 23; see also Nesteruk, 2010; Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009; Tovares & Kamwangamalu, 2017).

A number of studies have examined home bicultural and bilingual literacy practices among Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Latin American, and some Asian and European families living in the U.S. (Ice, 2020; Kremin et al., 2019; Ojha, 2020; Samarth 2013). For example, in examining the attrition and maintenance of home languages among the Indian diaspora in the United States, Samarth (2013) found that even though multilingualism exists, generational transfer is impacted by the heavy use of English, and lack of effort and motivation around home languages. Wang's (2018)

multiple case study of Asian immigrant families' heritage languages in the U.S. Southwest (Mandarin, Nepali, Persian, and Arabic) revealed a general phenomenon of heritage language acquisition, shift, loss, revival, and maintenance. In addition, the findings unveiled Asian immigrant families' struggles around lack of resources, school community support, and time, as parents were busy international graduate students.

Another study of immigrant populations (Ojha 2020) explored the family language policies of Nepali families living in the U.S., in particular, how Nepali families' language ideologies and practices were shaped, and in turn shaped the heritage language development of their school-age children. Ojha (2020) showed that, despite having a positive attitude towards their heritage language, the families were not able to invest resources to support their children's heritage language and literacy skills.

In terms of biliteracy, Kremin et al., (2019) compared Spanish–English bilingual and English monolingual children in the U.S. to examine the effects of Spanish literacy on English reading among Spanish–English bilingual children. They suggest that "early and systematic biliteracy exposure at home and through afterschool programs can influence children's sound-to-print associations even in the context of language-specific (monolingual) reading instruction" (p. 192). Similarly, Ice's (2020) study of Russian speakers in educational and family contexts in the U.S. confirmed the prominent role of Saturday schools and family language policies in the preservation of the heritage language and the community.

The above-mentioned studies are significant for this inquiry because of their focus on the language practices of immigrant families/heritage speakers in the U.S. and these families' language policies. However, their findings point to the need for continued research into understudied populations, such as African immigrant families. Some extant studies like Salami et al. (2017) and Akintayo (2009) focus on parenting practices around cultural and religious values. Salami et al., (2017) highlighted the cultural and linguistic challenges that African parents face in this regard. Akintayo (2009) examined perceptions around parenting among Pentecostal Nigerian Yoruba parents in the U. S. and suggested American values and cultural contexts had impacted their parenting practices.

One of the few studies specifically on heritage language transmission among African immigrant families in the U.S. Midwest is Kigamwa (2016), which indicates that family dynamics, school dynamics, and a reduced use of the language in the home negatively impact heritage language transmission. Kigamwa's (2016) study is critical for the present inquiry because it points to the significance of the sociolinguistic challenges and literacy practices of African immigrant families. In view of the limited extant research on African immigrant populations, the present study seeks to investigate the home bilingual, cultural, and literacy practices of Yoruba families from Nigeria living in the Midwestern U.S.

## Heritage Language Literacy, Identity Construction, Language Maintenance & Intergenerational Language Transmission

The home is the foundational setting for a child's cognitive, social, and emotional growth (The Urban Child Institute, 2013). Home literacy activities involve parents and children interacting socially, situations in which parents play the role of teachers. Schwartz & Verschik (2013) maintain that parents play a crucial role in heritage language maintenance. Homes are spaces for abundant literacy practices, typically guided by the family's cultural heritage and norms (Dixon & Wu, 2014). Families are aware of the benefits multilingualism and multilingual literacy carry, which influence their beliefs and

ideologies. For instance, Wilson (2021) found that parental ideologies concerning language learning seem to have evolved towards more positive attitudes related to language mixing and more flexible language practices. Heritage language literacy provides children with access to their history and culture (Creese et al., 2006); parents' positive attitudes towards the heritage language can strengthen children's intrinsic motivation to learn more (Kagan, 2005, as cited in Samarth, 2013). A strong identification with one's heritage language may lead to increased self-esteem, academic success, and family cohesion.

For heritage language learners, constructing identities at the intersection of two or more languages and cultures differs from the process of someone acquiring a foreign language, as heritage language learners are "socio historically connected with the target culture and yet experientially displaced from it" (He, 2009, p. 11; see also Canagarajah, 2021; Tovares & Kamwangamalu, 2017). Language proficiency also influences the way others position a heritage language learner, and this, in turn, influences the learner's opportunities for enacting certain social identities within a society that may be permeated by the dominant language (Li, 2005).

Ethnographically-informed studies and research in sociolinguistics have highlighted the general trends characterizing "language maintenance and the strong tendencies towards language shift in the second generation of immigrants" (Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2015. p. 320; see also Li, 1994; 2012; Touminen 1999; Luykx 2005). Research has shown that one of the challenges parents face when "following through with their intentions to use the heritage language with their children on a daily basis" is that while they aim to "apply particular language practices, they also have to juggle the complex task of both providing input in heritage languages and managing everyday tasks" (Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2015. p. 322; see also Gafaranga 2010; Meyer-Pitton 2013). Common tensions involve a struggle between their desire to raise their children in their heritage language and the dominant language, and their desire to create emotional bonds and to allow for their children's preferences (Fogle 2013; Fogle 2012). Furthermore, a dynamic perspective on language socialization indicates that children's language choices and interaction shape parental language behavior significantly (Luykx 2005; Gafaranga 2010). Thus, children play an active role in language maintenance (Paugh 2005) or language shift. For example, Gafaranga's (2010) study of intergenerational use of Kinyarwanda in an immigration context showed how children-initiated negotiation of language choice for adult-child interaction by displaying their problems in understanding the heritage language. The adults then adopted the child's selected code to settle language negotiation. This study points to the various dynamics involved in the process of heritage language learning.

Lastly, extensive research has highlighted significant differences in language maintenance and intergenerational language transmission among various ethnic minority communities in countries with a high number of immigrants, such as the U.S. (Fishman 1989; 1991; 2001; 2013; Schrauf, 1999). Here, it is important to make a distinction between language maintenance and intergenerational language transmission because each one points to different aspects of the intersection of immigration and language use. According to Borland (2006), "language maintenance in an immigrant context is taken to mean the continued use by a migrant person in the country of their settlement of a language that they have used prior to their migration" (p. 24). Intergenerational language transmission (ILT) refers to the process involved when the migrant person then passes the "language down to the next generation, either through informal learning or formal teaching, or a combination of both" (Borland, 2006, p. 24). In our study, the parents in the focal families engage in language maintenance within the home and the broader community, which may facilitate ILT because it provides a "language-rich environment" for their children (Borland, 2006, p. 24).

### Yoruba Immigrant Families

The Yoruba people constitute a significant portion of the African diaspora in the U.S. The latter half of the 20th century witnessed a new wave of Yoruba immigration motivated by educational and professional reasons (National Park Service, n.d.). The Yorubas value tradition and education of their children (Omobowale et al, 2019). This often translates to a strong focus on academic achievement. Studies suggest that Nigerian immigrants, among whom the Yoruba people are well-represented, have higher college graduation rates compared to the U.S. national average (Joseph, 2018). Yoruba immigrants are also known for their entrepreneurial and professional accomplishments (Oloruntoba & Falola, 2022) and they are well-represented in various fields including medicine, engineering, law, and academia.

Yoruba language and cultural practices serve as a bridge between generations, identity, and community. The Yoruba culture emphasizes a strong sense of community and family, with respect for elders being a core value. Yoruba immigrant families usually try to integrate into the American society but also work to preserve their cultural heritage. (House-Soremekun, 2022). Heritage Language maintenance is one of the crucial ways the Yoruba preserve their culture and identity. There are thousands of Yoruba-speaking parents in the U.S who either migrated to the U.S with young children or gave birth to children in the U.S (Akintayo, 2009). However, the only place these children may learn the Yoruba language is in their homes since there is no formal Yoruba education in the country for young children; neither are there weekend nor summer schools to learn the language. These children have mostly acquired the English language and are being taught the Yoruba language as a heritage language at home.

Yoruba heritage families share common characteristics with other heritage families. For example, they have children who have either acquired partial command of the heritage language or who have not acquired the language at all. In the case of immigrants in the U.S., once the children enter the mainstream educational system, they receive their reading and writing instruction solely in English. As a result, acquisition of the heritage language is interrupted; the children do not generally develop the heritage-language literacy necessary to perform in an adult-like setting (Polinsky, 2011; 2016). They rarely receive sufficient input in their home language because it is not the dominant language (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007).

### The Yoruba Language

*Yorùbá* is a tonal language with several varieties spoken across West Africa, most prominently in Southern Nigeria and the neighboring countries of Benin, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Ghana and The Gambia (Forde, 2017). *Yorùbá* is spoken by the Yoruba Ethnic group, with about 55 million speakers, and it is one of the three official languages of Nigeria. Yorubas are also found in Brazil, known as the Lucumi people, in Sierra Leone, as the Aku people, and in various regions of North America, and Europe. Yoruba speakers can be found in almost every country of the world, as they have highly migrated to different parts of the world over the years. Several reasons account for these migrations including economic, education, intermarriage, trade and commerce (Akande, 2016).

## Theoretical Framework

This study engages sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978) and New Literacy Studies theory (Barton, 2012) to explore the home literacy and cultural practices utilized by Yoruba parents to help their children develop bilingualism and biliteracy in English and Yoruba. In this study, a sociocultural lens

is adopted to conceptualize literacy within the contexts of bilingual literacies, cultural practices, and identity maintenance of Yoruba heritage speakers as a primarily social process.

New Literacy Studies theorists define literacy practices as a combination of "literacy events" and participants' perceptions and beliefs about the events. Such theorists were specifically concerned with categorizing social interactions where text played an integral role as "literacy events," as opposed to spoken language as "speech events" (Barton, 2012). According to Barton (2012), a "literacy event" is rule-governed, not confined to formal education settings, and can occur anywhere. It represents the social context in which participants interact with each other and written texts via reading and writing activities (Barton, 2012).

Literacy practices are distinct from literacy events because practices span multiple literacy events and incorporate the participants' perceptions of the literacy events and their own literacy (Barton, 2012). Scribner & Cole (1981) defined literacy practice as "a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge," and as such being comprised of "technology, knowledge, and skills" (p. 236). In line with these definitions, in this study, literacy events are defined as intentional engagement of parents teaching/sharing their linguistic and cultural knowledge with their children; and literacy practices as the multiple literacy events that participants engage in, and their perceptions and beliefs about those events.

A sociocultural lens (Vygotsky, 1978) was useful in this study because it allowed us to focus on the higher human cognitive processes, such as literacy learning, and how they can be seen as an activity that takes place within specific cultures and social contexts. Vygotsky's (1978) ideas are most recognized for identifying the role social interactions and culture play in the development of higher-order thinking skills, and they are especially valuable for the insights they provide about the dynamic "interdependence between individual and social processes in the construction of knowledge" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 192). One of the key contributions of sociocultural theory to the issue of language learning is that of "participation" (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000), which combines the social context with individual acquisition. In other words, mere personal effort would not result in mastery of a language unless the individual benefits from other people's (especially adult) participation (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

Immigrant families are engaged in the process of language socialization in the new place for a long time. According to Duff (2015), this process might take place "at home, in educational institutions and workplaces, and in other face-to-face and virtual communities" (p. 62). Language socialization is a complex, lifelong process, embedded in social interactions. In view of this, the combination of sociocultural theories and New Literacy Studies theory provided valuable lenses to better understand the various literacy events and broader literacy and cultural practices of the families participating in this study.

## Methodology

This qualitative study used ethnographic methods to better understand the home literacy and cultural practices of Yoruba families as they supported the bilingual and biliteracy development of their children. The study took place over a period of eight weeks, between December 2021 and February 2022. Three families were recruited for the study through purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2014). The participating families originated from the Southwestern part of Nigeria and from the Yoruba tribe. All the parents spoke English and Yoruba fluently and used the languages consistently in their homes. The children spoke English fluently and were learning Yoruba as a heritage language.

**Table 1.** *Summary of Participants' Information*

| Families' Pseudonyms | Jimoh | Oluronbi | Adebola |
|---|---|---|---|
| No. of children | 2 (1boy, 1girl) | 2 (boys) | 2 (girls) |
| Parents' Occupations | Father – Student<br>Mother-House wife | Father: IT/Accountant<br>Mother: Dentist | Graduate Students |
| Children | Ages: 7, 3<br>Class: Grade 2, Pre-k<br>Brought to the US | Ages: 11, 4<br>Class: Grade 6, Pre-k<br>Born in the US | Age: 6, 5<br>Class: Kindergarten & Grade 1<br>Brought to the US |

All data was collected by the first author, a member of the Yoruba community in the U.S. Being a member of the community provided the first author with an "insider" status that facilitated recruitment and data collection. Being friends with many of the parents who participated in the study helped in gaining access to the families and homes where the observations were conducted. Moreover, as a Yoruba immigrant living in the U.S., and a parent of the age group being considered, the first author shared many experiences and similarities with the participants in the study. She was raising her own children as an immigrant in a new context and was also committed to passing her language and culture down to her children. All these experiences provided a broad idea of the circumstances Yoruba parents may encounter with young heritage speakers in the U.S. During data collection, however, the first author was aware that despite all the connections and similitudes she had with the focal families, she needed to remember that there were many aspects of the phenomenon under study that she did not know. Thus, she strove to maintain a reflective disposition keeping in mind that as a researcher, she was still an "outsider" when she entered the researched space.

The second author joined the study in the final stages and was mainly involved in the writing of the manuscript. The second author is a Latina, multilingual speaker, who has lived and worked in various countries as a kindergarten English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. Her own experiences as an immigrant in the U.S. have provided her with a wide understanding of the diverging experiences of multilingual families in this nation and the pivotal role of language and culture in child-rearing.

The first author visited the home of the participating families and observed the parents, once a week for eight weeks, as they interacted with their children. Each observation lasted approximately one hour and was video recorded with participants' permission (24 observation sessions). The first author did not interact with participants while conducting observations aiming to avoid disruption of the natural interactions she sought to examine. In addition to the video recordings, the first author wrote detailed field notes, in which she documented participants' language use, actions, and families' use of artifacts during the observation sessions. The recorded field notes provided a broader context for data analysis. The recordings were in the language that was being spoken in the home during the observations (English or Yoruba).

In addition, one ethnographic interview was conducted with the parents in each family. These interviews allowed participants to elaborate on personal experiences and opinions freely and provided the researcher with an opportunity to ask for clarifications on things that were observed during home visits (Denscombe, 2010). All interviews were recorded and conducted in English. Finally, pictures of participants' interactions and the different literacy and cultural practices they engaged in were taken while conducting observations. The first author also asked participating parents to share some of the

artifacts they used when supporting their children's bilingualism and literacy practices. These included home-made learning activities, books in Yoruba, and samples of children's writing.

### Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was recursive and ongoing. Immediately, after each home visit, the first author reviewed the video recordings and added initial analytical notes and memos to the field notes. The video recordings helped her to add more details to the field notes. Once all data were collected, the first author conducted multiple reviews of all data sources and then proceeded to transcribe the recorded interviews. From the video recordings, the first author identified literacy events, and she then transcribed the selected events for further analysis.

Next, open coding (Saldaña, 2013) was used to conduct the first round of data analysis. After this, axial coding was used to start drawing connections between the codes and to identify emergent categories (Nesteruk, 2010). In this stage of the process, the researcher took notice of highlighted points and memos included in the field notes. While analyzing the data, the researcher considered cultural practices, non-verbal communication, and the mood of participants during observations. Artifacts, such as the pictures taken during field observations, were particularly helpful during this part of the analysis because they provided pictorial data to examine the broader analytical context. Finally, theoretical coding was employed as the culminating step to integrate the categories identified in the previous coding cycles (Saldaña, 2013). Data triangulation was used to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

## Findings

There are many elements that are part of the home literacy and cultural practices of the focal Yoruba families. Some of these practices were similar while others differed across families revealing the various ways in which the participants considered and understood the relationship between language and culture, engaged in literacy events, and supported the bilingual and biliteracy development of their children in English and Yoruba.

### Literacy Practices

One strategy that all families used to support their children's biliteracy development was to watch Yoruba movies together. This family activity normally consisted of parents and children sitting together in front of the T.V. or computer screen and watching a movie in Yoruba. When children struggled to follow the plot or understand certain Yoruba words, the parents used the opportunity to help children learn new vocabulary and sentence structures in the Yoruba language. In addition, the parents also had the children watch educational videos with Yoruba content that taught specific aspects of the language such as letters, numbers, parts of the body, days of the week, and proverbs.

These families' literacy practices never separated the learning of Yoruba from English. These parents were invested not only in helping the children to learn and maintain their heritage language, but in the development of their children's biliteracy skills. For example, children usually learned the Yoruba meaning of English songs and nursery rhymes through videos that first presented the song in English and then sang it in Yoruba. These songs often included physical movement and everyday objects (e.g., clothes, numbers, furniture, etc.), which helped the children understand the meaning of the words. These videos also included content that connected language to the Yoruba culture. The

stories presented incorporated African history, culture, and values such as teamwork, friendship, and cooperation.

Beyond watching heritage language videos and movies, parents also spent time speaking to their children in Yoruba. All three families believed that speaking Yoruba daily to their children was a way to help them understand the language and connect to their cultural identity. Regarding this, the parents commented:

> We speak Yoruba 80% of the time in the house […] Yoruba is more important here [the U.S.] because there's nobody, they can speak it with, nor do they learn it in school and we don't want their Yoruba language to fade, so we speak Yoruba to them often.
> (Jimoh family)
> We speak Yoruba to each other. And we make conscious and continuous efforts to speak it to the children too. (Adebola family)

> We want them to be able to speak it and we try to speak it to them. (Oluronbi Family)

An important aspect to mention here is that when speaking to their children, these parents engaged in what García (2009) has identified as translanguaging, or "the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential" (p. 140). While having conversations with their children or working on different activities, both parents and children in all families translaguaged using linguistic elements from English and the Yoruba language; this was their usual way of communicating. It was common to hear the families using expressions such as: *"Won wa sad" (they became sad)*; *"a need lati wa contented" (we need to be contented); "Mo fe drink omi." (I want to drink water); "omi ton come from the sky" (water (rain) that comes from the sky)*. Translanguaging was a practice children and parents engaged in as they communicated, and especially as parents helped children to develop their bilingualism and biliteracy.

Translanguaging allowed family members to use their entire linguistic repertoire and, as children continued to learn Yoruba in an English dominant context, they used English to develop their Yoruba skills. Thus, when children were not able to understand when parents spoke to them only in Yoruba, parents translated to bridge the linguistic connections between the two languages. When children were watching movies or cartoons in English, parents made sure they included subtitles in Yoruba to support the biliteracy development of their children. Additionally, every time parents read books in English to their children, they translated them into Yoruba. Parents shared that they used this practice to help children acquire new vocabulary and make linguistic connections between English and Yoruba (interview).

Aside from the awareness of the linguistic processes that were at work in their children's learning, the focal parents demonstrated that they were also cognizant of the social benefits that learning two languages would accrue for their children. Commenting on this, they explained:

> Learning the Yoruba language as well would allow the children achieve all they desire to achieve and be successful, at the same time allow them to communicate with family members, other Nigerians in the U.S. in their local language, people in their home country. Teaching the two languages to the children is beyond conversational benefit.
> (Father, Adebola Family)
> Since we are in the U.S., and English is the main language. So, I believe they should learn that effectively. (Mother, Oluronbi Family)

> We learnt Yoruba while growing up in my family and we are all successful, so I want my children to do same. (Father, Jimoh Family)

These parents wanted their children to be proficient in English because they believed it was the language the children needed to be successful in the U.S. However, they also wanted their children to learn Yoruba because they wanted the children to still be connected to their roots, maintain their cultural identity, and for communication with family members at home (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010). They believed that supporting the development of their children's bilingualism in English and Yoruba went beyond the ability to converse, as mentioned in the interview. For them, helping their children to become bilingual represented access and opportunities for accomplishments in the U.S. However, it is interesting to notice how these parents associated the learning of Yoruba not only with their Nigerian roots and identity but also with success. All parents were committed to supporting the development of the bilingualism and biliteracy skills of their children. Nevertheless, there were differences in how they supported the learning process. For instance, the Jimoh and Adebola parents deliberately started conversations with their children in Yoruba. They purposely asked their children questions to enable them to have a better understanding of specific words such as parts of the body, objects, and numbers. An example of how these parents employed intentional literacy practices through the engagement in literacy events was how in the Jimoh family, the mother taught her children how to count 1 to 10, the body parts, and the names of animals in Yoruba. Below is the teaching process she followed as recorded in the field notes:

> The mother read the numbers in English, then said them in Yoruba, and the children repeated them in Yoruba. The children could not pronounce the numbers properly in Yoruba as they were saying the words with incorrect tones, so the mother taught the children the correct pronunciation. She also taught the children about the body parts asking them questions like: *"Oju melo loni" (how many eyes do you have?); "Ika melo loni" (how many fingers do you have?); "Owo melo lo ni" (how many hands do you have?).* Then she moved on to teach them the names of some animals in Yoruba, *Aja (Dog), Ologbo (Cat)*, *Ehoro* (*Rabit).*

The mother in the Jimoh family expressed, "we may want to go back to Nigeria or visit Nigeria, and they also need to speak to grannies and families back home that do not understand English. And we want them to still be connected to our family" (interview).

In the Adebola family, the parents also used an intentional approach engaging in various literacy events to teach their children. Representative of this were the times when the father deliberately said some words in Yoruba and asked the children what the words meant in English. This was a common occurrence in this household and recorded multiple times in the fieldnotes. Below is an example of these recorded interactions.

> The father in the Adebola family is teaching his children different words in Yoruba while they are in the kitchen. He starts with the word "rain," "Ojo." The children do not know this one, then he gave the children a clue by using his hands to demonstrate rain. Then he says another word: "Aso," which means "cloth." He asks Kemi, she gave some words that were not the correct answers. Dad gave her some clues and she got it after many tries. The last word he taught was "Isu," which means "Yam." Remi did not know this word. Dad asks her to go and touch different things that he bought from the grocery store; she touched different things until she touched the yam. Then she shouted "Yam" and she eventually got it.

In addition to the above-mentioned practices, the parents from these two families also engaged in literacy events through the reading of Yoruba books and the teaching of writing of specific words to the children to help them master word meanings and increase their vocabulary.

Since one important aspect in language acquisition is constant interaction with other language speakers (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000), the parents in these families ensured that their children had constant interaction with their Yoruba community where the language was mostly used by Yoruba speakers. In this way, they guaranteed that their children were interacting with Yoruba speakers within and outside the immediate family setting. This concurs with what Polinsky & Scontras (2020) describe as "increased exposure to the heritage language will only get heritage speakers so far; they also need exposure from a variety of sources" (p. 17). However, even though all the families considered this important, the data shows that it was the Adebola family that really expressed strong opinions about living in a Yoruba-dominated environment and connecting with other Yoruba speakers as a main source of support for their children to learn their heritage language. This was especially important for them because, similar to what Wang (2018) found, as graduate students, they did not have much time to sit down with the children to teach them the language. The father from the Adebola family explained:

> Keeping ourselves and the children where there are Yoruba speakers is very important to me and speaking it at home […] They need cultural practices and mingling with Yoruba speakers.

In contrast to the other two families, the parents from the Oluronbi family explained that "speaking Yoruba to the children, engaging in cultural practices, and living and mingling with other Yoruba speakers" within a Yoruba-dominated community was enough for their children to acquire the heritage language. For these parents, creating an environment where children could use the Yoruba language was enough to help them develop their bilingualism and biliteracy skills. Thus, they were the only families that did not intentionally set time apart to teach the children new vocabulary or read with them.

**Cultural Practices**

Cultural practices cannot be separated from language learning/teaching practices (Vygotsky, 1978; Duff, 2015). Parents across the three families used cultural practices to support their children's development of their bilingualism and biliteracy in Yoruba and English. At the same time, they also instilled in their children Yoruba ethics and cultural values. In this manner, these parents used their cultural practices to connect their children to their Yoruba identities and help them develop their language skills, especially because they were growing up in the U.S.

### *Moral Teachings, Poems, Proverbs, and Stories as Cultural and Literacy Practices*

The focal parents used poems, folk tales, and proverbs to instill in their children the cultural values and ethics of the Yoruba community while also supporting the literacy development of their children. These parents described how their own mothers and fathers would reprimand them using proverbs in Yoruba whenever they made mistakes or offended them. Thus, they described that morally instructive proverbs, poems, and sayings were of high value for them, and as a result, this was a cultural and literacy practice they maintained with their own children.

In the Jimoh family, the father would usually start his moral teachings in English and later interpret them in Yoruba. He shared that for him a major way to help the children maintain their identity was

through instilling good morals and values in them. Below are some of the moral premises he shared with his children during observations.

- Do not shout at elders. Yoruba culture does not permit it.
- Don't say the 'f' word.
- Everyone should see you as a humble and respectful child: "Ogbodo ni irele" (you must be humble)
- Don't be stubborn; in Yoruba such children are called "Omo jagini jagan" (stubborn child)
- Ma te ile gau (do not behave like you own everyone)

In this family, the mother used poems to teach ethics to the children. For example, she used poems to teach her children about good behavior. She used both English and Yoruba to explain the overall meaning of the poem to the children and then proceeded to explain the meaning of each word in the poem.

The focal families also used folk tales to teach morals to their children. Below is a song story the mother of the Adebola family told her children. She used this song-story to teach the children the Yoruba language by explaining to them the meaning of each word. At the end of the story, the mother asked the children the moral of the story, and they replied both in English and Yoruba that it taught them to be obedient, contented, and not greedy.

**The story of Ijapa and Yanibo**

Ijapa is a male tortoise and husband, while Yanibo is a female tortoise and wife to Ijapa. Ijapa and his wife Yanibo did not have children, and they became worried. They went to a native doctor who told them that Ijapa should return in 7 days. Ijapa returned and was given a soup that nobody except his wife should eat. As Ijapa was going home, the aroma of the soup enticed him, and he disobeyed the native doctor and ate part of the soup, against the warning of the herbalist. Suddenly, his stomach began to swell up like a pregnant woman's. So, they went back to the herbalist to ask for forgiveness and a cure. Then, he started singing:

Baba alawo mo ma bebe (native doctor I have come to apologize)
Alugbirin - (onomatopoeic response)
Oni n mama, mu owo ba enu (you warned me not to put my hands in my mouth)
Alugbirin
Oni n mama mu ese bae nu (you warned me not to put my legs in my mouth)
Alugbirin
Gbongbo lo yo mi gere (the tree root made me fall)
Alugbirin
Mo mu owo kano be mo mu kan enu (then I touched the soup and put it in my mouth)
Alugbirinrin
Mo boju wo iku, ori gbento (then I looked at my stomach and it is growing)
Alugbirin
Baba alawo mow a bebe, alugbirin (native doctor I've come to apologize)

Then the native doctor told Ijapa that there was no cure for what happened to him.

In addition, the families also used proverbs to teach the children about ethical values while helping them to learn new vocabulary and language structures. Below are some examples of proverbs used by focal families.

Eni ba jale leekan, to ba da aran bori, aso ole lo da bora.
(This proverb emphasizes that stealing is bad.)
Ijakumo ki rinde osan, eni a bire ki rinde oru.
(Children born in good homes do not wander around in the night.)
Agutan to b aba aja in a je igbe.
(You become like the friends you move with.)

### *Religious & Social Practices*

Activities such as praying in Yoruba, studying the Bible and the Quran, and teaching religious practices to the children were also part of the ways Yoruba parents supported their children in learning their languages and developing their cultural and religious identities. In the Adebola Family, for example, since both parents were Christian, they taught their children how to pray the Christian way in Yoruba and how to sing Yoruba Christian songs, as the field notes below show:

> Mom said, "clap for Jesus"- "E patewo fun Jesu" and she repeated it in Yoruba too. The children were asked to read their Bible in English and their parents translated it for them in Yoruba. Kemi read the story of Moses. Dad corrected the words she could not pronounce well and used the recast to correct words she had mispronounced.

In the Oluronbi Family, the parents also used the Bible to help the children learn new Yoruba words. In addition, their children watched cartoons with Christian messages. This was used, as the parents commented, to support literacy development and to strengthen Christian beliefs.

In the Jimoh family, religious teachings and practices were also intricately connected to the biliteracy development of the children. For instance, in this family, every time the father taught the children a new word or sentence structure, he always connected it to Yoruba culture and the Quran (field notes). The mother was in charge of teaching children their religious practices (for example, she taught children how to do ablutions, the act of washing one's body as part of a religious ritual) and how to pray in an Islamic way. All these practices were taught in English and then translated to Yoruba for the children.

## Discussion

For New Literacy Studies, a "literacy event" represents the social context in which people interact with each other and written texts via reading and writing activities (Barton, 2012). The data in this study shows how focal parents engaged in a range of literacy events that reflected their social contexts. These literacy events were rule-governed, as they involved specific desired outcomes; however, what is significant is that they were not confined to formal education settings but occurred around the home (Barton, 2012).

Within the practices examined in this study, an intricate link between language and culture is noticable. For instance, when the families watched Yoruba movies or cartoons, they were not utilizing this activity simply as entertainment, but parents were intentional in using this family time together to teach their children new words in Yoruba while connecting this language to English. Research has

shown, that T.V. shows, such as cartoons stimulate thinking processes, encourage discussion, and the development of communication skills (Özay Köse, 2013; Sezek et al., 2013). Children's exposure to Yoruba cartoons and movies was guided by parents, who carefully chose the content to support biliteracy and the learning of the Yorùbá culture, identity, and values (Adelowo, 2020; Melo-Pfeiffer, 2015).

He (2009) explains that heritage language learners are "socio historically connected with the target culture and yet experientially displaced from it" (p. 11); thus, in helping their children to develop bilingualism and biliteracy, all parents considered that speaking Yoruba to their children was a major way to help them learn the language and connect it to their identity. In addition, they related this language learning to Yoruba cultural knowledge through the teaching of poems, folk stories, songs and proverbs. This points to their understanding of language as key to identity building and as a means of cultural identification (Park & Sarkar, 2007; Canagarajah, 2021).

In addition, it was remarkable to witness the high regard these parents have for the Yoruba language, even while living in an English dominant environment like the U.S. For them, English was not the only language associated with success. From their own experiences, they had gathered that becoming bilingual was more important than learning English only. This understanding clearly goes against the prevalent monolingual ideologies espoused by many in the U.S. (Palmer et al., 2019), and adheres to the findings of researchers such as Falola & Afolayan (2020), who maintain that children who are able to speak in their native language and English (or the majority language) demonstrate higher academic achievement throughout their life.

Since these parents were all born in Nigeria and came to the U.S. as adults, it appears that their own engagement with literacy, diverse linguistic ideological understandings, and awareness of the important role of Yoruba in their own educational, personal, cultural, and academic trajectories had an impact on their consideration of the academic and linguistic prospects of their children. Noteworthy is how their actions point to a holistic view of language and a dynamic bilingualism (García, 2009) reflected in the way they engaged with language and literacy in their homes. The data shows that these parents viewed their children as bilingual speakers with a linguistic repertoire comprised of a variety of linguistic features. Thus, instead of trying to separate the learning of the two languages (English and Yoruba), these parents engaged in translanguaging. These parents drew on the languages available to the children to maximize their communicative skills and language learning potential. Rather than focusing on what the children could not do with the language, they provided many opportunities for them to engage with literacy through a myriad of literacy events (Barton, 2012); their focus was on how children were enacting their various practices (García 2016). Translanguaging helped families to maintain a smooth flow of communication at home by encouraging the speakers to use the linguistic tools they possessed to aid with comprehension and communication. In addition, the use of translanguaging may also be an indication that these parents, as bi/multilingual speakers themselves, may have understood the importance of supporting their children as they acquired a linguistic repertoire comprised of linguistic features from multiple language systems.

In all the recorded events, the focal parents demonstrated the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical approach centered on multilingualism (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021) that validated and humanized the bilingual and biliterate development of their children and their learning processes (García & Leiva, 2014). The focal parents showed preferences towards the children's bilingual ability, which concurs with what Wilson's (2021) study found regarding parental language ideologies. According to Wilson (2021), parental ideologies regarding language learning appear to have evolved in favor of more positive attitudes towards language mixing and more fluid linguistic practices.

The findings from this study offer possibilities to consider how the use of translanguaging at home can be a significant way to counter the monolingual bias present in U.S. school contexts and education policy (Fishman, 2013). As Palmer et al. (2019) state, "we must make ongoing efforts to interrogate and transform existing power structures, especially considering that U.S. schools operate within and are shaped by a context defined by English hegemony" (p. 124). We argue that the parents in this study were actively engaging in efforts to contest monolingual approaches to bilingualism, in which languages are kept strictly separated, by using their own bi/multilingual learning experiences to support their children's development of bilingualism and biliteracy.

Another important aspect of the findings is how these parents considered language learning as part of engaging in the community. Since these families were living in the U.S., and the children were immersed in the language and culture associated with the English language while at school, the parents deliberately chose to focus on creating ways for the children to also engage with the language and culture of their homeland. Moreover, their consideration of language as a shared property of the community seems to have encouraged them to teach their children common values of their culture, at times relying on religious texts such as the Bible and the Quran. This was done to support their children's understanding of their culture and community norms and ensuring their successful participation in it (Akintayo, 2009; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Salami et al., 2017). For these parents, there was no separation between learning the Yoruba language and engaging with the community of Yoruba speakers. In this regard, Clark (2009) reminds us that the complex interrelationship between globalization, multilingualism, and identity can be better appreciated by uncovering the multiple ways in which individuals engage and invest in representations of languages and identities in their everyday lives. As languages become detached from their traditional places, because they mobilize with people, the language resources and people's repertoires play a significant role in individuals' interactions and their acquisition of their culture and identity in their new environments (Borland, 2006; Canagarajah, 2021; Tovares & Kamwangamalu, 2017; Blommaert, 2003; Heller, 2003).

Finally, it is important to highlight how the support these parents provided for their children through home literacy practices, cultural practices, and community involvement was key in supporting the children's bilingual and biliteracy development in an English-dominated environment (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013). These parents' actions demonstrate how Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) sociocultural theory operates. In these families, the gap between their children's current and future linguistic competence was bridged by assistance from others. Learning demands social interaction so that the learner can internalize knowledge out of external action and interactions. In the process of language learning, a variety of internal developmental functions are activated; however, this process can only happen when the child interacts with other peers or the adults in the surrounding environment (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

## Conclusion and Limitations

This study investigated the home literacy and cultural practices of three Yoruba-speaking families living in the U.S. Midwest. The study identified a range of home literacy and cultural practices employed by the focal parents to support the development of their children's bilingualism and biliteracy while living in an English-dominant environment. Considering that there is a dearth of research examining the linguistic and cultural practices of African immigrant families living in the U.S., and even less research has been conducted with Yoruba speaking families, this study is of great significance.

This research inquiry opened a window that allowed us to see how the focal families devised different ways to support the bilingualism and biliteracy development of their children at home. These homes were spaces for rich literacy practices guided by the family's cultural heritage and norms (Dixon & Wu, 2014). The study shows how these parents understood the inextricable connection between language and culture and used this awareness to support the linguistic and socio-cultural development of their children. The findings from this study can be used as resources to support other immigrant families that might be experiencing similar circumstances in other sociocultural contexts. In addition, they can be helpful for school communities in the U.S. as they support the learning journeys of multilingual and multicultural learners.

Lastly, it is important to note that this study includes a very small sample of participants, who are living in a specific geographical region of the U.S. Thus, we do not intend to generalize the findings to other populations or locales. Nevertheless, we still consider that these findings advance the existent understanding of home cultural and literacy practices of African immigrant families and offer important knowledge to bridge the gap between school and home literacy practices. Further research is needed to investigate if there is a difference in the literacy and cultural practices of parents of African descent, who have been born in the U.S., versus those born in Africa. Research should also consider whether there is a difference in the investment of immigrant parents teaching children born in the U.S. compared with teaching children born outside the U.S. Finally, we deem important the research that investigates the experiences of African children to ascertain how they make sense of their own sociocultural and language learning processes.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interests were reported by the authors.

## References

Adelowo, A. G. (2020). The influence of modern movies on Yorùbá culture and tradition amongst the Yorùbá of Ogun state. *International Journal of Advanced Mass Communication and Journalism*, *1*(2), 27–36.

Akande, A. (2016). Migration and the Yorùbá Myth of Origin. *European Journal of Arts*, *1*, 36–47.

Akintayo, M. O. (2009). *Parenting among Pentecostal Nigerian Yoruba in the United States: A phenomenological approach* [Ph.D., Capella University]. https://www.proquest.com/docview/305164165/abstract/CFD1F555A5C04EDEPQ/1

Barton, D. (2012). Ethnographic approaches to literacy research. *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, 1–7.

Blommaert, J. (2003). Commentary: A sociolinguistics of globalization. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *7*(4), 607–623. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2003.00244.x

Borland, H. (2006). Intergenerational language transmission in an established Australian migrant community: what makes the difference?" *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2006, (180), pp. 23-41.

Canagarajah, S. (2021). Rethinking mobility and language: From the Global South. *The Modern Language Journal*, 105, 2, pp. 570-582.

Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2021). Pedagogical translanguaging. *Elements in Language Teaching*. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009029384

Clark, J. S. B. (2009). *Multilingualism, citizenship and identity: Voices of youth and symbolic investments in an urban, globalized world.*

Cook, V. (2008). *Second language learning and language teaching* (4th ed.). Hodder Education.

Creese, A., Bhatt, A., Bhojani, N., & Martin, P. (2006). Multicultural, heritage and learner identities in complementary schools. *Language and Education.*, *20*. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500780608668708

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.

Denscombe, M. (2010). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects* (4th ed.). Open University Press.

Dixon, L. Q., & Wu, S. (2014). Home language and literacy practices among immigrant second-language learners. *Language Teaching*, *47*(4), 414–449. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444814000160

Duff, P. A. (2015). Transnationalism, multilingualism, and identity. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *35*, 57–80. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026719051400018X

Falola, T., & Afolayan, M. O. (2020). A history of the six-year primary project in the use of Yoruba as the medium of primary education. *Yoruba Studies Review*, *4*(2), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.32473/ysr.v4i2.130046

Forde, D. (2017). *The Yoruba-speaking peoples of South-Western Nigeria: Western Africa part IV*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315297613

Fishman, J. (1989). *Language and ethnicity in minority sociolinguistic perspective.* Multilingual Matters.

Fishman, Joshua A. (1991). *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages.* Multilingual Matters.

Fishman, J. A. (2001). *Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing language shift: A 21st Century perspective.* Multilingual Matters.

Fishman, J. A. (2013). Non-English-language ethnic community schools in the USA. *Literacy in School and Society: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 25.

Fogle, W. (2012). *Second language socialization and learner agency: Adoptive family talk.* Multilingual Matters.

Fogle, W. (2013). Parental ethnotheories and family language policy in transnational adoptive families. *Language Policy, 12*(1). 83–102.

Gafaranga, J. (2010). Medium request: Talking language shift into Being. *Language in Society 32*(2). 241–270.

García, O. (2009). Emergent bilinguals and TESOL: What's in a name? *Tesol Quarterly*, *43*(2), 322–326.

García, O., & Leiva, C. (2014). Theorizing and enacting translanguaging for social justice. In A. Blackledge & A. Creese (Eds.), *Heteroglossia as Practice and Pedagogy* (pp. 199–216). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7856-6_11

He, A. W. (2009). *Toward an Identity Theory of the Development of Chinese as a Heritage Language.* https://www.international.ucla.edu/asia/article/51495

Heller, M. (2003). Globalization, the new economy, and the commodification of language and identity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *7*(4), 473–492. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2003.00238.x

Ice, A. (2020). Raising bilingual and biliterate heritage speakers of Russian in a monolingual context: The impact of family and supplementary education language policies [ProQuest Information & Learning (US)]. In *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences* (Vol. 81, Issues 6-A). https://www.proquest.com/docview/2376297034/2169DB4212A34F46PQ/1

John-Steiner, V., & Mahn, H. (1996). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework. Educational Psychologist, 31(3/4), 191-206.

Joseph, B. (2018). Why Nigerian immigrants are one of the most successful ethnic group in the U.S. [Medium]. Retrieved from https://medium.com/@joecarleton/why-nigerian-immigrants-are-the-most-successful-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s-23a7ea5a0832

Kheirkhah, M. & Cekaite, A. (2015). Language maintenance in a multilingual family. *Multilingua*, *34*(3): 319–346.

Kigamwa, J. C. (2016). Salient factors in the acquisition and maintenance of heritage languages among US-born children of African immigrants. *Linguistica Online*, 17.

Kremin, L. V., Arredondo, M. M., Hsu, L. S.J., Satterfield, T., & Kovelman, I. (2019). The effects of Spanish heritage language literacy on English reading for Spanish–English bilingual children in the US. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *22*(2), 192–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1239692

Li, M. (2005). The role of parents in Chinese heritage-language schools. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *29*(1), 197–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2005.10162831

Li, W. (1994). *Three generations, two languages, one family: Language choice and language shift in a Chinese community in Britain*. Multilingual Matters.

Li, W. (2012). Language policy and practice in multilingual, transnational families and beyond. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development 33*(1). 1–2.

Lin, S. H. (2015). Dynamic relationships between beliefs and practices: How Chinese families support their children's biliteracy acquisition [ProQuest Information & Learning (US)]. In *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences* (Vol. 76, Issues 5-A(E)). https://www.proquest.com/docview/1735929449/126DE9C37B24D91PQ/1

Luykx, A. (2005). Children as socializing agents: Family language policy in situations of language shift. Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism (ISB), 1407–1414.

Meyer Pitton, L. (2013). From language maintenance to bilingual parenting: Negotiating behavior and language choice at the dinner table in binational-bilingual families. *Multilingual Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication 32(*4). 507–526.

Nesteruk, O. (2010). Heritage language maintenance and loss among the children of Eastern European immigrants in the USA. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *31*(3), 271–286. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630903582722

Ojha, L. P. (2020). *Family language policy and heritage language development of children in transnational immigrant families: A case of two Nepali families in the US* [M.A., Minnesota State University, Mankato]. https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/2407359655/abstract/DF950354A3324D5DPQ/1

Oloruntoba, S.O., Falola, T. (Eds). *The Palgrave Handbook of Africa and the Changing Global Order*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77481-3_7

Omobowale, A. O., Omobowale, M. O., & Falase, O. S. (2019). The context of children in Yoruba popular culture. *Global Studies of Childhood, 9*(1), 18-28. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610618815381

Özay Köse, E. (2013). Effects of cartoons on students' achievement and attitudes in biology teaching (endocrine system). *Kastamonu Üniversitesi Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi*, *21*(3), Article 3.

Palmer, D. K., Cervantes-Soon, C., Dorner, L., & Heiman, D. (2019). Bilingualism, biliteracy, biculturalism, and critical consciousness for all: Proposing a fourth fundamental goal for two-way dual language education. *Theory Into Practice*, *58*(2), 121–133. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2019.1569376

Park, S., & Sarkar, M. (2007). Parents' attitudes toward heritage language maintenance for their children and their efforts to help their children maintain the heritage language: A case study of Korean-Canadian immigrants. *Language*, *Culture and Curriculum*, 223–235. https://doi.org/10.2167/lcc337.0

Partners, L. C. (2019, October 30). *Top US States with the largest foreign-born populations*. LCR Capital Partners. https://www.lcrcapital.com/blog/top-us-states-foreign-born/

Paugh, Amy L. (2005). Multilingual play: Children's code-switching, role play, and agency in Dominica, West Indies. *Language in Society 34*(1). 63–86.

Pavlenko, A., & Lantolf, J. P. (2000). Second language learning as participation and the (re)construction of selves. *Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning* (pp. 155–177). Oxford University Press.

Polinsky, M., & Kagan, O. (2007). Heritage languages: In the 'wild' and in the classroom. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *1*(5), 368–395. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2007.00022.x

Polinsky, M., & Scontras, G. (2020). A roadmap for heritage language research. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, *23*(1), 50–55. Cambridge Core. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728919000555

Riehl, C. (2010). Discontinuous language spaces. In Peter Auer & Jürgen Schmidt (Eds.), L*anguage and Space: An international handbook of linguistic variation*. Volume 1.

Routley, N. (2022, November 22). *Countries with the highest (and lowest) proportion of immigrants*. Visual Capitalist. https://www.visualcapitalist.com/countries-with-the-highest-proportion-of-immigrants/

Salami, B., Hirani, S. A. A., Meherali, S., Amodu, O., & Chambers, T. (2017). Parenting practices of African immigrants in destination countries: A qualitative research synthesis. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, *36*(1), 20–30. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2017.04.016

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed). SAGE.

Samarth, B. (2013). *Attrition & maintenance of home languages in the Indian Diaspora in the United States* [Ph.D., The University of Wisconsin - Madison]. https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/1428389101/abstract/88A40ADB0EE341C5PQ/1

Schwartz, M., & Verschik, A. (2013). *Achieving success in family language policy: Parents, children and educators in interaction*.

Scribner, S., & Cole, M. (1981). *The psychology of literacy*. Harvard University Press.

Sezek, F., Kose, E., & Kaya, E. (2013). Effects of cartoons on students' achievement and attitudes in biology teaching. *Energy Education Science and Technology Part B: Social and Educational Studies*, *5*(1), 1–10.

House-Soremekun, B. (2022). The African Diaspora in the United States. In S. O. Oloruntoba, S.O. & T. Falola (Eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Africa and the Changing Global Order*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77481-3_7

The Urban Child Institute. (2013). *Data Book 2013. The State of Children in Memphis and Shelby County*. http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/resources/publications/data-book-2013/family-home

Toppelberg, C. O., & Collins, B. A. (2010). Language, culture, and adaptation in immigrant children. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, *19*(4), 697–717. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2010.07.003

Tovares, A., & Kamwangamalu, N. (2017). Migration trajectories: Implications for language proficiencies and identities. In S. Canagarajah (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Migration and Language* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315754512

Tuominen, A. (1999). Who decides the home language? A look at multilingual families. *International Journal of Sociology of Language 140*(1). 59–76.

UNHCR. (2016). *UNHCR global trends—Forced displacement in 2016*. UNHCR Global Trends - Forced Displacement in 2016. https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychologocal process*. Havard University Press.

Wang, W. (2018). Cases of heritage language maintenance among Asian immigrant families in the Southwestern United States [Ph.D., New Mexico State University]. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2386848063/abstract/75831432CB304FE8PQ/1

Wei, L. (1994). *Three generations, two languages, one family: Language choice and language shift in a Chinese community in Britain*. Multilingual Matters.

Wei, L. (2012). Language policy and practice in multilingual, transnational families and beyond. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development 33*(1). 1–2.

Wilson, S. (2021). To mix or not to mix: Parental attitudes towards translanguaging and language management choices. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, *25*(1), 58–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006920909902

Zhang, D., & Slaughter-Defoe, D. T. (2009). Language attitudes and heritage language maintenance among Chinese immigrant families in the USA. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *22*(2), 77–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310902935940

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025, pp. 62-82**
**DOI 10.14434/ijlcle.v5i.36895**

# Multicultural Education Contents, Attitudes, Practices, and Challenges in Nigeria's Social Studies Education

Adaobiagu Obiagu, Confidence Onyekachi,
Roseline Amadi, and Emmanuel Eze

## Abstract

Harnessing Nigeria's rich cultural diversity could hasten multi-dimensional development. This study endeavours to contribute to fostering peacebuilding and social cohesion within Nigeria's multi-ethnic landscape, grappling with numerous conflicts. Specifically, we investigate the teaching practices, attitudes, and obstacles encountered by social studies teachers in delivering Multicultural Education (MCE) contents. Employing an embedded qualitative and quantitative mixed methods approach, data were gathered through a closed-ended questionnaire, an open-ended questionnaire, and an observation checklist within the Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu state, Southeast Nigeria. Our research encapsulates responses from 267 students, insights from 31 educators, and observations conducted in 18 social studies classrooms across six schools. Our findings reveal a notable disparity: while educators exhibit a positive and high inclination toward multicultural attitudes, the implementation of multicultural practices remains considerably deficient. The low teachers' multicultural practices are echoed in the perspectives of both teachers and students and substantiated by direct observations conducted during this research. Moreover, deficiencies in MCE practices are due to teacher scepticism, limited knowledge of diversity issues in education, and a dearth of adequate learning resources. Policy reforms and actionable changes in MCE practices are required to address prevalent disparities and improve the efficacy of MCE in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Cultural diversity, Multicultural attitudes, Multicultural education, Nigeria, Social studies, Teaching practices

**Contact:** Adaobiagu Obiagu, University of Nigeria & University of Toronto
ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8591-0489
E-mail: adaobiagu.obiagu@unn.edu.ng
Confidence Onyekachi, University of Nigeria
E-mail: confidencechinelo1505@gmail.com
Roseline Amadi, University of Nigeria
E-mail: roseline.amadi.232194@unn.edu.ng
*Emmanuel Eze, University of Nigeria, University of Heidelberg & University of Münster
ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2007-2696
E-mail: eze.emma@unn.edu.ng

## Introduction

Multicultural Education (MCE), as elucidated by Banks (2014), emphasizes the significance of appreciating, valuing, and respecting students' diverse cultural and ideological backgrounds within their communities. This educational framework is similar to the elements of the funds of knowledge theory by González et al. (2006) underscoring the notion that all students deserve an education acknowledging and embracing their lived experiences and multifaceted identities, encompassing political, religious, ethnic, cultural, and gender diversities. Central to MCE is the regular integration of diverse perspectives and experiences into the curriculum, alongside the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies within classroom settings, as advocated by Sleeter (2001). This multifaceted approach not only nurtures students' multicultural awareness, knowledge, and competency but also acknowledges the potential of their cultural heritage as a valuable resource influencing their learning experiences (Gay, 2000).

In addition, Banks (2014) posits that MCE plays a pivotal role in dispelling stereotypes, mitigating unchecked misunderstandings, and fostering understanding, appreciation, and respect for cultural diversity among students within their school and broader community environments. Sleeter (1996) further underscores the importance of MCE goals by emphasizing the acquisition of skills and knowledge for engaging with diverse cultural perspectives. Similarly, prior studies by Ladson-Billings (2022) and Gay (2000) underscore the empowering potential of MCE, in facilitating societal inclusivity and equity. Additionally, Sleeter (2001) highlights the significance of a curriculum that respects and incorporates learners' diverse cultural heritages. Notably, Parkhouse and Bennett (2023) emphasize the beneficial impact of culturally responsive teaching, particularly for students from marginalized communities.

Compelling evidence highlighting diverse approaches and benefits of MCE in various settings is available. For instance, Durden et al. (2015) conducted a study in the Midwestern United States exploring culturally relevant pedagogy in preschool classrooms. They observed teachers actively engaging cultural agents from the community to educate children about different cultures and languages. Utilizing resources such as books, puzzles, family pictures, and children's artwork, educators curated a diverse physical environment encompassing language, ethnicity, and gender diversities. Similarly, Sturdivant and Alanis (2019) documented a teacher's intentional design of curriculum lessons that involved families, thereby integrating culturally representative components tailored to students' interests. This deliberate practice significantly fostered inclusivity within the classroom environment. Moreover, other studies by Sleeter (2001) and Gay (2000) emphasize that students engaged in MCE initiatives feel a sense of inclusion in the curriculum. This inclusive approach enhances their learning experience and cultivates a sense of safety, support, and value, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds.

The foregoing benefits of MCE are cogent reasons for centering teachers' multicultural practices and attitudes in teacher development programmes. Hence, the necessity of investigating the ongoing implementation of MCE by teachers stands as imperative, particularly within multicultural landscapes such as Nigeria, the focal point of this study. Nigeria, home to a population exceeding 200 million people, encompasses a rich tapestry of over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages, epitomizing Nigeria's cultural diversity. Predominantly, the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo ethnic groups occupy the northern, southwestern, and southeastern regions, respectively. Furthermore, the country hosts significant religious affiliations, primarily Christianity and Islam, alongside a minority practicing traditional African religions. Islam holds prominence in the North, while Christianity prevails in the South, encompassing diverse cultural and religious expressions across the nation.

This rich mosaic of diversity in Nigeria emphasizes the compelling necessity for effective MCE implementation, achievable by teachers holding positive multicultural attitudes and practices. Following González et al. (2006) funds of knowledge theory, the potential of MCE lies in teachers' capacity to harness Nigeria's cultural richness from students' diverse lived experiences in their local communities, which could propel development across various realms, including the economy, education, and socio-political domains. For instance, research by Amalu et al. (2020) underscores the profound impact of cultural diversity on tourism development, triggering amplified family income, heightened government revenue, increased employment opportunities, infrastructural advancements, and improved access to basic amenities. Additionally, as highlighted by Nzeadibe et al. (2015), MCE fosters a sense of cultural sensitivity within development initiatives, consequently reducing conflicts and indirectly bolstering the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental.

Nigeria grapples with multiple challenges, including ethnic power struggles, religious intolerance, poverty, corruption, and economic inequality, as highlighted by Akunne et al. (2018), Obiagu et al. (2020), and Salawu (2010). These factors underpin the widespread and entrenched ethnoreligious conflicts prevalent in the country. Odey and Ugar (2023) recently showed the persistently unaddressed roots of violent conflicts in Nigeria, notably within educational contexts, portraying a concerning lack of visible solutions. Also, Moland's (2015) research focusing on a non-formal radio-based MCE program revealed a tendency to avoid addressing structural issues such as ethnic and religious complexities within MCE. Concerns arose over equitable representation of diverse groups and ensuring authentic portrayals of diversity, limiting the program's effectiveness in addressing pertinent societal conflicts.

Recognizing MCE as a pivotal strategy for mitigating conflict arising from intolerance and stereotypes, our study's focus lies on the imperative role of educators implementing MCE. The positive attitude of educators toward MCE practices, profound understanding of its essence, familiarity with effective practices, and adeptness in navigating implementation challenges are essential. Consequently, our research in Nigeria aims to examine these critical aspects, striving to enhance MCE practices and their potential to address societal challenges. While the social studies curriculum in Nigeria incorporates MCE content, prevalent societal issues such as ethnic and religious intolerance persist, indicating inadequacies in practical MCE implementation. For instance, Obiagu et al. (2020) revealed in their quasi-experimental study on peace education in social studies that, despite exposure to peace-oriented content, students retained troubling perceptions about violent behaviours by ethnic others, undermining efforts to discourage social conflicts and enhance social cohesion. Furthermore, incidents of school bullying, oppression, assault, victimization, ethnic and religious misrepresentations, and discrimination persist, resulting in severe consequences such as physical harm, sexual molestation, and fatalities which are rife (Preti, 2008; Obiagu et al., 2020; Okagbue et al., 2022).

Despite the growing issues suggesting ineffective MCE, research assessing the attitudes, practices, and challenges faced by social studies teachers in implementing MCE content remains scarce in Nigeria and similar developing country contexts. Therefore, this study aims to address the overarching questions: What are the teaching practices and attitudes of social studies teachers concerning MCE content? What challenges do they encounter in implementing MCE content within the social studies curriculum? The primary objective of this study is to explore and analyse these critical aspects. While our study focuses on a local context in Nigeria, its findings hold the potential to contribute significantly to similar multicultural settings, particularly within Africa. Moreover, these findings can spark meaningful dialogues aimed at enhancing MCE and fostering increased cultural tolerance, understanding, and respect within an increasingly globalised world.

## Context of this study: MCE in Nigeria

Nigeria's social studies curricula, from the 2007 revision to the latest 2018 edition, incorporate MCE content encompassing diverse topics such as culture, social values, marriage traditions, and social conflicts. These MCE-related themes are integral components of the basic education level covering Primary 1 to 6 and Junior Secondary School (JSS) 1 to 3 (i.e., Grades 1 to 9). In this study, our focus centres on the MCE contents within the Social Studies curriculum. We categorize these MCE-related topics into two segments: direct and indirect/hidden content. Table I delineates the direct MCE contents prevalent in the Primary 1 to JSS 3 Social Studies curriculum, while Table 2 highlights the indirect or concealed MCE components emphasized.

**Table 1.** *Direct MCE Contents in Nigerian Social Studies Curriculum*

| Class | Topic | Contents | Methods & materials |
|---|---|---|---|
| Primary 1 | Meaning and types of culture | 1. Meaning of culture - Peoples' way of life that include dressing, dancing, eating.<br>2. Types of culture – Material and non-material culture. | 1. Pictures of people wearing traditional dresses.<br>2. Pictures showing material and non-material culture. |
| Primary 2 | Foods we eat in our culture as family members. | 1. Some Nigerian foods are Yam, Eba, Amala, Tuwo Shinkafa, plantain, Rice, Beans Cocoyam, pounded yam, Akpu, Starch, etc.<br>2. Consequences of eating together as a family e.g. promotes communalism, happiness, family unity and loyalty, etc. | 1. Pupils' text and workbooks.<br>2. Picture showing the different types of food in our culture.<br>3. Picture of happy moods of people eating together in the family. |
| | Greetings and respect to elders in our culture. | 1. Greeting is a way of showing respect to people and appreciating them.<br>2. Forms of greeting include kneeling, prostrating, shaking of hands, clenching of fists, etc.<br>3. Greeting promotes tolerance, good neighbourliness, courtesy, friendliness, etc. | 1. Pictures of different ways of greeting.<br>2. Video clips. |
| Primary 3 | Types of marriages in our community. | 1. Meaning of marriage.<br>● Lawful and acceptable union of a man and woman to make up a family.<br>2. Types of marriages: polygamy, monogamy etc. | 1. Pictures of husbands and wives. (Couples).<br>2. Pictures or photographs that show types of marriages. |
| | Various ways of getting married and the objects used in the ceremony. | 1. Marriage practices in Nigeria e.g. agreement by the two families by paying the bride price.<br>● Religious marriage either in the court or mosque.<br>● Traditional marriage or court wedding.<br>2. Objects used in marriage ceremonies: Wine, kolanut, food items, wedding gown, money, services, etc. | 1. Bible and Qur'an.<br>2. Picture of church, mosque and shrine.<br>3. Audio visual aid.<br>4. Textbooks, resource persons, marriage objects.<br>5. Real objects.<br>6. Marriage album. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Culture | 1. Meaning of culture – way of life of a people.<br>2. Elements of culture – languages, foods, clothes, religions, festivals and ceremonies.<br>3. Why different people have different customs.<br>● Differences in histories<br>● Differences in geographical position<br>● Differences in external influences | 1. Pictures of dressing from different cultural areas.<br>2. Pictures showing different ways of greetings, eating etc,<br>3. Real cultural materials and objects. |
| Primary 4 | Other people's beliefs and traditions. | 1. Ways our beliefs and tradition differ from and similar to others.<br>● The names they call God<br>● The methods of worship<br>● The style of dressing, etc.<br>2. Some of the values that can be promoted with better understanding of cultural differences include respect of other people's views, beliefs and traditions; fairness; unity; good neighbourliness etc. | 1. Real copies of Bible, Qur'an, Candle, dresses associated with different religious groups, etc.<br>2. Pictures of people with different cultural backgrounds and beliefs in an interaction. |
| Primary 5 | Unity in cultural diversity. | 1. Meaning of culture, diversity and unity.<br>● Culture as a people's way of life<br>● Unity refers to oneness.<br>● Diversity refers to differences.<br>2. Unity in cultural diversity refers to oneness in spite of differences.<br>3. Ways of promoting unity in cultural diversity in our community.<br>● Making friends with mates who are not from our ethnic group.<br>● Eating foods from other people's culture.<br>● Wearing dresses from other culture.<br>● Learning to speak languages of other ethnic groups.<br>● Being truthful in your interaction with people etc. | 1. Relevant pictures and charts.<br>2. Relevant pictures and charts. |
| JSS 1 | Meaning and characteristics of culture. | 1. Meaning off culture- a total way of the life of the people.<br>2. Components of culture – material and non-material culture.<br>3. Features of culture – language, food and dressing, religion, technology/craft, etc.<br>4. Characteristics of culture<br>● We learn culture.<br>● It tells us how different activities can be carried out.<br>● It allows a range of permissible behaviours, etc.<br>5. Cultural differences. | 1. Motion pictures of culture.<br>2. Pictures of cultural display.<br>3. Visits to museum.<br>4. Regalia. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Similarities and differences among cultures in Nigeria. | 1. Cultural similarities in Nigeria.<br>2. Cultural differences in Nigeria.<br>3. Shared norms and values of Nigerian communities. | 1. Motion pictures of culture<br>2. Pictures of cultural display<br>3. Regalia |

*Source*: Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) 2012, 2018.

**Table 2.** *Indirect MCE Contents in Nigerian Social Studies Curriculum*

| Class | Topic | Contents | Methods & materials |
|---|---|---|---|
| Primary 1 | Values that show good morals in our society | Examples of morals to show what is right i.e. greeting, respect, loyalty, kindness, honesty, contentment, tolerance, etc and what is wrong e.g. stealing, bullying, fighting, lying etc. | ● Cartoons<br>● Posters<br>● ROM film and video clips.<br>● Regalia<br>● Photographs.<br>● Exhibits, etc. |
| JSS I | Positive group behaviours. | 1. Types of positive group behaviours<br>● Mass action.<br>● Communal labour.<br>● Joining a protest or march.<br>● Participating in a fight.<br>● Acting patriotically. | ● Simulation games.<br>● Resource persons.<br>● Pictograms. |
| JSS 3<br><br>Most hidden multicultural contents (values) are emphasized in civic education curriculum. These values include cooperation, honesty, tolerance, integrity, etc. Only few are found in Social Studies curriculum. | 1. Promoting peaceful living in our society. | 1. Meaning of peace.<br>2. Types of peace – positive and negative peace.<br>3. Importance of peace.<br>4. Ways of promoting peace. | ● Guided questions.<br>● Debates,<br>● Resource person (Senior Police Officer).<br>● Role play.<br>● Guided class discussion.<br>● Art works.<br>● Films and videos. |
| | 2. Social conflicts. | 1. Meaning of conflict.<br>2. Types of conflict.<br>3. Examples of conflict – inter-ethnic conflict, communal/intra-ethnic conflict.<br>4. Causes of conflict. | ● Dramatization.<br>● Discussion.<br>● Simulation.<br>● Radio & Tv.<br>● Documentaries of conflict situations.<br>● Pictures. |
| | 3. Managing and resolving conflicts. | 1. Conflict management and resolution e.g. dialogue, compromise, arbitration, mediating, litigation.<br>2. Attributes required of conflict resolution e.g. mutual understanding, | ● Demonstrations.<br>● Field trip to Alternative Dispute Resolution Centre (ADR). |

| | |
|---|---|
| | respect for rule of law, tolerance, self-control, respect for opposing views. |

*Source*: Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) 2012, 2018.

## Methods

This descriptive research employed an embedded qualitative and quantitative mixed methods approach, utilising various instruments including a closed-ended questionnaire, an open-ended questionnaire, and an observation schedule to gather data on teachers' multicultural attitudes, practices, understanding, and challenges. The study was conducted within Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA) in Enugu State, southeast Nigeria. The study population encompassed teachers and students from the middle (Primary 4-6) and upper (Junior Secondary 1-3) levels of basic education institutions situated in Nsukka. The upper basic education tier in Nsukka LGA comprised 6,959 students and 47 social studies teachers, summing up to a total of 7,006 individuals across 28 secondary schools. Although specific figures for middle and upper schools were unavailable, all primary school teachers were considered social studies instructors owing to the structural placement within the primary school teaching framework in Nigeria.

Drawing upon the assumption that schools with larger student populations would typically employ a higher number of teachers, our study utilized a convenience sampling approach to select six schools boasting the highest student enrolments. Within these schools, a random sampling technique was employed to select participants for the study. The study sample comprised 267 students drawn from the selected schools, including three junior secondary schools and three senior primary schools, with 45 students from each school. The students' ages ranged from 8 to 17 years, with a mean age of 11.74 years. Furthermore, the study involved the purposive sampling technique to encompass all social studies teachers within the sampled school classes. A total of 31 social studies teachers participated in the study, comprising 17 teachers from primary schools and 14 from secondary schools. Comprehensive participant profiles are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** *Study Participants Profile*

| | | **Teachers** | | **Students** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Category | | F | % | F | % |
| *Gender* | Male | 12 | 38.7 | 100 | 37.5 |
| | Female | 19 | 61.3 | 167 | 62.5 |
| *Class* | Primary 4 | 9 | 29.0 | 47 | 17.6 |
| | Primary 5 | 3 | 9.7 | 89 | 33.3 |
| | Primary 6 | 5 | 16.1 | - | - |
| | Junior Secondary 1 | 4 | 12.9 | 44 | 16.5 |
| | Junior Secondary 2 | 7 | 22.6 | 59 | 22.1 |
| | Junior Secondary 3 | 3 | 9.7 | 28 | 10.5 |
| *Age* | 21 – 30 years | 10 | 32.3 | | |
| | 31 – 40 years | 15 | 48.4 | | |
| | 41 – 50 years | 4 | 12.9 | | |
| | 51 years and above | 2 | 6.5 | | |
| *Educational Qualification* | Social Studies Education (SSE) | 15 | 48.4 | | |
| | Other SSE Courses | 8 | 25.8 | | |
| | Non-SSE Courses | 7 | 22.6 | | |
| | Non-Education Course | 1 | 3.2 | | |
| | 1 – 5 years | 14 | 45.2 | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Years of Experience* | 6 – 10 years | 11 | 35.5 |
| | 11 – 15 years | 3 | 9.7 |
| | 16 – 25 years | 1 | 3.2 |
| | 26 years and above | 2 | 6.5 |

Note. F = Frequency | % = Percentage

**Instruments for Data Collection**

Our research employed three distinct instruments for data collection: the Teachers' Multicultural Education Questionnaire (TMEQ), the Students' Multicultural Education Questionnaire (SMEQ), and the Multicultural Education Practice Observation Checklist (MEPOC), all designed and developed by the researchers. The TMEQ comprised both structured and open-ended items, utilizing a 4-point rating scale encompassing Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagreed (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). This questionnaire comprised two sections: Section A focused on gathering respondents' biodata, while Section B aimed to elicit information regarding teachers' attitudes, practices, and challenges encountered in implementing MCE content within the social studies curriculum of the Nsukka Local Government Area.

Section B of the TMEQ was organized into three distinct clusters corresponding to teachers' attitudes, practices, and encountered challenges in MCE. Cluster 1, adapted from Ponteroito, Baluch, Greig, and Rivera (1998), comprised 19 items and focused on gauging teachers' multicultural attitudes. Cluster 2, consisting of 14 items, aimed to assess social studies teachers' practices regarding MCE. To complement the data collected from Cluster 2 of the TMEQ, students' responses from the SMEQ were utilized. The SMEQ, structured into two sections, featured Section A collecting respondents' biodata. Section B of the SMEQ comprised a single cluster of 14 dichotomous (Yes/No) items, with items same as in Cluster 2 of the TMEQ, capturing students' perceptions of their teachers' multicultural practices. A dichotomously scored instrument was preferred for students' ease of response.

Additionally, Cluster 3 of the TMEQ encompassed three open-ended questions, facilitating direct input from field practitioners (i.e., teachers) regarding challenges encountered in implementing MCE content or practicing its principles. The choice of employing an open-ended questionnaire over an interview schedule stemmed from previous difficulties the researchers encountered in soliciting teacher participation in interviews. Furthermore, the MEPOC, comprised of ten dichotomous (Yes/No) items assessing multicultural presence within classrooms, was utilized alongside the classrooms' MCE practice observation schedule. The observation schedules were completed by the second and third authors.

The validation of these instruments involved a rigorous process, commencing with face validation by three distinguished research experts. Among these experts, one specialized in Measurement & Evaluation, while the other two were esteemed social science Education professionals from the Faculty of Education at the University of Nigeria. Recommendations provided by these experts led to revisions in the questionnaires, primarily focusing on enhancing item relevance and linguistic clarity. Pre-research trials were conducted to test the instruments' efficacy, where the students' questionnaire underwent trial testing with 20 junior social studies students. Simultaneously, the teachers' questionnaire underwent trial testing with ten teachers from a school situated outside the selected schools within Nsukka LGA, ensuring their non-participation in the study area. Subsequently, responses gathered from these trial tests were collated and subjected to analysis using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the instruments' internal consistency reliability.

The reliability coefficients obtained for the teacher's instrument demonstrated values of 0.64, 0.78, and 0.85 for Cluster 1, Cluster 2, and the overall instrument, respectively. Similarly, the reliability coefficient for the students' questionnaire was determined as 0.63. These coefficients, indicative of good internal consistency, were deemed acceptable for inclusion in the study based on established criteria (Field, 2013). Furthermore, ethical approval for the study was duly obtained from the ethics and project committee of the Department of Social Science Education at the University of Nigeria, ensuring adherence to ethical standards throughout the research process.

The fieldwork was conducted by the second and third authors, initiating the process by securing formal consent from the school administrators and participants within the selected six schools. Subsequently, the administration of questionnaires to social studies students and teachers took place. Notably, 267 students completed the questionnaires on-site, ensuring a comprehensive 100% return rate as the researchers successfully retrieved all completed measures. In contrast, while 39 teachers' questionnaires were distributed, only 31 completed measures were retrieved, accounting for a response rate of 79.49%. This slight discrepancy in response rates was observed among the teacher participants. Additionally, the observational component of the study encompassed a total of 18 classes: nine classes in primary schools and nine in junior secondary schools, meticulously observed by the second and third researchers.

The data collected through the Teachers' Multicultural Education Questionnaire (TMEQ) underwent analysis utilizing mean and standard deviation calculations. Employing a 4-item Likert scale, we established a criterion of 2.50 as the cut-off point for item acceptance, indicating the mean weight of each item on the scale. Consequently, any item scoring 2.50 or above signified agreement and positive multicultural attitudes or high multicultural practices, while items with a mean score below 2.50 indicated disagreement or negative multicultural attitudes or low cultural practices. For the analysis of dichotomous data obtained from the students' questionnaire and the observation schedule, a straightforward percentage analysis method was employed. Establishing a benchmark for acceptance at 60%, items scoring 60% and above indicated commendable or high levels of multicultural practices, whereas items falling below 60% suggested inadequate multicultural practices. Furthermore, to evaluate group differences in mean multicultural attitudes and practices among teacher variables, statistical techniques such as *t*-tests and ANOVA were utilized for comparative analysis.

## Findings

The findings of the study are reported below under three headings each representing each studied variable: multicultural attitudes, multicultural practices and MCE challenges. Important to note is that asterisked items are worded to indicate negative multicultural attitude or practice and hence reversed scored to get the true picture of the overall reported attitude or practice.

### Teachers' Multicultural Attitude

The collective mean score for teachers' multicultural attitudes registers at 3.01, with a standard deviation of .25 (Table 4). This mean score surpasses the established cut-off point of 2.50, indicating a prevalent high and positive disposition among teachers towards multiculturalism. Notably, teachers exhibited positive inclinations concerning their responsibility to cultivate multicultural awareness among students and to encourage an appreciation for cultural diversity. Across most items, teachers scored above the mean benchmark, except for items 5, 11, 15, and 17. These items reveal reservations among teachers. They expressed concerns, believing that educating students about cultural diversity might instigate conflicts within the classroom or society. Additionally, some teachers conveyed a lack

of necessity for multicultural training and expressed the opinion that fostering pride in one's culture does not fall under their purview as educators.

**Table 4.** *Responses to Teachers' Multicultural Attitudes*

| S/N | Items | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I am aware of the diversity of cultural backgrounds in my classroom | 3.58 | .56 |
| 2 | I find teaching a culturally diverse student group rewarding | 3.19 | .90 |
| 3 | Teaching methods need to be adapted to meet the needs of a culturally diverse student group | 3.54 | .72 |
| 4 | Teachers have the responsibility to be aware of their students' cultural backgrounds | 3.41 | .71 |
| 5 | It is not the teacher's responsibility to encourage pride in one's culture* | 2.41(2.58) | 1.14 |
| 6 | I believe that the teacher's role needs to be redefined to address the needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds | 3.19 | .87 |
| 7 | When dealing with bilingual children, communication styles often are interpreted as behavioural problems | 2.90 | .87 |
| 8 | As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes increasingly rewarding | 3.03 | .94 |
| 9 | I can learn a great deal from students with culturally different backgrounds | 3.70 | .46 |
| 10 | As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes increasingly challenging | 3.12 | 1.02 |
| 11 | Multicultural training for teachers is not necessary* | 2.29(2.70) | 1.10 |
| 12 | To be an effective teacher, one needs to be aware of cultural differences present in the classroom | 3.32 | .90 |
| 13 | Students should learn in English only* | 3.09(1.90) | .94 |
| 14 | Students should be prohibited from communicating in any other language in school apart from English* | 2.70(2.29) | 1.13 |
| 15 | Today's curriculum gives undue importance to multiculturalism and diversity* | 1.87(3.12) | .95 |
| 16 | Regardless of the makeup of my class, it is important for students to be aware of multicultural diversity | 3.32 | .74 |
| 17 | Teaching students about cultural diversity will only create conflict in the classroom or the society* | 2.41(2.58) | 1.11 |
| 18 | Being multiculturally aware is not relevant for social studies* | 2.54(2.43) | 1.12 |
| 19 | I believe it is the teacher's role to teach students to appreciate other students' culture | 3.51 | .85 |
| | **Multicultural Attitude of Teachers** | **3.01** | **.25** |

*Note*: * = used to show reversed scored items that indicate poor attitude. Mean scores in brackets represent scores of the items when unreversed. N=31

The mean scores of categorized responses are presented in Table 5. Statistical analyses, including *t*-tests and one-way ANOVA, were conducted on the data considering different groups across studied categories (gender, years of teaching experience, class, and educational qualification of teachers). The outcomes revealed that there were no statistically significant differences observed in the mean scores of multicultural attitudes across these studied categories. However, the mean scores of male teachers were marginally higher compared to female teachers in terms of multicultural attitudes. Likewise, teachers with over 10 years of teaching experience exhibited higher mean scores in multicultural attitudes. Moreover, primary school teachers demonstrated comparatively higher levels of multicultural attitudes than their secondary school counterparts. Furthermore, an interesting

observation unfolded concerning age groups, as older teachers (aged 41 and above) showcased higher levels of multicultural attitudes in contrast to younger teachers (aged 21 to 40 years) (Table 5).

**Table 5.** *Mean Scores Based on the Study's Variables*

| Variables | **Gender** | | **Teaching experience (in years)** | | | | | **Educational qualification** | | | | **Teacher's age (in years)** | | | | **Teacher's class** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | 1-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-25 | 26+ | SOS | SSE | EDU | Non-EDU | 21-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51+ | Middle basic (Primary 4,5,6) | Upper basic (JSS 1,2,3) |
| | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) |
| Multicultural attitude | 3.08 (.23) | 2.96 (.25) | 2.99 (.27) | 2.95 (.22) | 3.12 (.19) | 2.64 | 3.23 (.40) | 3.01 (.29) | 2.95 (.23) | 3.05 (.18) | 3.21 | 2.96 (.32) | 2.97 (.18) | 3.14 (.13) | 3.23 (.41) | 3.07 (.22) | 2.93 (.26) |
| Multicultural practice | 2.33 (.39) | 2.31 (.18) | 2.24 (.32) | 2.38 (.23) | 2.29 (.26) | 3.21 | 2.42 (.10) | 2.42 (.24) | 2.12 (.34) | 2.33 (.16) | 2.28 | 2.21 (.36) | 2.32 (.13) | 2.54 (.41) | 2.42 (.10) | 2.28 (.29) | 2.37 (.25) |
| *n* | 12 | 19 | 14 | 11 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 15 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 10 | 15 | 4 | 2 | 17 | 14 |

## Social Studies Teachers' Multicultural Practices

Students' and teachers' responses gleaned from their respective closed-ended questionnaires, coupled with the outcomes obtained through the researchers' observations of classroom dynamics, collectively constituted the basis for assessing social studies teachers' multicultural practices. Responses and observation results are subsequently presented. About 53 % of responding students agreed that their teachers engaged in multicultural practices, closely aligning with teachers' mean reported rating of these practices (Mean = 2.32; i.e., 57 %).

### *Social studies teachers' reports on their multicultural practices*

The results depicted in Table 6 present an overview of teachers' multicultural practices. The grand mean for teachers' multicultural practice was calculated as 2.32 with a standard deviation of .27, falling below the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicates that, overall, social studies teachers' engagement in multicultural practices is rated as low. Remarkably, teachers reported several tendencies that contribute to this low rating including a lack of consideration for students' diversity during instructional planning, minimal awareness of the potential impact of classroom statements on students' cultural identity and pride, and desire to discourage of mother-tongue's influence in students' English usage. Furthermore, teachers mentioned avoiding discussions around stereotypes to prevent potential conflicts in the classroom. Regarding teaching practices, excursion visits to cultural museums, the organization of cultural days, or the invitation of resource persons for MCE classes were noticeably absent and not implemented. Regarding positive practices, some teachers reported commendable efforts such as assigning social studies tasks that encourage students to share diverse cultural experiences and backgrounds. Additionally, they acknowledged avoiding restricting students to particular greeting styles or language use, allowing for cultural diversity expression.

**Table 6.** *Responses of Teachers' Multicultural Practices*

| SN | Items | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I wear a cultural attire on the days I teach culture topics | 3.03 | .87 |
| 2 | I highlight and challenge stereotypes when I teach about people, culture and identity | 2.22 | .80 |
| 3 | I expect or demand students to greet me in my cultural style irrespective of whether we share the same cultural background or not* | 2.61(2.38) | 1.05 |
| 4 | I discourage mother-tongue interference in my students' use of English* | 2.25(2.74) | 1.06 |
| 5 | I allow students to greet me in their cultural style | 2.54 | .96 |
| 6 | I motivate my students to challenge stereotypes against their socio-cultural group and against any other group | 1.96 | .75 |
| 7 | I do not discuss stereotypes in my class to avoid conflicts and tensions in my class* | 2.03(2.96) | .87 |
| 8 | I consider my students' diversity when planning classroom lessons | 2.12 | .71 |
| 9 | I consider the impact my statements can have on my students' cultural identity and pride | 2.09 | .78 |
| 10 | I encourage students to speak their native languages in school | 2.61 | .98 |
| 11 | We organize cultural day for students and encourage students to wear their traditional attire to the event | 2.12 | .80 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | I give students assignments or class activities that allow them to share their diverse cultural experiences and backgrounds | 3.12 | .80 |
| 13 | I invite parents from other cultural backgrounds to share cultural stories and histories in our classes on culture | 1.90 | .70 |
| 14 | I take students to cultural museums and exhibition centres to see cultural artefacts and displays | 1.87 | .67 |
| | **Multicultural Practice of Teachers** | **2.32** | **.27** |

*Note*: * = used to show reversed scored items that indicate poor attitude. Mean scores in brackets represent scores of the items when unreversed. n=31

The t-test and one-way ANOVA analyses conducted across various groups (gender, years of teaching experience, class, and educational qualifications of teachers) showed no statistically significant difference in their mean scores for multicultural practice. However, from the results shown in Table 5, male teachers displayed higher mean scores compared to female teachers in both classroom multicultural practice, and those with over 10 years of teaching experience also exhibited higher scores. Secondary school teachers demonstrated higher multicultural practice compared to primary school teachers. Additionally, older teachers (41 and above) displayed higher multicultural practice than younger teachers (aged 21 to 40 years).

### *Students' reports on their social studies teachers' multicultural practices*

To increase the reliability and validity of our findings while checkmating teachers' response bias, we surveyed 267 students whose teachers participated in the study. A total of 53.1% of student respondents acknowledged that their social studies teachers implement multicultural practices (Table 7). Conversely, 47.6% of students who negated the teachers' multicultural practices responded that their teachers do not implement these practices. This student-reported data aligns with the feedback provided by social studies teachers about their MCE practices. A closer examination of individual items indicates that social studies teachers typically do not wear traditional attire when teaching cultural topics; students feel less encouraged by their teachers to challenge stereotypes; teachers allow students to greet them using their cultural styles; social studies classes mainly encourage English communication, discouraging native languages or dialects; students are given assignments that permit them to share diverse cultural experiences. However, activities like excursions to cultural museums, holding cultural days, and inviting resource persons during multicultural classes are infrequent.

**Table 7.** *Students' Responses on Teachers' MCE Practices*

| S/N | Items | Students (n=267) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | As a student, respond to the following statements related to how teachers practice multicultural education contents. | Yes | | No | |
| | | Frequency (F) | Percentage (%) | Frequency (F) | Percentage (%) |
| 1 | My social studies teacher wears a cultural attire on the days he or she teaches us culture topics | 79 | 29.6 | 188 | 70.4 |
| 2 | My social studies teacher tells us to be proud of our heritage and culture in school and outside the school. | 152 | 56.9 | 115 | 43.1 |
| 3 | My social studies teacher tells us to question bad things said about people from other communities or ethnic groups | 100 | 37.5 | 167 | 62.5 |
| 4 | My social studies teacher allows us to greet him or her in our own cultural style | 188 | 70.4 | 79 | 29.6 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | My social studies teacher encourages us to speak our native languages or dialect | 104 | 39.0 | 163 | 61.0 |
| 6 | My social studies teacher teaches us to like people for who they are | 210 | 78.7 | 57 | 21.3 |
| 7 | My social studies teacher teaches us not to discriminate against people whose culture or identity is different from ours | 173 | 64.8 | 94 | 35.2 |
| 8 | My social studies teacher teaches us to value and respect people despite cultural differences | 237 | 88.8 | 30 | 11.2 |
| 9 | We are allowed to speak only English in social studies classes | 182 | 68.2 | 85 | 31.8 |
| 10 | My social studies teacher uses examples and pictures to show us different cultural ideas | 169 | 63.3 | 98 | 36.7 |
| 11 | We are given social studies assignments or class activities that allow us to tell stories of our diverse cultural experiences and backgrounds | 179 | 67.0 | 88 | 33.0 |
| 12 | My teacher invites parents from other cultural backgrounds to share cultural stories and histories with us | 70 | 26.2 | 197 | 73.8 |
| 13 | My social studies teacher takes us to cultural museums and exhibition centres to see cultural artefacts and displays | 66 | 24.7 | 201 | 75.3 |
| 14 | My social studies teacher organizes cultural day for us and asks us to wear our cultural attire on that day. | 76 | 28.5 | 191 | 71.5 |
| | Total Multicultural Practice | 141 | 53.1 | 126 | 47.6 |

### *The observation results on classrooms' multicultural practices*

The observation outcomes of teachers' multicultural practices in 18 sampled classes across six schools are presented in Table 8. The findings point to a low level of classroom multicultural practice, with a percentage of 20.00%. This observation corroborates the assertions made by both teachers and students regarding the generally low levels of multicultural practice among social studies teachers. Only 2 out of the 18 observed classes displayed geographical maps, specifically Nigerian maps, on their walls; none of the classrooms, either in primary or secondary levels, exhibited photo charts depicting cultural exhibitions. However, certain multicultural practices were observed, such as teachers wearing native attire, allowing students to express their opinions in class, and permitting the use of native languages by students during lessons.

**Table 8.** *Researcher-observed MCE Practices in 18 Classes*

| **S/N** | **Items** | **Researchers (n=2)** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Researchers' observation schedule in 18 classes | Yes | | No | |
| | | F | % | F | % |
| 1 | Nigeria cultural photos are hung on the class walls | 0 | 0.0 | 18 | 100.00 |
| 2 | Students speak their native languages in class | 15 | 83.3 | 3 | 16.7 |
| 3 | Teachers allow students to share their views in class | 10 | 55.6 | 8 | 44.4 |
| 4 | Teachers wear traditional attire | 9 | 50.0 | 9 | 50.0 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | Photos of cultural exhibitions attended by the school are hung on class walls | 0 | 0.0 | 18 | 100.00 |
| 6 | Global cultural photos are displayed on the wall | 0 | 0.0 | 18 | 100.00 |
| 7 | Charts displaying cultures and states of students' population of a classroom are hung on the wall of the classroom | 0 | 0.0 | 18 | 100.00 |
| 8 | Charts displaying various Nigerian languages are hung on class wall | 0 | 0.0 | 18 | 100.00 |
| 9 | World or African or Nigerian map(s) hangs on class wall | 2 | 11.1 | 16 | 88.8 |
| 10 | Photos of different landscapes in different countries hang on the class wall | 0 | 0.0 | 18 | 100.00 |
| | Total | 3.6 | 20.0 | 14.4 | 79.99 |

**Teachers' MCE Understanding and Challenges**

The MCE perspectives and challenges of teachers were assessed with their responses to three open-ended questions that formed cluster three of the teachers' questionnaire on their multicultural practice (TMEO). The choice of an open-ended questionnaire was due to the researchers' experience of teachers' reluctance and refusal to grant interviews in previous studies. The three open-ended questions are (1) please explain what multicultural education entails to you in the provided space; (2) Please list your challenges with implementing multicultural curriculum contents in the space provided; (3) Please list your challenges with implementing multicultural principles in the space provided. 27 out of the 31 teachers who participated completed the open-ended questionnaire. Their responses or perspectives are presented below under three themes.

*Social studies teachers' understanding of MCE*

Findings show that social studies teachers' knowledge of what MCE entails is limited. Their understanding of MCE is mostly limited to awareness of one's and others' cultures and excludes other diversity questions such as ethnic, racial, and gender diversities. For example, T6 explained that 'multicultural education means educating one to understand other people's culture, respect others and accept one another for the betterment of the society'. More examples are presented below.

> Multicultural education entails helping the pupil to know more about their culture; it helps the pupils to participate in their culture; it also helps them to have the knowledge of other people's culture e.g. food, language, dressing, marriage, festivals etc. T5

> Multicultural Education refers to any form of education that incorporates the histories, texts, values, believes and perspectives of people from different cultural background. T4

> Multicultural Education is simply several culture in a particular environment. E.g., School, church and programme. When people from different culture come together, it brings harmony and can as well bring conflict. T17

> Multicultural Education is an act or study of other culture from different ethnic groups we have in the country and history of Nigerian. T27

The overemphasis on culture excludes other diversity issues. Only one teacher considered the question of gender as a component of multicultural education, though T4's view if broaden can accommodate quality and diversity issues. T10 explained that 'multicultural education is a movement that gives equal opportunities to students of different cultures, different genders to learn.'

### *Social studies teachers reported challenges with teaching MCE contents*

Several challenges with implementing multicultural content were listed by social studies teachers. Detailed answers were not provided here but bulleted points. These challenges include cultural erosion, poor financing, ethnic conflicts, ethnicity, cultural intolerance, pride, lateness to school, overage of some students, language barrier, time demand, and teacher incompetence.

### *Social studies teachers' reported challenges with practising MCE*

Responses to this question were bulleted as well. Social studies teachers reported their challenges to practising MCE as including students' refusal to be disciplined; language barriers; conflict in opinions arising from cultural differences; leads to students' disrespect for elderly people; and lack of listening ear on the part of the teacher. About three teachers think that practising MCE (e.g., tolerating your students' dialect and cultural diversity, allowing students to voice dissatisfaction with discriminatory school practices, and tolerating students' dissenting voices) could bring disrespect to elders. Teacher 22 stated, "It brings insult to the teachers; it is boring to accommodate students of different cultural backgrounds, and it is too difficult to implement."

## Discussion

The study's findings reveal a notable disparity between the positive and high multicultural attitudes among teachers and their actual low implementation of multicultural practices. Both teachers and students reported these low levels of multicultural practice, which were also observed by the researchers. Students' responses on their teachers' multicultural practices are slightly lower than teachers' self-rating of their practices, indicating high reliability of our results. Moreover, the study highlights that social studies teachers have a limited understanding of the concept of MCE. Additionally, challenges such as cultural conflicts, language barriers, and ethnic disputes were identified as obstacles to effectively practising MCE in classrooms.

Teachers exhibit positive attitudes toward integrating MCE into the curriculum, recognizing the importance of such an approach. Our findings align with research by Karacabey et al. (2019) that also identified positive MCE attitudes among Turkish teachers. This positive disposition among Nigerian social studies teachers may be influenced by the country's multicultural structure and the emphasis on teacher training and professional development, as indicated by Salako and Ojebiyi (2019). Their involvement in numerous MCE conferences, workshops, and educational courses might contribute to their favourable attitudes. Past studies support the idea that integrating critical MCE content into teacher training programs positively shapes preservice teachers' attitudes toward MCE, as highlighted by Arsal (2019). Similarly, Cho and DeCastro-Ambrosetti (2005) noted that increased awareness and appreciation of diverse cultures led to improved MCE attitudes.

The discrepancy between teachers' positive attitudes towards MCE and their low implementation practices becomes evident in their failure to address and challenge cultural stereotypes during lessons on people, culture, and identity. Both teachers' and students' responses highlight an existing implementation gap in MCE given the higher ratings of MCE attitudes than practices. Hence, teachers are likely missing an opportunity to encourage critical thinking about cultural stereotypes. Such reluctance to challenge stereotypes might stem from concerns regarding the equitable representation of all groups and the pursuit of authentic diversity representation (Moland, 2015). Contrary to our findings, Durden et al. (2015) discovered that teachers in their study on culturally relevant pedagogy in the preschool classroom in the Midwest, USA actively engaged with cultural agents in the community, utilized diverse materials such as books, puzzles, family pictures, and

children's artwork, fostering a physically diverse classroom environment encompassing language, ethnicity, and gender. While our study did not delve into follow-up inquiries, the curriculum's broad perspective could imply a comprehensive approach to teaching culture-related topics, a practice less common in Nigeria.

In contrast to our findings, Aragona-Young and Sawyer (2018) identified American teachers who often made generalized definitions of culture, sparing specific identities, and exhibiting limited enthusiasm towards MCE practices. Our discovery of teachers' high MCE attitudes conflicting with low implementation practices contrasts with Huh et al.'s (2015) findings among South Korean educators, where a deeper multicultural understanding positively correlated with effective classroom implementation and resource utilization for MCE. This inconsistency indicates the complexity of contextual influences and pedagogical approaches affecting the actualisation of MCE in different educational settings.

Our observation of social studies classrooms revealed a stark reality: MCE instructional materials – excluding Nigerian political map found in 20% of the classes – including global photos, cultural artefacts, geographical maps, and cultural exhibition photos, were notably absent in 100% of the observed classrooms. This absence echoes findings from previous studies investigating the availability of instructional materials for teaching social education in Nigeria (Edeh et al., 2021; Okobia, 2011). The lack of these essential materials poses a significant challenge to effective multicultural teachings. Studies in Nigeria have consistently shown that students exposed to instructional materials in social studies achieve higher academic performance compared to those without such resources (Olayinka, 2016). This raises the possibility that teachers may require training in utilizing instructional materials for effective MCE implementation. Indeed, Eze and Nwagu (2021) emphasize the need for capacity building among teachers in Enugu state, Nigeria, particularly in employing innovative, learner-centred, and inclusive teaching strategies alongside instructional materials and media.

Our findings indicate the presence of institutional barriers hindering the effective implementation of MCE in Nigeria, despite the high reported level of multicultural attitudes among teachers. This discrepancy may be attributed to deficiencies in the quality of social studies teacher education or the absence of professional development training programs focusing on the practical implementation of MCE in Nigeria. Existing evidence suggests that integrating critical MCE content into teacher education programs positively influences the development of teachers' multicultural attitudes (Arsal, 2019). Furthermore, our findings align with studies highlighting the need to reverse the inadequacy and irregularity of teachers' professional development opportunities in Nigeria (Eze et al., 2022).

The findings suggest that multiple factors contribute to the inadequate practice of MCE, including language barriers, teachers' concerns about losing students' respect, time and financial constraints, and ethnoreligious intolerance. Addressing these challenges is crucial to enhancing MCE and resolving diversity issues in Nigeria. As previously highlighted by Garba (2013), integrating MCE content into social studies has the potential to foster trans-culturalism within the educational system. To achieve the goals of MCE in diverse settings like Nigeria, both personal and institutional limitations must be addressed. There is a potential for nurturing a multicultural democracy through the engagement of competent teachers in transformative practices.

While our study found that male and older teachers reported higher multicultural attitudes and practices compared to female and younger teachers, respectively, these differences were not statistically significant. Interestingly, Aktoprak et al. (2018) reported contrary findings, indicating that

younger and female teachers exhibited a more positive attitude toward MCE. In our context, societal norms such as mobility, might contribute to these differences, as cultural factors often enable men to be more outgoing, while older individuals may possess more disposable resources for exploring different environments. It's plausible that male and older teachers have had more exposure to diverse settings through travel, which could explain their higher attitudes toward multiculturalism. These findings underscore the potential implications for teacher training programs to address such variations.

## Conclusion

This study sheds light on the attitudes and practices of social studies teachers towards MCE in Nigeria. Despite harbouring positive attitudes towards MCE, teachers exhibit low implementation practices, a notable gap. This discrepancy may stem from an inadequate understanding of the concept of MCE, limited access to instructional materials, and institutional barriers hindering its effective execution. Contributing factors such as language barriers, teacher's apprehension about losing student respect, constraints related to time and finances, and ethnoreligious intolerance were identified as challenges affecting the effective implementation of MCE. Furthermore, male and older teachers displayed higher multicultural attitudes and practices compared to their female and younger counterparts, respectively.

Our findings underscore the pressing need for teacher training programs that incorporate critical MCE content and innovative, learner-centred teaching methodologies, along with the provision of relevant teaching resources. Ukpokodu (2011) emphasizes that multicultural and cultural competence should be prerequisites for educators of diverse subjects, analogous to the requirement of expertise in mathematics or science for teaching those subjects. Continuous professional development is imperative to equip teachers with the necessary skills for facilitating effective MCE in their classrooms. Initiating this training in teacher education institutions can establish a strong foundation for both preservice and early-career teachers. If needed, policy and curriculum reforms should reflect the contemporary realities of Nigeria as a multicultural nation, emphasizing inclusivity and social cohesion. These changes should address institutional and individual limitations to fully achieve the objectives of MCE within and beyond the classroom.

The study's outcomes provide a groundwork for future research endeavours regarding the implementation of MCE, not only in Nigeria but also in comparable settings with diverse cultural landscapes. There is a critical need to delve into the underlying individual factors influencing the poor practice of MCE and determine the necessary support mechanisms required to encourage increased interest and implementation of MCE strategies. This understanding is vital for fostering a more inclusive and culturally sensitive educational environment.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interests were reported by the authors.

## References


Aktoprak, A., Yiğit, P., & Güneyli, A. (2018). Attitudes of primary school teachers toward multicultural education. *Quality & Quantity*, *52*, 181-194. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0600-x

Amalu, T., Phil-Eze, P. & Ajake, A. (2020). Assessing the impact of economic and cultural diversity on tourism development in Nigeria. *GeoJournal 85*, 1457–1468. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-019-10032-2

Aragona-Young, E., & Sawyer, B. E. (2018). Elementary teachers' beliefs about multicultural education practices. *Teachers and Teaching*, *24*(5), 465-486. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1435527

Arsal, Z. (2019). Critical multicultural education and preservice teachers' teachers' multicultural attitudes. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, *13*(1), 106-118. DOI 10.1108/JME-10-2017-0059

Banks, J. A. (2010). Approaches to multicultural curriculum reform. In J. A. Banks and C.A. Banks (Eds), *Multicultural Education Issues and Perspectives* (pp. 233-254). John Wiley and Sons Inc.

Banks, J. A. (2014). *An introduction to multicultural education.* Pearson.

Cho, G., & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, D. (2005). Is Ignorance bliss? Pre-service teachers' attitudes toward multicultural education. *The High School Journal, 89*(2), 24-28. doi:10.1353/hsj.2005.0020

Durden, T. R., Escalante, E. B., & Blitch, K. (2015). Start with us! Culturally relevant pedagogy in the preschool classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *43*, 223-232. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-014-0651-8

Edeh, C., Obiagu, A., Omenma, Z., & Nwabudike, C. (2021). Availability and utilization of instructional materials integral to civic education implementation in Nigerian Schools. *Nigerian Social Science Education Review*, *5*(1), 120-129.

Eze, E., & Nwagu, E. K. N. (2021). Dimensions of teachers' expressed capacity building needs on climate change education strategies. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Environmental and Science Education*, *17*(4), e2251. https://doi.org/10.21601/ijese/10982

Eze, E., Nwagu, E. K.N., & Onuoha, J. C. (2022). Nigerian teachers' self-reported climate science literacy and expressed training needs on climate change concepts: Prospects of job-embedded situative professional development. *Science Education*, *106*(6), 1535-1567. https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.21743

Garba, M. A. (2013). Social Studies Education: A tool for promoting intercultural education. *Journal of Academic Excellence. (MCSER–CEMAS–Sapinza University of Rome)*, *2*(8).

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice.* Teachers College Press.

González, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (Eds.). (2006). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410613462

Huh, H. K., Choi, S. W., & Jun, J. (2015). Relationships among multicultural sensitivity, multicultural education awareness, and level of multicultural education practice of South Korean teachers. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, *12*(1), 107-126.

Joe-Akunne, C. O., Nwankwo, E. A., & Chine, B. C. (2018). Reducing ethnocentrism and corruption in Nigeria: the psychosocial perspective. *Practicum Psychologia*, *8*(1).

Karacabey, M. F., Ozdere, M., & Bozkus, K. (2019). The attitudes of teachers towards multicultural education. *European Journal of Educational Research, 8*(1), 383-393.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2022). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children.* John Wiley & sons.

Moland, N. A. (2015). Can multiculturalism be exported? Dilemmas of diversity on Nigeria's Sesame Square. *Comparative Education Review*, *59*(1), 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1086/679014

Nzeadibe, T. C., Ajaero, C. K., Okonkwo, E. E., Okpoko, P. U., Akukwe, T. I., & Njoku-Tony, R. F. (2015). Integrating community perceptions and cultural diversity in social impact assessment in Nigeria. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, *55*, 74-83. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eiar.2015.07.005

Obiagu, A. N., Mezieobi, D. N., Aroh, N. P., & Akubue, F. N. (2020). The effect of cooperative concept mapping on misconceptions, knowledge achievement and transfer of learning in peace education. *The Social Studies, 111*(1), 18-38. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2019.1652139

Odey, A. P., & Ugar, A. A. (2023). Management of protracted social conflicts in a multicultural society: The Nigerian example. *American Journal of Arts and Human Science*, *1*(5), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.54536/ajahs.v1i5.1086

Okagbue, E. F., Wang, M., & Ezeachikulo, U. P. (2022). Does school bullying show lack of effective multicultural education in the school curriculum? *International Journal of Educational Research Open, 3*, 100178. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2022.100178

Okobia, E. O. (2011). Availability and teachers' use of instructional materials and resources in the implementation of social studies in junior secondary schools in Edo State, Nigeria. *Review of European Studies*, *3*, (2), 90. doi:10.5539/res.v3n2p90

Olayinka, A. B. (2016). Effects of instructional materials on secondary school students' academic achievements in Social Studies in Ekiti State, Nigeria. *World Journal of Education*, *6*(1), doi:10.5430/wje.v6n1p32

Parkhouse, H., & Bennett, E. (2023). Exploring social studies teachers' use of action research to enhance cultural responsiveness. *Social Studies Research and Practice*, *18*(1), 18-32. https://doi.org/10.1108/SSRP-06-2022-0014

Ponterotto, J. G., Baluch, S., Greig, T., & Rivera, L. (1998). Development and initial score validation of the teacher multicultural attitude survey. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, *58*, 1002-1016. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164498058006 00

Preti, A. (2008). School shooting as a culturally enforced way of expressing suicidal hostile intentions. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, *36*(4), 544-550.

Salako, E. T., & Ojebiyi, A. O. (2019). Teaching social studies from multicultural perspective: a practical approach to re-fashion African Studies for transformation. *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*, *16*(1), 96-113. https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/contjas.v6i1.6

Salawu, B. (2010). Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria: Causal analysis and proposals for new management strategies. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, *13*(3), 345-353. https://gisf.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/0071-Salawu-2010-Nigeria-ethno-religious-conflict.pdf

Sleeter, C. E. (1996). *Multicultural education as social activism*. SUNY Press.

Sleeter, C. E. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Rethinking the curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *52*(2), 94-106. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487101052002002

Sturdivant, T., & Alanís, I. (2019). Teaching through culture one teacher's use of culturally relevant practices for African American pre-schoolers. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, *13*(3), 203-214. DOI 10.1108/JME-03-2019-0019

Ukpokodu, O. (2011). Developing teachers' cultural competence: One teacher educator's practice of unpacking student culturelessness. *Action in Teacher Education*, *33*(5-6), 432-454. DOI: 10.1080/01626620.2011.627033

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025, pp. 83-108**
**DOI 10.14434/ijlcle.v5i.35186**

# Supporting Young People's Identity through Translanguaging in English as a Second Language Classroom[1]

Eucharia Okwudilichukwu Ugwu

## Abstract

This work highlights how monolingual English-based instruction prevents Nigerian children from acquiring literacy skills and, more, attaining a healthy sense of selves as bilingual language learners. A narrative qualitative inquiry approach was used to do a critical case study of elementary school students whose Mother Tongue (MT) is Nsukka Igbo, a dialect spoken in the eastern part of Nigeria, West Africa. Data was collected through classroom observations and formal and informal interactions with the children. The study was framed through translanguaging as decolonial theory and pedagogical practice, which allowed the author to think through the complexities of an imposed bilingual identity and to engage the students in English language learning (ELL). This paper provides insights into young Nigerian L2 learners' struggles with their identity, which may be of interest to all language teachers and shed further light upon the need for young people to learn in their MT. Although the results of this research may not be generalized due to the short duration of the intervention, the experiences shared here suggest that translanguaging has the possibility of transforming teaching practice in Nigeria and other language learning environments.

**Keywords:** translanguaging, identity, decolonial pedagogy, mother tongue, bilingual education

**Contact:** Eucharia Okwudilichukwu Ugwu, University of Ibadan, Nigeria
E-mail: okwudili555@gmail.com


[1] I would like to thank the Sustainable Futures Global Network for the opportunity to participate in the 2020/2021 first Sustainable Futures in Writing workshop for early career researchers. This work is an offshoot of that participation and the mentorship I received. I would also like to thank my mentor, Dr. Gustav J. Weltsek of the School of Education, Indiana University, for being part of this work from the beginning to the end.

## Introduction

> When I entered the classroom, a child knocked on the desk. All the kids stood up and shouted excitedly, stressing every word: "Good morning, Sister. We are happy to see you. God bless you. See you next time". I smiled at them and moved to the back of the class, pondering the last phrase. The next day, I was greeted the same way. I thought that I should correct them by explaining, in Igbo, why the last phrase was unnecessary in that context, but I failed. I realized it was a memorized pattern used for greeting everyone who entered the class. As I entered the classroom, there were 48 kids squeezed into a small classroom with only one teacher. Due to limited space, most of the children hung their empty school bags on their backs as they sat on wooden benches.
> (Fieldnote, February 1, 2022).

Across the globe, the question of which, among a multilingual society's languages - national, dominant, or minority - to use in school, is being fiercely contested (Banda, 2010; De Klerk, 2000; Hancock, 2018; Ouane & Glanz, 2011). There is increased advocacy for bilingual education, where children can receive education in both their mother tongue (MT) or first language (L1) and the society's dominant language (Rodríguez-Tamayo & Tenjo-Macias, 2019; Silbernagel, 2015). Such advocacies have given rise to dual language programs in many countries. Debate around second language (L2) education has also increased with the ongoing promotion of the epistemologies of the Global South (Santos, 2016) with emphasis on decolonial and pluriversal theories and perspectives to education (Medina, 2021; Perry, 2020). Proponents of these approaches contest any dominant approach to literacy, including the designation of some languages as universal and therefore suitable for education, while a huge number of minority languages are suppressed. The pluriversal approach, according to Perry (2023) "unpicks a colonial past and neo-colonial present, a global market economy and knowledge economy driven by the Global North…" (p. 6). The pluriverse proposes a world of multiple worlds where different ways of knowing, learning and living could co-exist (Escobar, 2017; Ziai, 2018). A pluriversal world recognizes that every language, as a cultural artefact, is a knowledge bank, has relevance, and that no one language should be privileged above another.

Major characteristics of colonialism, no doubt, were linguistic and cultural domination, and the school system provided a fertile ground for achievement of these Language, observes Ravishankar (2020) is not an arbitrary fact of colonialism but a form of colonial violence. Decolonization, therefore, should include de-tooling the imposed colonial language, especially in the education sector. However, many countries in the Global South - such as Nigeria, continue to deliver education in the colonial language, that is, a language imposed on them by their colonizers, such as English, French and Spanish, - rather than in their numerous indigenous languages which evidence children's mother tongues (MTs). In this article, I take the stance of Ouane and Glanz (2010) who use the terms, MT and L1 interchangeably and relate both to using the language of daily interaction which children use prior to their first year of school.

Nigeria is one of the Sub-Saharan African countries where up to 50% of the population speaks an indigenous language as a MT (Gadelii, 2004). Yet, bi/multilingual education, that is, the use of two or more languages in education - one or more indigenous languages in addition to the official language - is seen as a threat to national cohesion (Bulcha, 1997; Ouane & Glanz, 2011). Consequently, monolingual education, that is, the use of only one language, usually the colonialists'-imposed language, is preferred and considered a unifying force (Anchimbe, 2006; Wolff, 2017). Reflecting on the state of language in African education, Ouane and Glanz (2010) note that "[b]eyond basic education, only 25 percent of the languages used in secondary education and five percent of the

languages in higher education are African" (p. 9). Additionally, no more than 15% of the local population is fluent in such languages.

In Nigeria, many families and rural communities such as Orba, where this study was conducted, use the indigenous language for daily interactions. Therefore, most children in such communities grow up as monolinguals, that is, speaking only their MT. They also come to school with little or no knowledge of the English language or culture beyond the idea that their parents and friends will be proud if they learn English. Although the Nigerian language policy recommends a transitional model of mother tongue-based bilingual education (MTBBE) (The Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014), many schools nationwide offer English-only monolingual education (Baba, 2016; Ezenwa-Ohaeto & Akujobi, 2013; Igboanusi & Peters, 2015). The transitional model requires that teaching begins in the child's MT or language of the environment for the first three to four years of basic education, after which a dominant or national language becomes the language of instruction (LOI) through the university level.

With the preference for monolingual instruction, children are forced to stop speaking their MT from their first day in school, while another language, that is, the LOI is imposed upon them. In some cases, speaking the MT is met with corporal punishment (Ezenwa-Ohaeto & Akujobi, 2013; Ouane & Glanz, 2011). A major problem arises in that language is "the means through which we identify ourselves and are, in turn, identified by other (Katsos et al., 2021, p. 39). Therefore, when young people are separated from their language, they are made invisible, that is, separated from their means of perceiving and identifying themselves (Ravishankar, 2020). They may begin to feel that their MT is inferior to language of instruction, LOI. This can place on them a "psychological burden of linguistic inferiority" (Coronel-Molina, 1999). They are further faced with the arduous task of learning the primarily accepted/taught language, transitioning from competent monolinguals to incompetent bilinguals who must use one language at home and use a different one in school. With such an imposed bilingual identity without adequate preparations, the young people have little time to develop their identities in their MT.

**Researcher's positionality**

This study is born out of my childhood experience, growing up and completing primary education in Orba, a rural community in Enugu State, Nigeria. Until I started primary school, I was a monolingual, comfortably speaking only my MT. Everyone in my family and neighborhood spoke Nsukka Igbo, and constant interactions characterized our daily life. However, attending an English-only school made me cross linguistic and cultural borders, forcing me to acquire a bilingual identity. Coming from a non-literate (by cultural standards) home, that is, with parents who could neither read nor write, my experience was anything but pleasant. It left me with traumatic memories. The rule was: you must speak English, but if you could not, three options were available: receiving corporal punishment, a fine, or perpetual silence. Silence was the easiest of the three. Therefore, I became one of the silent kids in class. This identity of silence was one that was affectually imposed upon me.

As one who struggled with her bilingual identity from childhood, I was curious about others who had similar experiences and how they navigated their own identities and challenges. Remembering that the English language was a suppressive weapon used to silence me in school, I wanted to know if bringing back the children's MT in the classroom could make a difference and perhaps provide them with an alternative and pleasant learning experience. In this paper, I share my experience of a brief but powerful encounter with an elementary school student in Orba as he and his two friends struggled to make sense of their newly imposed bilingual identity. Although Chidi (pseudonym) was fluent in Igbo, the school's choice of English-only instruction meant he must simultaneously learn and be instructed

in English. Throughout my work with Chidi I was able to understand how he and his classmates struggled to fit into a system that offered them little academic content due to their limited knowledge of English and, more, limited their ability to explore their identities in healthy and productive ways through their MT. In my writing, here, I share these findings.

Building on my past experiences as a framework for understanding my own schooling and identity, I situated this study in Orba. I had hoped that by interacting with the kids in a familiar environment and their MT, I would be able to participate in the experiences of emerging bilingual children to understand their journey better and my own as well. In this study, I used translanguaging (García, 2011) to think through the complexities of an imposed bilingual identity and as a way to engage Chidi and his friends in English language learning. By translanguaging from Igbo to English, I gained valuable insights into the identity struggles of young L2 learners in Nigeria, which may be of interest to all teachers of English Language Learners (ELL) and shed further light upon the need for young people to learn in their MT.

## Theoretical Positioning

The research referred to in this article was framed within translanguaging, a theory of L2 learning and decolonial pedagogical practice (Mbirimi-Hungwe & Hungwe, 2020; Otheguy et al., 2015; Vogel & García, 2017). De Costa et al. (2021) summarizes translanguaging as "a bi-/multilingual performance that allows bi-/multilingual speakers to use their full linguistic and semiotic repertoire as a form of social practice to construct meaning within a specific context and local situation" (p. 134). From a theoretical lens, translanguaging contrasts the traditional "bounded notion" of L2 language teaching in which the target language was taught in isolation to avoid the influence of the learners' L1 or other previously acquired languages (Haukås, 2016; Lane & Mikihara, 2017; Parra & Proctor, 2022; Portolés & Martí, 2020). Proponents of the translanguaging model argue that bi/multilinguals have a unified linguistic system which governs their language behavior. They do not simply switch from one language to another during speech events because each of their languages does not exist in isolation (Baker, 2001; Orellana & García, 2014; García & Lin, 2016). In translanguaging practices, language learners are encouraged to activate and leverage all their linguistic resources or potentials, thus benefiting from their own multilingualism (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Dougherty, 2021; García, 2011; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Lewis et al., 2012). None of the previously acquired languages is suppressed but instead, one language is used to reinforce the other. In addition, translanguaging could be a means to address the perspective of decoloniality, that is, "a process that aims to question and transform legacies of colonialism in institutions, structures, and ways of knowing" (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2024, p. 27). If colonialism involved forced imposition of language and knowledge systems on a people (Flores-Rodríguez, 2012), then decoloniality is the process of supplanting what was imposed and reclaiming what was lost, namely, the indigenous languages and their knowledge. Translanguaging is situated in this work as a form of counter-storytelling, which, according to Zavala (2016), is a decolonial education strategy through which "the master storylines of Modernity, Eurocentrism, and coloniality" are retold by the colonized. Vogel and García (2017) emphasize that the theory of translanguaging "builds on scholarly work that has demonstrated how colonial and modernist-era language ideologies created and maintained linguistic, cultural, and racial hierarchies in society" (p. 2).

Translanguaging is positioned in this paper as a decolonial pedagogy rooted on social justice, including minority language right (García et al., 2016; García & Leiva, 2014; Leonet et al., 2017). One of the false narratives of colonialism is that formal education is possible only in the colonial language (Alidou et al., 2006; Ezeokoli & Ugwu, 2019; Ouane & Glanz, 2010). While not underrating the

challenges of African complex linguistic landscape to the planning and practice of multilingual education, the past colonial history remains a strong force that continues to determine the choice of LOI in African education (Bamgbose, 2000; Ouane & Glanz, 2011). African languages are continually rejected by the school system. In Nigeria, for example, the indigenous languages remain at the periphery of education, and meaningful changes are not in sight due to complex issues, including non-training of bi/multilingual teachers and a lack of instructional materials in the MT languages (Ugwu, 2019, 2021a, 2021b). If it were not for these complex issues, translanguaging might offer a novel way to decolonize language education by allowing young people to develop a healthier bi/multilingual identity.

### Research Questions

The preliminary literary research, personal reflection, and data collection lead me to develop the following focused questions:

1. What coping mechanisms do young people employ to navigate an imposed bilingual identity?
2. How does translanguaging affect young people's positionalities and their abilities to learn a second or an additional language?

## Literature Review

### Definition of Terms

For the sake of clarity, I define a monolingual as one who speaks or understands only one language. Monolingualism is therefore the practice of using one language for daily interactions. This practice is still dominant in many rural Nigerian communities especially among children and non-literate adults. I use the term, non-literate loosely to define individuals who cannot read or write. Additionally, a bi/multilingual is one who speaks two or more languages. A person who is oriented towards using one language has a monolingual mindset and vice versa.

### Identity and Language Learning

Norton (2000) defines identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). This definition points to how our lives are complex weavings of multiple experiences that transcend any one moment. It is by "knowing who I have been, based on my personal and cultural history, that makes it possible for me to maintain my determination to understand who I am now and be aware of the possibilities of who I may be in the future" (Coronel-Molina, 1999, p. 73). Wenger (2010) also believes that identity "incorporates the past and the future into the experience of the present" (p. 5). Therefore, identity formation is an ongoing process of growth. Broadly speaking, every learning experience offers an opportunity for an identity expansion or modification. A learner can be considered a social participant who makes meaning using the social world as a resource to constitute an identity. Learning something new is therefore ruffling one's identity. As the learner gains new insights, new ways of relating to the world emerge. Consequently, negotiation becomes an inevitable process of adjusting to the needed change.

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) suggest that identities can be imposed, assumed, or negotiated by a group or individuals. Imposed identities, however, are not negotiable; assumed identities are accepted and therefore, not negotiated; and negotiable identities are usually contestable. However, identities are time and context bound, such that their state may change over time and space. For

example, a person may accept an imposed identity because they have limited or no power to resist it at a particular time, but if their situation changes, they might do otherwise. A negotiable identity is prone to change through the empowered design of the individual. Since human experiences change over time, negotiation of identity is also an ongoing process.

Any form of identity imposition, be it linguistic or cultural, will be characterized by power imbalance. Such imbalance might lead to a struggle or negotiation (hooks, 1994; Irizarry, 2011; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). A typical example is an ELL learning space. ELL students come to school with their respective identities already formed or acquired over time, grounded in their L1. However, as the school imposes bilingual identities on them, they are pushed to linguistically disadvantaged positions where they must learn new ways of using language and of relating to the world. "To speak a certain language is to essentially identify with a culture, to assume it as one's own and experience a felt unity in a group" (Ravishankar, 2020, p. 2). For children born into a particular culture, L1 acquisition emerges naturally as a form of cultural initiation. However, the situation changes when learning a L2. At that stage, individuals' linguistic and cultural identities have already been formed. Learning English as an L2, for example, entails learning an additional culture and becoming part of two cultures. There are bound to be cultural clashes because the L1 and L2 will offer two different worldviews to the learner. In a school context, this kind of experience could trigger a sense of loss of control if not handled cautiously because students are transiting from a level of linguistic competence to incompetence and from using language freely with much ease to using it cautiously to avoid mistakes. This phenomenon is even more difficult for ELL students saddled with the dual roles of learning English and learning the curriculum contents in English. In such a situation, identity negotiation could become a coping mechanism through which they position themselves as emerging bilinguals, that is, students who are acquiring an L2.

Rodríguez-Tamayo and Tenjo-Macias (2019) maintain that emerging bilinguals reconstruct their identities through their daily linguistic choices. Such choices may, however, depend on external variables, including what their receptors would like to hear, since communication is relational. Students learn a second or an additional language not just to please themselves but also to be socially acceptable in their learning spaces. Silence, for example, could be a linguistic choice. Emerging bilinguals may decide to keep silent, even when it is necessary to speak, because of a sense of insecurity (Morita, 2004). In that case, silence becomes a linguistic choice or a coping mechanism through which they express their identity. Silence may also be an imposed identity especially where a strict linguistic rule is put in place.

In the Nigerian monolingual classrooms, negotiation of identity through a multiplicity of languages is absent, limiting any identity development to the imposition or assumed. Ouane and Glanz (2011) state that "[t]he language question in Africa touches upon self-esteem and feelings of identity and reflects not only past and present political, economic and cultural dependencies, but also relates to fundamental and enduring hard-core governmental politics, internal and external" (p. 57). In this work, translanguaging is used as a teaching strategy to find out if it could facilitate L2 learning and positive bilingual identity in an ELL environment.

## Translanguaging as Decolonial Pedagogical Practice

Translanguaging is an emerging perspective in bilingual education. It encompasses "both the complex and fluid language practices of bilinguals, as well as the pedagogical approaches that leverage those practices" (García & Lin, 2016, p. 2). Translanguaging is rooted in the critical post-structuralist school that challenges the traditional "bounded notions" or "strict language separation" ideology which characterizes L2 teaching (Lane & Mikihara, 2017; Mbirimi-Hungwe & Hungwe, 2020; Parra &

Proctor, 2022). The bounded notion compartmentalizes the languages of bi/multilingual learners such that each language is treated separately. The imposed arbitrary boundaries make it impossible for L2 learners to fully utilize the linguistic resources they acquire over time.

Translanguaging brings an alternative approach to multilingual education. It proposes that "multilingual people do not operate in linguistic isolation" (Parra & Proctor, 2022). Borrowing the term "repertoire" which was coined by Gumperz (1982) to mean "the totality of the linguistic resources…available to members of the society", translanguaging scholars applied it to the individual L2 learners' linguistic resources. They insist that "students should benefit from being multilingual by using resources from their whole linguistic repertoire" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Translanguaging practices, therefore, soften the imposed artificial boundaries between languages to allow for a more fluid language use (Kvietok-Dueñas, 2019; Leonet et al., 2017; Vogel & García, 2017). All linguistic resources become supportive assets for learning the target language. García, et al., (2016) state that translanguaging enhances students' text comprehension, provides opportunities for linguistic practices, and supports students' bilingual identity growth and socioemotional development. Additionally, fluid languaging might help ELL students to activate their prior knowledge, which is fundamental to learning, foster a learner-friendly environment, and lessen students' fears of making mistakes thereby increasing class participation.

Translanguaging can be a powerful way to ensure that young people retain their cultural identities because it accommodates many voices. In other words, students are allowed to express themselves either in the target language or the language they had acquired. Zavala (2016) believes that in the ongoing effort to supplant colonialism, the colonized must understand the "structural arrangements and cultural logics" in which they are still hemmed in. Such understanding could be the beginning of freedom. In Nigeria, as in many nations in the Global South, English is the "language of conquest and domination" (hooks, 1994). The continued use of English as the only LOI while rejecting the numerous Nigerian indigenous languages makes schooling a colonial practice.

However, Menon et al. (2021) believe that decoloniality is not a matter of supplanting "the dogma of the Western episteme" (p. 939) with the decolonial episteme. Instead, it is de-centering the West and affirming "the re-emergences, re-existences, and liberation of people dominated by the global westernizing" (p. 939). Translanguaging could play a mediating linguistic role in language learning environments through the fluid linguistic practices it proposes to offer.

## Method

### The Research Space

This study was conducted in a rural primary school in Orba in the eastern part of Nigeria. The people spoke Nsukka Igbo, a distinct variety of Igbo language. As part of my preparation for data collection, I interviewed a linguist from Orba who also taught Igbo in one of the Nigerian universities. I realized that Nsukka Igbo had no known written script, despite Nsukka, being a home to one of the oldest Nigerian universities. I chose Orba because first, Nsukka Igbo is my L1. Therefore, my high proficiency level provided an advantage to interact with the students and to attempt producing a script in Nsukka Igbo. Secondly, I knew from experience that for many children there, the school silenced their native language.

To reduce bias in the selection process, I made a preliminary investigation by visiting three primary schools in a particular village. One of the schools was public (government-funded) while the other two were private. I met with each of the head teachers, interacted with a few teachers, and observed the general atmosphere and the teaching and learning process. These interactions and

observations enabled me to select one school that might best serve my purpose, and it included an enclosed classroom for minimal privacy to observe and interact with students and to observe regular class attendance. I visited the selected school a second time and observed three teachers of different classes: K3 (aged 4-6), Primary 1 (aged 6-7), and primary 2 (aged 7-9). Lastly, I selected the second primary school based on their capacity to use language more engagingly and critically, which would enable me to interact with students and teachers.

**Participants**

This narrative qualitative research (Butina, 2005; Creswell, 2007) involved a critical case study of a nine-year-old primary school student, Chidi (pseudonym) as a focus child and his two friends, Emeka and Uche (pseudonyms) as co-participants. The focus child spoke Igbo Nsukka fluently but struggled with speaking English. I collected data through daily interactions and formal and informal interactions with him during and after lessons through translanguaging. I observed and listened to his interactions with his two friends who shared a desk with him. These activities lasted for two weeks. I spent approximately three hours a day in the students' class. Accommodating his two friends enabled me to gain deeper insights into their daily uses of language in a natural way and how the imposed bilingual identity affected their learning experiences. I made notes and audio-recorded my conversations with them as well as their side conversations. Side conversations in my data refer to the spontaneous and informal dialogues Chidi and his two friends often engaged in, usually in Igbo, during lectures.

My choice of Chidi as the focal child was coincidental. During my preliminary visit, I quickly noticed him because he was hardly attentive but played with the desk during lectures and class work. His unique, seemingly distracted behavior prompted my interaction with him. I spoke to him in English, inquiring why he was not writing his class work. He cast me a short glance and looked down. Two students sitting beside him began to laugh at him. I felt sympathetic, realizing how embarrassed he must have felt. Then I spoke to him in Igbo, repeating the same question. He responded that he had no textbook and could not find his exercise book. I asked him to share a textbook with the student sitting beside him and to write the class work on an old exercise book.

When I returned for the data collection, I realized that while some students had changed seats, Chidi remained in the same position, the last row in the back of class. When Chidi smiled at me, I was surprised that he immediately recognized me. Without a second thought, I moved closer to him. It seemed to me that he felt a sense of ease at my presence, which gave me room to begin interacting with him in a friendlier way.

In Chidi's classroom, the only language allowed to be practiced was English, although the teacher occasionally explained certain concepts in Igbo. Before the first lesson of the day, the classroom was always rowdy, with children chattering in Igbo. English lectures lasted an hour, after which students completed class work while the teacher waited. As the teacher graded the work, children who finished continued their chattering while those who took longer spent the time finishing. Those idle moments allowed me to engage Chidi in reading and formal and informal conversations. These moments also allowed me the opportunity to help him engage in his classwork.

I tried to make my daily encounter with him as natural as possible. I sat beside him, making conscious efforts not to disrupt his conversations with his friends except, when necessary, as when it disrupted their engagement with the teacher's instruction. As the children became used to my presence, I stood aside and listened to them or watched their movements and reactions. I made notes and used my phone to audio-record conversations.

### Data Collection

Data in this work were the results of my daily interactions with, and observations of Chidi and his friends. I also used fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011) to record my observations, reflections, how I applied translanguaging, and the contexts of each conversation and actions. To ensure interval validity and reliability (Creswell, 2007), I occasionally conducted member checking by referring Chidi back to our former conversations. I translated the Igbo dialogues into English as part of the data analysis. Since I could not locate any texts written in Nsukka Igbo, I used my knowledge as a native speaker to create a phonetic translation. When in doubt, I asked my family members' support during the transcription. My mentor read each transcript and checked my coding, thus adding to the validity of the data.

### *Data Analysis*

I organized and prepared the data by transcribing the audio recordings at the end of each day. I compared the transcript with my fieldnotes and collated emerging themes. At the end of the field work, I analyzed the data using the six-phase guide provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis: (a) Getting familiar with the data (b) generating initial codes (c) searching for emerging themes (d) reviewing the themes (e) defining or categorizing themes based on recurring patterns and (f) interpreting and writing the findings. First, I read the transcripts and the fieldnotes several times until I became familiar with the entire dataset. I made notes on the general sense I got from the data. The fieldnotes and reflections I wrote each day made it easier for me to establish patterns that related to the research questions. I used open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to develop more condensed codes, which were then modified as I established overlaps. I selected the most significant conversations and paraphrased some for a more focused analysis. I searched for themes (recurring patterns) that significantly captured, for example, Chidi's coping mechanisms. Lastly, I reviewed, modified, and collapsed some themes and developed primary ones. I further paraphrased some of the children's discussions to reduce the length of the data. Finally, I arrived at the following coping mechanisms: (a) escape from class and nonparticipation presence (b) loss of concentration and side conversations in the MT (c) silent resistance and forceful use of the MT. I also arrived at four positionalities: (a) as competent Igbo Speakers (b) as Incompetent and Vulnerable ELL (c) as Determined ELL and (d) as Identity Negotiators.

## Findings

In what follows, to avoid undue repetition, I have placed the words and sentences that were spoken in English in CAPITAL LETTERS. Igbo expressions are in ***boldface and are italicized.*** I have placed my comments in *italics* and my translations of Igbo to English in regular fonts.

### Coping Mechanisms: Navigating the Imposition of English

For Chidi and his classmates, the classroom was a place of identity negotiation and, as Norton and Toohey (2002) stated, "a site of struggle" (p. 116). Each time they spoke or read, they negotiated their identities as Igbo native speakers on the one hand and ELL learners on the other. During my time with them, I witnessed that they devised different coping mechanisms which enabled them to make sense of imposed bilingual identities and their learning experiences. Their major coping mechanisms are described below. Some of the coping mechanisms overlap.

### *Escape from Class and Nonparticipation Presence*

On my first day in the school, I identified Chidi as a restless child who played with his friends and continually tried to leave or escape from the class to use the bathroom. His requests were turned down by the teacher several times, and this prompted my intervention. When I engaged him in a casual discussion, I realized that he was struggling with reading and could minimally speak English. Leaving the class to the bathroom became an avoidance coping mechanism since he found it difficult to follow the lectures. That same day, I applied translanguaging after a reading comprehension lesson. I realized that Chidi, like most of the students, engaged in choral reading, repeating loudly what the teacher read without looking at the text on their textbook or on the chalkboard (see figure 1). But sometimes Chidi went silent and at other times he repeated the words incorrectly, as shown below:

Teacher: HE SAID
Chidi: **SHE** SAID
Teacher: THE LADY SAID
Chidi: **SHE SAY THE SAY**

In the above instance, it was obvious that what Chidi was repeating did not make any sense to him, yet, by reading loudly, he could stay present and give the appearance of learning.

**Figure 1.** *Choral Reading and Repetition*

After several choral repetitions, the teacher asked the children to sit down and read aloud on their own. Chidi looked at the texts without uttering a word. Moments later, he pushed the book aside and covered his face on the desk - another coping mechanism. I asked him, in Igbo, to sit up and inquired if he could read the text. He shook his head, indicating "no". I worked with him to identify and pronounce each word, practicing several times until he could do that on his own. We discussed the meaning of each word, translanguaging between English and Igbo. I used his snack money to explain the concept of buying and selling. Excerpt:

Me: What is a BIRO?
Chidi: Something you put inside a book; (*demonstrates with his hands*). A BIRO is a RULER.
Me: No! What is this object I am holding?
Chidi: PEN.
Me: A PEN IS ALSO A BIRO. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
Chidi: YES.
Me: What is an ERASER?

Chidi: RAZOR
Me: No! Do you have a pencil?
Chidi: Yes
Me: Can I see it? What do you call this attached part of the pencil?
Chidi: CLEANER.
Me: Yes, you are right. But it is also called an ERASER.
Me: What is an EXERCISE BOOK?
Chidi: A book used to learn EXERCISE.
Me: What do you call this object*?* (*I lifted an exercise book on his desk*).
Chidi (*silent for a while):* it is called BOOK.
Me: It is an EXERCISE BOOK.

After the practice, I asked him general questions about the passage. When I asked him in English, "WHAT IS SHE SELLING?" Chidi kept silent. Then I repeated the question in Igbo: ***Gịnị bụ ọ na-ere?*** He enthusiastically responded in English: "BIRO, ERASER AND, EXERCISE BOOK". Through this simple translanguaging strategy, which became a regular pattern he learned to focus on individual words while reading (see figure 2). Each time I taught him how to read a particular text, he practiced repeatedly on his own, until he became used to pronouncing all the words without support.

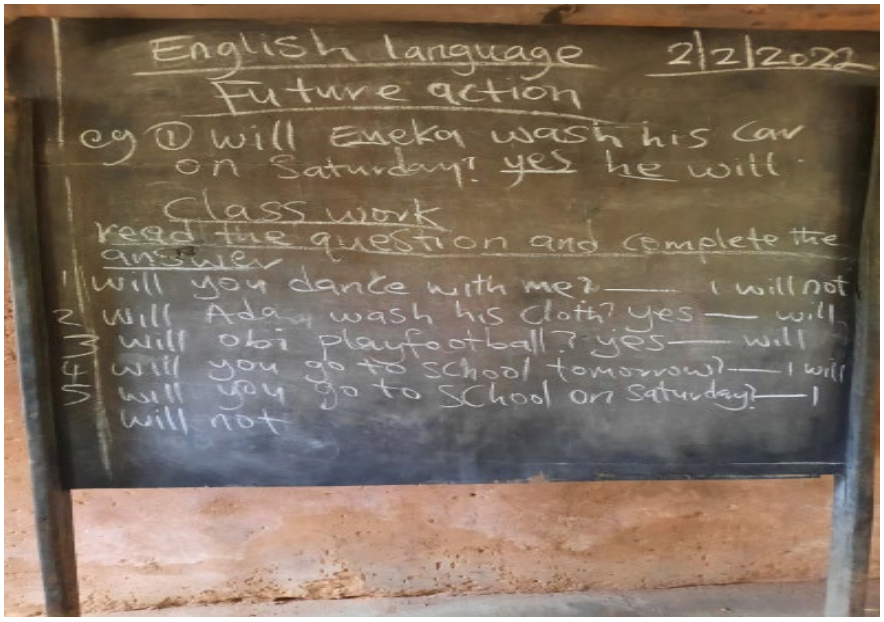
**Figure 2.** *Beginning to Read through Word Recognition*

### *Loss of Concentration and Side Conversations in the MT*

Another coping mechanism Chidi devised was constantly talking with his friends, in Igbo, even during lessons. One day, the teacher was teaching "Future Action" (figure 3). The kids got busy with their usual choral "reading", sometimes adding their own words as they wished. Excerpt:

WILL YOU DANCE WITH ME? NO, I WILL NOT.
WILL *ADA WASH **HIS** [sic] CLOTHES? YES, SHE **IS** [sic] WILL.
WILL OBI PLAY FOOTBALL? YES, HE WILL.
**Ada is a popular Nigerian female given name and it means "first daughter". The textbook had an error, "his" instead of "her". The teacher copied the text on the board with the error* (Fieldnote, February 2, 2022).

**Figure 3.** *Lesson on Future Action*




As the above lesson was going on, Chidi and his friend, Uche (pseudonym), busied themselves with side conversations in Igbo (see figure 4). Excerpt:

> Uche, (*suddenly*)*:* We have entered the month of February.
> Chidi, (*boastful*): Yesterday was what?
> Uche: FIRST.
> Chidi: I would have said. (*A clipped phrase, "**Mụ ga asị"**, meaning, "I would have been surprised if" […you did not know…*]).
> Uche: When I was coming to school, I ate bread and pap. I also came with HUNDRED NAIRA [one hundred naira]
> Chidi: What I have is TWO HUNDRED NAIRA. (*He brings it out*).
> Uche: Your money looks fine, as if it was withdrawn from the BANK.
> Chidi: We have entered 2022.
> Me, (*interrupting*): When did we enter 2022? When did 2022 start?
> Uche: After the *Krismas* [CHRISTMAS] celebration. On *Krismas* night.
> Chidi: After the NEW YEAR celebration. On NEW YEAR night.
> Uche: See, it is written there (*points at the chalkboard*).
> At this point, they began to talk about the Christmas "KNOCKOUT" [firework].
> Me: Now, listen to your teacher!

In the above episode, the children's ideas flowed freely and spontaneously as they spoke Igbo. On a surface level, the ideas may appear disjointed, but it was a moment where they could assert each of their sense of self as they tested each other's knowledge of dates and seasons. I realized that what they discussed created a great learning opportunity which I quickly and briefly utilized.

**Figure 4.** *Side Conversation*

Side conversations mainly occurred when the children were engaged in repetitive or choral "learning". By pointing at the chalkboard, the children showed that they were not completely detached from the class. However, for Chidi and Uche, instead of repeating a set of sentences that did not make sense, they created their own safe spaces in which they used Igbo to recall their experiences and build knowledge for themselves.

### *Silent Resistance and Forceful Use of the MT*

Two more coping mechanisms which Chidi used in the classroom were either responding in Igbo when spoken to in English or keeping silent. Several episodes demonstrated his use of either silence or forceful use of the MT. One morning, he came late to school. As soon as he settled down, I asked in English, "WHY WERE YOU LATE TO SCHOOL"? At first, he kept silent, but after a while, he responded, *"**Mmm…, an' m eku urua.**"* (Mmm…, I was sleeping). Another example was when they shared their desires to learn English. But their excitement ended soon after as Chidi's attempt to speak failed. Excerpt:

> Me: Let us speak English now. Should we speak English?
> Kids, (*in unison):* Yeees.
> Me: okay, I will ask you some questions one after the other.
> Me, (*to Chidi):* WHY DO YOU WANT TO GO TO LAGOS?
> Chidi: TO THE, TO THE*… **Ge mu** ("so that I will")* GOING TO THE, THE WATER.
> Me: You're going to the water? Okay, when you get to the water, what will you do?
> Chidi: *Silent*. I prompted him to respond, but he refused until I changed the discussion to Igbo.

In the above conversations, language use became formal and Chidi's abilities to think and express himself were stifled. His words could not flow freely as self-doubt set in, and he went into identity negotiation through which he made a linguistic choice of either speaking or keeping silent. When his attempts to speak English failed, he receded into silence as a linguistic choice. The above conversation contrasts with the one below in which the three friends spoke spontaneously and playfully in Igbo. Excerpt:

Me: How will you get money to buy a car? What type of work will you do in Lagos?
Emeka: He will be a barrow pusher.
Chidi: I will do HOLY GHOST work.
*Uche and Emeka started laughing, amused at his response.*
Chidi*, (protesting):* It is this boy who said that I will be a barrow pusher.
Me: don't mind him. So, what work would you like to do?
Chidi: Borehole drilling.
Me: The same type of work your Daddy is doing?
Emeka: Your Daddy is a barrow pusher.
Chidi: HOLY GHOST FIRE! Get mad.
Uche: Your Daddy is an *okada* rider [commercial cyclist].
Uche (to me): His Daddy is a tailor.

In another instance, Chidi returned from the restroom after my intervention (this episode is described fully in the next section). We had the following conversation in Igbo:

Me: What did you say to the teacher?
Chidi: Exactly what you asked me to tell her.
Me: What exactly did you say to her?
Chidi: *silent*
Me: Did you speak to her in English or Igbo?
*Emeka started laughing. Chidi lowered his head, but I urged him to respond.*
Chidi: **A gwar' m ya iye hu I gwar' m, ne nwamunyi n'akpashim ike** (I told her that thing you said to me, that I urgently needed to use the restroom).
Me: Did you say it in Igbo?
*He nodded, shyly. Soon after, he began talking excitedly to me, in Igbo.*

The above conversation is another example of the linguistic tension that an imposed identity had on Chidi. He also experienced linguistic shame each time his friends laughed at his inability to speak English. His use of the phrase "that thing you said to me" was not a coincidence but a calculated linguistic choice. Since the rule was to speak English in class, it was only through an intervention such as the ones I implemented that he was able to find the courage to break the rule by speaking Igbo. He had previously doubted his linguistic competence and the ability to exert himself as an ELL learner. But the senses of anxiety and self-doubt contrasted with situations in which he was free to talk in Igbo as shown in the dialogue below:

ME: What did you do after school yesterday?
Chidi: I went to CATECHISM
Me: Where?
Chidi: ***N'ulo uka ime orie*** (In the Church at the Orie Market).
Me: After that, what else did you do?
Chidi: I went to BLOCK (*Block Rosary], a common prayer group for kids*).
Me: Can you repeat what you have just told me in English?
Me, *(in English):* WHAT DID YOU DO YESTERDAY, AFTER SCHOOL? CAN YOU REPEAT YOUR ANSWER IN ENGLISH?
Chidi: *Silent.*
I tried to cajole him into saying something, but he simply shook his head without uttering a word.

Once again, when forced to speak English, as shown in the later part of the conversation, he chose silence as a conscious linguistic choice. In conclusion, each time I tried to teach him English" through am imposed language practice, I failed.

**Translanguaging and Students' Positionality**

The teaching method in Chidi's classroom presented education as a "banking system" (Freire, 2005) in which teachers posit information into students. It was characterized by rote learning and failed to critically engage the children. A typical example was an episode after a science lesson on "Harmful Farm Insects". When the children were given classwork after the lesson, I wanted to find out, in Igbo, if Chidi understood the lesson. The following dialogue took place.

> Me: What is the meaning of "HARMFUL"?
> Chidi: **Iye di FULL**. (Something that is full).
> Me: No. *I explained the meaning.*
> Uche, (*reads):* HARMFUL FARMA INSECT
> Chidi (*protesting):* ***Gede mbe edere "A"? I siri FARMA. O bu FARM.*** *(Where is 'A' written? You said 'FARMER'. It is farm*).
> Me: What is "AN INSECT"?
> Emeka: That empty container used in the church by the Mass servers. They pour something inside and swing it, and then it smells.
> Me: Oh, that one is INCENSE. It is different from the word INSECT.
> Me: Let's read again. What is FARM?
> Chidi: That thing that blows air on people.
> Uche, (*laughing*): He said it is FAN.

The above example, and similar incidents, reflect how significant the impacts English-only or monolingual education has on learners' education. In Chidi's class, the children regurgitated facts and concepts as an equivalent to learning. The above example was more surprising because the school was surrounded by farmlands visible just by looking through the windows. However, the children could not connect their learning with their environment due to the language barrier and perhaps also the teacher's shortsightedness to go beyond the textbook to offer practical, hands-on learning opportunities. Faced with different learning challenges, the children positioned themselves differently at different times. Some examples are discussed below.

*Positionality as Competent Igbo Speakers*

Throughout my work, I noticed that Chidi and his friends positioned themselves as competent Igbo speakers who were developing bilingual identities as ELL learners. Chidi continued to assert and exert himself as an emerging bilingual. For example, after a reading lesson titled, "Telling how to do Things", the children were given classwork, but I realized that Chidi could not complete his. I worked with him using translanguaging. This had two direct impacts on him. First, he understood the passage and moved from literal to a deeper level of comprehension, as shown in the dialogue below, which was in Igbo:

> Me*:* From what we have read, did Musa's mother teach him how to cook yam?
> Chidi: Yes
> Me: Next time, if Musa wants to cook yam, what will he do?
> Chidi: He will cook it, and if his mother is not at home and he is hungry, he will take some yams and cook.
> Me: What did you learn about cooking yam?

> Chidi (*suddenly and with boldness):* Sister, I know how to cook yam. I used to cook yam at home.
> Me: All right. Please explain to me how you cook it.
> Chidi, (*with much excitement)*: I cut the yam, wash it, wash the pot and pour the yams into the pot. Then, I pour some water into the pot and put it on the fire. After some time, I pierce it with a knife to know if it is soft. If it is not hard, then I bring it down.

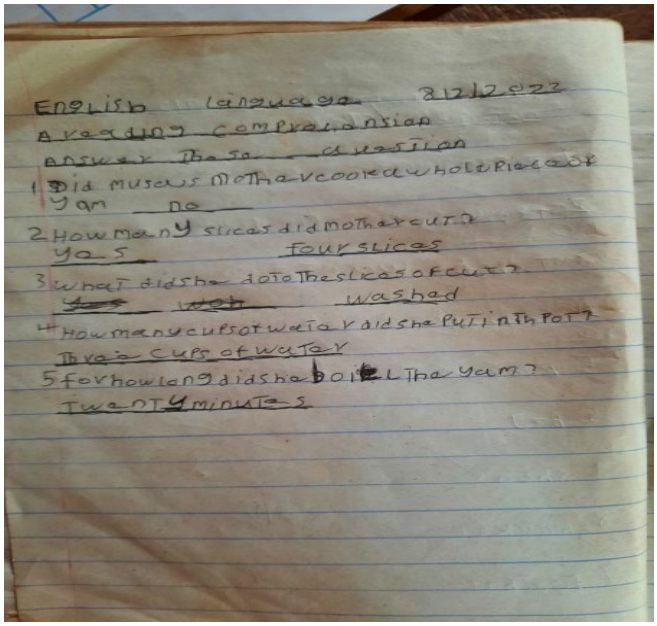
As shown in the dialogue, translanguaging enabled Chidi to connect the reading passage with his everyday experience of cooking yam, a stable Nigerian food. He further engaged with the text in a significantly personal way by expressing his identity as "an expert in yam cooking" (Chidi). He moved to a deeper level of reading comprehension, introducing several ideas that were not explicitly stated in the text. For example, he brought in the idea of "piercing the yam" to find out if it was cooked. By adding that Musa should be able to cook yam for himself whenever he was hungry and his mother was not at home, Chidi moved to the level of critical literacy.

The second impact of translanguaging was that Chidi could self-correct his classwork. Initially, he wrote "Yes" or "No" as answers to all the questions (see figure 5).

**Figure 5.** *Chidi's Classwork Before Translanguaging*

Before applying translanguaging, he had written numbers 1-3 of the classwork as shown in Fig. 5. When I stopped him, and we discussed the passage using translanguaging, he realized his mistakes. He erased what he had written and wrote different answers as shown on figure 6).

**Figure 6.** *Chidi's Classwork after Translanguaging*




### *Positionality as Incompetent and Vulnerable ELL*

An episode in the class offered a glimpse into Chidi's constant struggles with his imposed bilingual identity and how translanguaging became an unavoidable tool for negotiating his sense of self. It was a moment of confrontation with English and what it symbolizes in his life. A lesson had just ended, and the children were completing their classwork when Chidi suddenly stood up. I spoke to him, in English:

> Me: WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
> Chidi*: Gẹ m je sị Auntie, gẹ m je* **EASE MYSELF.** *Nwamụnyi na-akpa m.* (*Let me go and tell the auntie, let me go and ease myself. I want to use the bathroom*).

Although Chidi's MT was not welcomed in the class, the urgency of his need required him to speak up. Therefore, he positioned himself as an emerging bilingual capable of exerting himself through translanguaging. He negotiated his expertise in English and skillfully chose the keywords, "**EASE MYSELF**" that might present him as not completely failing the linguistic rule of the class but could enable him to obtain his request thereby retaining a positive sense of self. Unfortunately, things did not work out as he had hoped. He returned sooner than expected looking downcast. He continued standing and was restless. Then I asked him,

> Me: YOU DIDN'T GO? WHY?
> Chidi (*sullenly*): ***O siri m***, GO BACK! (*She said to me, "go back"!)*

Chidi uttered the phrase, GO BACK with a dejected countenance and an angry tone of finality that made both his frustration and a sense of defeat clearly visible. It occurred to me that I needed to intervene at that moment to enable him to maintain a positive sense of identity as an ELL. I bent low, touched him gently on the shoulder and spoke to him in Igbo.

> Me: Do you really need to use the bathroom?
> *He nodded without looking at me.*

Me: Go back and tell her, in Igbo, that you really need to use the bathroom, as a matter of urgency.

He went back to the teacher. I watched him as he moved forward, hoping that if the permission was rejected again, I would have to approach the teacher and insist on it. However, the teacher granted the request. He went out, came back later and continued with his classwork. The intervention I was able to implement through translanguaging gave him the necessary support.

### *Positionality as Determined ELL*

Despite Chidi's struggles with English, there were crucial moments of triumph when he manifested his deep-seated proficiency in Igbo and spoke in ways that were surprising. This study was carried out during a political crisis in the Eastern part of Nigeria, so, Mondays were designated as "sit-at-home" or "lockdown" days, and all forms of movement, economic activities, and school attendance were prohibited. Before the lesson began on a Tuesday morning, I initiated a conversation in English but noticed Chidi's sudden discomfort and unresponsiveness. Then I changed to Igbo:

Me: Did you come to school yesterday?
Chidi: No.
Me: Why?
Chidi: Yesterday was not a school day.
Me: But yesterday was Monday. Is Monday not a school day?
Chidi: It was LOCKDOWN day.
Me: Why is there a LOCKDOWN on Mondays?
Chidi: I don't know.
Me: What happens on LOCKDOWN days?
Chidi: ***Ịfụta, a LOCKA gị DOWN.*** (If you come out, they LOCK you DOWN).
Me: What does it mean to LOCK somebody DOWN?
Chidi: ***Asua gị ẹka n'ishi, i dee eshi.*** (*You'll receive a hard knock on your head, then you'll shrink*).

The most interesting part of the above conversation to me was Chidi's last statement. The rare diction *"I dee eshi"* confounded me because it was a rare - phrase used by only the older generation of Nsukka Igbo speakers. The phrase was more profound than any English word I could associate with it. I found myself, an adult native speaker, having to learn new vocabulary from a nine-year-old child. At home, I asked my mother to help and learned the translation, which means "to shrink".

Reflecting on the dialogue later, I also realized how Chidi played on the word "lockdown" to derive a personal meaning, "a day associated with violence". He used his expertise in the MT to assign meaning to a socio-political issue around him. In doing so, he showed his inherent creative potential in language that could flourish if he had opportunities to fluidly use language by translanguaging between Igbo and English.

Another revealing moment with the children was when Uche exhibited his 'prowess' in speaking English in a novel, yet funny way. While a lesson was going on, Uche suddenly initiated the conversation below:

Uche (boastingly): If I speak this particular English, none of you will understand it.
Emeka (*daring him):* Ok, speak it now!
Uche (*boastfully):* HOW UNA DEY? (Nigerian Pidgin, meaning, "how are you all?").
Emeka: It means, "Where are you going"?
*Uche laughs proudly.*

Me (*interrupting*): How about Chidi? What did he say is the meaning?
Uche (*beamingly*): He said that he does not know the meaning.
Me (*to Uche*): So, what is the meaning?
Uche (*boastfully*): *It means,* "HOW ARE YOU".

The above conversation shows the place of English language in the children's life. To Uche, speaking English in a novel way gave him a sense of pride and made him happy. By using a Nigerian Pidgin English, he showed how his bilingual identity is naturally developing in a social context. Chidi displayed a similar sense of joy one morning. As soon as I entered the class, he said to me excitedly, in Igbo, "Sister, I practiced the reader yesterday. I can read it".

Me: If I ask you to read now, can you?
Chidi: Yes. *Then he opened a passage we had practiced the previous day and read it for me.*
Me, (*to Uche*): Did you practice it?
Uche: ***E nwegi mu ekwukwo*** (I don't have the book).

### *Positionality as Identity Negotiators*

Another experience emerged during a conversation about "going to Lagos", an idea that came up due to the consent form I had sent to children's parents. A parent came to the school the next day, and inquired from me, *"My child said that you intend to take him to Lagos"*. I was surprised. Later, I realized that the children had misinterpreted my mission in their school. This led to a discussion through which they shared complex linguistic perceptions of English, their motivation for learning, and how English helped them retain their senses of selves. Excerpt:

Me: Why do you want to go to Lagos?
Chidi: So that I will get money.
Me: Money? What do you want to do with money?
Uche, (*to Chidi, with an alarming tone):* If you get there, you'll be speaking English!
Emeka *(also sounding alarmed)*: ***Chidi, ị dị SURE n'ịmara asụ English***? (Chidi, are you sure that you can speak English*?*)

The children imagined that moving to an environment in which English would be the only language of communication should be taken seriously. As the dialogue unfolded, Uche and Emeka indicated that they would like to leave their present school, "where children were seriously flogged" (Emeka), to Lagos, where they would learn English.

Uche: …I want to speak English so that my Daddy and others will say that I could speak English so that they will be happy, [and] …I will be so pleased with myself.
Chidi: …I want to go to Lagos …so that when I return, I will speak English, and my Mummy and Daddy will be happy with me.
Emeka: I want to speak English …so that nobody would speak Igbo to me again.
Me (*to Emeka)*: Why not?
Emeka: I don't like the way Igbo people speak.
Me: How do they speak?
Emeka: When they insult you, you too insult them in return. And I don't want to insult people in return.

The children revealed in the above conversation how learning English was tied to their retaining senses of selves as individuals who needed to be accepted by their families. It was an existential challenge with which they had to struggle. Moreover, since their proficiency in Igbo could not guarantee

acceptance or power, it was not surprising that another child, Emeka (pseudonym), wanted to distance himself from his Igbo identity. By equating Igbo with a language used for "mutual exchange of insults" Emeka identified English as a purer language incapable of being used for unpleasant communication, such as for insulting people. Another revealing aspect of the above dialogue was the use of corporal punishment in school. The children imagined that in the cities, they would learn English and by so doing, escape corporal punishments which, as I also noticed, were given to students who could not read. One day, Chidi stood in front of the class and read. He returned to his seat looking happy and triumphant. But when he sat down, he looked at the other students kneeling in front of the class. Then he shouted, pointing at one of them, **"*Chinwe esekpumeru ala*!"** (Chinwe (pseudonym) is kneeling down)!

Me: Why is he kneeing down?
Chidi: Because he couldn't read.

From Chidi's happy response, I imagined his sense of pride for being able to read which in turn elevated and spared him the humiliation of kneeling down. I remembered my childhood days when I too was punished for not being able to read. Meanwhile, Chidi's reading improvement through my brief intervention was a proof to me that the children's inability to read was tied to their limited competence in English. They also had inadequate attention to developing literacy skills using the best practices in teaching. Several similar incidents convinced me that my daily encounter with Chidi and his classmates brought positive changes in their struggles to find a voice in the classroom. A day before I ended the fieldwork, I watched him and Uche playfully practicing reading, while translanguaging between English and Igbo:

Uche (*reading*): THIS IS…
Chidi: ***Gede mbe ederu THIS?*** (Where is THIS written?)
Uche (*points at the word*): ***Lekwe ye!*** (Look at it!)
Chidi *(pointing at the picture on the book):* ***Nke a bụ WOMAN*** (This one is WOMAN).
Uche: ***Ọ bụ ịleka*** **MAN** (It is rather, MAN).

The above dialogue reflects how easy and flexible reading became for children, after being empowered to use language fluidly.

## Discussion

The experiences I share highlight how the use of English as the only LOI prevents Nigerian children from acquiring literacy skills and, more, attaining healthy senses of selves. Learning, as Wenger (2010) explains, is "a social becoming" (p. 3). It is a transitory and transformative process through which one negotiates a new way of being without entirely giving up what one had been, that is, one's identity. To subvert their perception of themselves as competent monolinguals yet incompetent bilinguals, the children needed a supportive classroom in which the rich linguistic resources they had acquired as competent Igbo speakers could be used to reinforce their learning of English. However, such opportunities were unavailable due to the school's choice of English-only LOI. The choice had negative consequences, including low-level literacy acquisition and an inability to use language creatively and meaningfully.

Despite the different coping mechanisms, the children's identity positioning as incompetent speakers of English manifested in loss of concentration, loss of control, feelings of vulnerability, alienation, and a desire to distance themselves from their cultural identities. There were also instances of "linguistic shame and inferiority" (Coronel-Molina, 1999). Whenever the children had opportunities to communicate in Igbo, their ideas flowed spontaneously and creatively. However, when forced to

speak English, self-expression became difficult, and language use became formal and mechanical, making them feel linguistically incapacitated. Subjugation and a feeling of inadequacy are some of the effects of colonialism (hooks, 1994). The preference for monolingual education, as exemplified in Chidi's classroom, makes many Nigerian classrooms a colonial space.

A decolonial pedagogy such as translanguaging offers an opportunity to decenter any dominant language in the learning space thereby allowing a more fluid language practice. Translanguaging gives room for many language possibilities in the teaching-learning process. On the contrary, monolingual teaching practice in the dominant language will continue to perpetuate the "global constructions of functional literacy education as Eurocentric and neo-colonial" (Perry, 2020, p. 2). Through my use of translanguaging in Chidi's class, positive impacts were made, including increased learning and the ability to retain their sense of self. The young people shifted from mere memorization of facts and concepts to active participation in class and critical literacy. In the yam story, for example, I did not have to teach Chidi everything about yam cooking; I rather learned from him because he was experienced in it.

I posit that translanguaging has outstanding potential for Nigerian children and can be a useful decolonial practice. Within the short period of time I spent in the school, the bond between Chidi and me was strengthened. I was not sure what he thought of each time I stepped in and out of the class, but his excitement whenever I stood aside and watched suggested that his zeal to study exponentially increased. The words and sentences written on the pages of his books were no longer mysteries with which to be grappled. They became representations of reality and offered him more opportunities to renegotiate his identity as an emerging bilingual.

Reflecting on my encounter with Chidi, I realized that Nigeria has continued to sustain an oppressive language policy that is harmful to young ELL learners. As I think of the long, difficult roads I have traversed to reach where I am today, I wonder how different life could have been if someone had been afforded as a resource and shown me guidance and hope. Somehow, I know that he still has a long way to go, but I also hope he will sustain the zeal with which I left him.

## Conclusion

In discussing the use of the MT in bi/multilingual education, highly multilingual countries like Nigeria, often present apparent challenges that cannot be taken for granted. Questions such as, *Which language should be used?* and *Which language should be left behind?* will always come to mind. No doubt, the problem is more complex when many of such languages are not standardized and lack written versions and instructional resources. With such complexities, monolingual education with a preference for either the dominant or ex-colonial language might be seen as the best option. However, insights from this study suggest that monolingual education harms children who are learning to be bilingual and reduces their chances of attaining critical literacy skills. Students need to learn the language of instruction, be it a dominant or national language, both to succeed in school and to connect with the global world. However, that should not be done at the expense of their cultural and linguistic identities. MT is the window through which they make sense of their world. To suddenly cut young people off from their identities is destructive. It decontextualizes the lessons, makes language learning mechanical, thereby reducing their chances of learning the target language.

In all my engagements with Chidi and his friends, it was evident that an oppressive language practice disengaged them from their MT and was a significant hindrance to their literacy acquisition. It silenced them and made them vulnerable. Colonialism, according to Santos (2016), "is a system of naturalizing differences in such a way that the hierarchies that justify domination, oppression, and so

on are considered the product of the inferiority of certain peoples and not the cause of their so-called inferiority" (p. 18). English language naturalized differences in Chidi's learning space. Lack of competence in English made him feel inferior several times and alienated him from the class. However, his situation hardly received attention until I encountered him. Without the intervention, I could have perhaps misjudged him as a low ability or misbehaved child who could not settle down in class.

In ELL classrooms, teachers need to create opportunities that allow children to tell their personal stories and connect new information with their contexts by using language freely and naturally. Such freedom could give them the required space to negotiate and own their identities as L2 learners to whom developing higher competence in the target language is a gradual process. Translanguaging can offer such opportunities. In my research study, it enabled the children to reinforce their learning using the resources they had gained from Igbo, their L1. If the translanguaging practices were sustained, Chidi could emerge not only as a bilingual but also as one with the capacity to engage in both local and global cultures and practices.

Chidi was not the only child who needed support. Many children in his class did. As I stepped out of their class on the last day of my fieldwork, I looked at them and thought of how long it might take them to reach the level of literacy needed to compete with their future colleagues in the global world. Although I promised to teach them English, each time I visited home, my daily encounters with them also made me realize how grossly incompetent I had become in my MT. This was prominent when Chidi used Igbo dictions that were deeply enriching but remote to me.

### Evaluation of Contribution to the Field

This study contributes to current understanding of the challenges of teaching English in an ELL learning space. While this research cannot be generalized due to the short duration of the intervention, it does show that translanguaging has the potential to transform teaching practice in Nigeria and in other second or additional language learning environments. More studies are needed to show the long-time implication of applying translanguaging on young people and in an L2 situation. My proficiency in Nsukka Igbo, the language of the participants gave me an invaluable advantage to connect with their daily realities. However, I wonder how translanguaging might have worked if I was not competent in the students' L1. Further studies with teachers not proficient in students' L1 languages could offer insight into classroom practices, teacher talk, coping mechanisms and a healthy sense of self, etc. I also wonder what could have happened if the students spoke different languages. These wonderings open a space for future research, including how translanguaging might work in multilingual contexts, including where students speak different languages or where teachers and students do not speak the same language.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## References


Anchimbe, E. A. (2006). Functional seclusion and the future of indigenous languages in Africa: The case of Cameroon. In J. Mugane et al., (Ed.). *Selected proceedings of the 35th annual conference on African linguistics* (pp. 94-103). Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

Alidou, H., Boly, A., Brock-Utne, B., Diallo, Y. S., Kathleen, H., & Wolff, H. E. (2006). *Optimizing learning and education in Africa - the language factor a stock-taking research on mother tongue and bilingual education in Sub-Saharan Africa.* Association for the Development of Education in Africa.

Baba, S. N. (2016). An analysis of teacher willingness to use the langue of the immediate environment at lower basic 3 in Jigawa State. In H. Mcllwraith (Ed.). *The Abuja Regional Hornby School: Language lessons from Africa* (pp. 107-122).

Baker, C. (2001). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (3rd ed.). Multilingual Matters.

Bamgbose, A. (2000). *Language and exclusion: The consequences of language policies in Africa.* LIT.

Banda, F. (2010). Defying monolingual education: Alternative bilingual discourse practices in selected colored schools in Cape Town. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 31*(3), 221-235. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434631003658073

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bulcha, M. (1997). The politics of linguistic homogenization in Ethiopia and the conflict over the status of Afaan Oromoo. *African Affairs 96*(384), 325–52.

Butina, M. (2005). A narrative approach to qualitative inquiry. *Clinical Laboratory Science*, 28(3), 190-196.

Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2022). Pedagogical Translanguaging and its application to language classes. *RELC Journal*, *53*(2) 342–354. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882221082751

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative enquiry and research. Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publication, Inc.

Coronel-Molina, S. (1999). Crossing borders and constructing indigeneity: A self-ethnography of identity. In J. N. Brown, & P. M. Sant (Eds.). *Indigeneity: Construction and re/presentation* (pp. 59-75). Nova Science Publishers.

De Costa, P. I., Green-Eneix, C., Li, W., & Rawal, H. (2021). Interrogating race in the NEST/NNEST ideological dichotomy: Insights from raciolinguistics, culturally sustaining pedagogy and translanguaging. In R. Rubdy & R. Tupas (Eds.). *World Englishes: Ideologies* (pp. 127-140). Bloomsbury.

Dougherty, J. (2021). Translanguaging in action: Pedagogy that elevates. *ORTESOL Journal, 38, 20-32.*

De Klerk, V. (2000). To be Xhosa or not to be Xhosa ...that is the question. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 21*(3), 198-215. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630008666401

Emerson, R., Fretz, R., & Shaw, L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Escobar, A. (2017). *Designs for the pluriverse: Radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds.* Duke University Press

Ezenwa-Ohaeto, N., & Akujobi, O. S. (2013). English as a second language in contemporary Nigerian society, a reality or farce? *Awka Journal of English Language and Literary Studies, 4*(1), 45-60.

Ezeokoli, F. O., & Ugwu, E. O. (2019). Parents', teachers' and students' beliefs about the use and study of mother-tongue in the secondary schools in Akinyele Local Government Area, Oyo State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies, 7*(2), 82-93. http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.7n.2p.82

Flores-Rodríguez, D. (2012). Language, power and resistance: Re-reading fanon in a Trans-Caribbean context. *The Black Scholar. 42*(3-4), 27-35. http://dx.doi.org/10.5816/black scholar.42.3-4.0027

Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Translated by M. B. Ramos. (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum.

Gadelii, K. E. (2004). *Annotated statistics on linguistic policies and practices in Africa,* www.african.gu.se/downloads/gadeliireport.pdf.

García, O. (2011). *From language garden to sustainable languaging: Bilingual education in a global world. NABE Perspectives.* https://ofeliagarciadotorg.files.wordpress.com/ 2011 /02/2012nabenewsletter_34n1_nov2011_dec2011.pdf

García, O., Johnson, S., & Seltzer, K. (2016). *The translanguaging classroom. Leveraging student bilingualism for learning.* Caslon.

García, O., & Leiva, C. (2014). Theorizing and enacting translanguaging for social justice. In A. Blaledge & A. Creese (Eds). *Heteroglossia as practice and pedagogy* (pp. 199-216). Springer.

García, O., & Lin, A. M. Y. (2016). Translanguaging in bilingual education. In O. García, A. M. Y. Lin, & S. May (Eds.). *Bilingual and multilingual education,* Encyclopedia of language and education. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02324-3_9-1

Gumperz, J. (1982). *Discourse strategies.* Cambridge University Press.

Hancock, A. (2018). Learning literacy in multilingual contexts: Scotland and South Africa. In V. Nomlomo, Z. Desai, & J. September (Eds.). *From words to ideas: The role of literacy in enhancing young children's development* (pp. 32-51). University of the Western Cape/British Council South Africa.

Haukås, A. (2016). Teachers' beliefs about multilingualism and a multilingual pedagogical approach. *International Journal of Multilingualism 13*(1), 1-18.

hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom.* Routledge.

Hornberger, N. H., & Link, H. (2012). Translanguaging and transnational literacies in multilingual classrooms: A bilingual lens. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 15*(3), 261-278. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2012.658016

Igboanusi, H. S., & Peters, L. (2015). The language-in-education politics in Nigeria. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 19*(5), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2015.1031633

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). (2024). Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery. https://inee.org/minimum-standards

Irizarry, J. G. (2011). Buscando la Libertad: Latino youths in search of freedom in school. *Democracy and education, 19*(1), 1-10.

Katsos, N., Gibson, J., Lorge, I., Müller, L., Öztürk, O., Reynolds, J., Wilson, E., & Forbes, K. (2021). Language skills and identity in bilingual education: A case study of a bilingual primary school in England. *Cambridge Occasional Papers in Linguistics, 13*(2), 35-62. https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/174456/

Kvietok-Dueñas, F. J. (2019). Youth bilingualism, identity and Quechua language planning and policy in the Urban Peruvian Andes. *Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations. 3293.* https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/3293

Lane, P., & Mikihara. (2017). Indigenous people and their languages. In O. García, N. Flores & M. Spotti (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of language and society* (pp. 282-299). Oxford University Press.

Leonet, O., Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2017). Challenging minority language isolation: Translanguaging in a trilingual school in the Basque country. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education, 16(*4), 216-227. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2017.1328281

Lewis, G., Jones, B., & Baker, C. (2012). Translanguaging: Origins and development from school to street and beyond. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 18*(7), 641-654.

Mbirimi-Hungwe, V., & Hungwe, T. (2020). The use of translanguaging among speakers of mutually intelligible languages to understand computer science concepts: A case of "Sepitori" in South Africa. In. V. Mbirimi-Hungwe, T. Hungwe, & S. M. Seeletse (Eds.). *Emerging perspectives on translanguaging in multilingual university classrooms* (pp. 1-17).

Medina, C. M. (2021). Barruntos: Youth improvisational work as anticolonial literacy actionings in Puerto Rico. *Research in the Teaching of English, 56*(2), 132-154.

Menon, S., Green, C., Charbonneau, I., Lehtomäki, I., & Mafi, B. (2021). Approaching global education development with a decolonial lens: Teachers' reflections. *Teaching in Higher Education, 26*(7)8, 937-952. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1941845

Morita, N. (2004). Negotiating participation and identity in second language academic communities. *TESOL Quarterly, 38*(4), 573-603

Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change.* Pearson Education Ltd.

Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2002). Identity and language learning. In R. Kaplan (Ed.). *The Oxford handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 115-123).

Orellana, M. F., & García, O. (2014) Language brokering and translanguaging in school. *Language Arts, 91*(5), 386-392.

Otheguy, R., García, O., & Reid, W. (2015). Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective from linguistics. *Applied Linguistics Review, 6*(3), 281–307. http://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2015-0014

Ouane, A., & Glanz, C. (2010). *Why and how Africa should invest in African languages and multilingual education. An evidence-and practice- based policy advocacy brief.* UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

Ouane, A., & Glanz, C. (Eds.). (2011). *Optimising learning, education and publishing in Africa: The language factor. A review and analysis of theory and practice in mother-tongue and bilingual education in sub-Saharan Africa.* UIL/ADEA.

Parra, M. O., & Proctor, P. (2022). *The translanguaging pedagogies continuum.* CUNY academic works. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/qc_pubs/521

Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (2004). Introduction: New theoretical approaches to the study of negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts. In A. Pavlenko, & A. Blackledge (Eds.). *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts* (pp. 1-33). https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853596483-003

Perry, M. (2020). Pluriversal literacies: Affect and relationality in vulnerable times. *Reading Research Quarterly, 56*(2), 239-309. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.312

Perry, M. (2023). *Pluriversal literacies for sustainable futures: When words are not enough* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003302360

Portolés, L., & Martí, O. (2020). Teachers' beliefs about multilingual pedagogies and the role of initial training. *International Journal of Multilingualism, 17*(2), 248–264.

Ravishankar, A. (2020). *Linguistic imperialism: Colonial violence through language.* Trinity College Digital Repository. https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/trinitypapers/87

Rodríguez-Tamayo, I. Y., & Tenjo-Macias, L. M. (2019). Children's cultural identity formation: Experiences in a dual language program. *Gist Education and Learning Research Journal*, 18, 86-108. https://doi.org/10.26817/16925777.439

Santos, B. de Sousa. (2016). Epistemologies of the South and the future. *From the European South*, *1,* 17-29. http://europeansouth.postcolonialitalia.it

Silbernagel, E. (2015). *Investigating the linguistic identity development of dual language learners.* Honors Program Theses, 155. https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt/155

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.* Sage Publications, Inc.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2014). *National policy on education (*6th ed.). Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council.

Ugwu, E. O. (2019). Africa on the verge of a linguistic genocide: The need for action. *European Scientific Journal, 15*(23), 57-75. http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2019.v15n23p57

Ugwu, E. O. (2021a). Keeping the promise of multilingual education in Nigeria: The neglected question. *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria, 24*(1), 1-14.

Ugwu, E. O. (2021b). Mother tongue-based multilingual education in Nigeria: A remote reality. *International Journal of Arts and Social Sciences Education, 6*(2), 61-72.

Vogel, S., & García, O. (2017). Translanguaging. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education.* https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.181

Wenger, E. (2010). *Communities of practice and social learning systems: The career of a concept.* https://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2012 /01/09-10-27-CoPs-and-systems-v2.01.pdf

Wolff, H. E. (2017). Language ideologies and the politics of language in post-colonial Africa. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus, 51*, 1-22. https://dx.doi.org/10.5842/51-0-701

Ziai, A. (2018). Internationalism and speaking for others: What struggling against neoliberal globalization taught me about epistemology. In B. Reiter (Ed.). *Constructing the pluriverse: The geopolitics of knowledge* (pp. 117–136). Duke University Press.

Zavala, M. (2016). Decolonial methodologies in education. *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory.* https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-532-7_498-1

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025, pp. 109-126**
**DOI 10.14434/ijlcle.v5i.35166**

# Engaging Comunalidad as Theory and Praxis in Language Reclamation

María Cecilia Schwedhelm Ramírez

## Abstract

Comunalidad is the result of struggle and collective reflection emerging from the daily resistance and lived experiences of Indigenous peoples in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, Mexico (Maldonado, 2010). Like comunalidad, language reclamation is inherently relational and dynamic, deeply connected to identity, autonomy, and self-determination. In this essay, I explore comunalidad as theory, praxis, and pedagogy asking: How might comunalidad, as a relational and situated praxis, inform efforts toward language revitalization? Understanding the foundations and contextual factors that give rise to comunalidad is necessary to illuminate its intersections with and implications for language reclamation. I argue that comunalidad prompts us to conceive of language reclamation as a collective purpose—one that arises from, informs, and strengthens community relational practices and processes. As theory, comunalidad informs language reclamation; as praxis, it actively shapes both language and the process of reclaiming it. In this way, comunalidad emphasizes the need for situated pedagogies rooted in the daily praxis of the community. Overall, a lens of comunalidad provides insight into how language reclamation can function as a collective process and responsibility, building and strengthening community relationality, self-determination, and resistance.

**Keywords**: comunalidad, decolonization, indigenous language revitalization, language reclamation, indigenous education, Latin America

**Contact:** María Cecilia Schwedhelm Ramírez, Independent Researcher
E-mail: maria.schwedhelm@gmail.com

## Introduction

Comunalidad is a product of processes of struggle and collective reflection that emerged, not within the hegemonic spaces of academia, but in the daily struggle and resistance of Indigenous peoples of the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, Mexico, against the dispossession of their lands and in defense of their right to self-determination (Maldonado, 2010a). Described as "the principle and practices of communal life and the source of indigenous identity and resistance" (Meyer, 2010, p. 30-31), comunalidad emerges as an ideology of conscientization that seeks to "orient the life of pueblos as pueblos," to uncover the effects of colonialism and the dominant culture so they could be reverted (Maldonado, 2010a, p.46).

Without losing sight of comunalidad as being grounded, created and re-created in the everyday labor of society (Martínez Luna, 2013), using it as theory represents a political act, and as Nava Morales (2013) asserts, a decolonizing move that places it in the analytical horizon with other decolonizing theories in Latin America, reinforcing the ethnopolitical struggles of Indigenous peoples. In this spirit, this essay explores comunalidad as theory, praxis and pedagogy, focusing on its intersections and possibilities with and for language reclamation in Oaxaca and similar contexts of colonization and struggle for self-determination.

Most of the literature on comunalidad has emerged from the Oaxacan context and has been applied locally to grassroots initiatives that aim to transform an Indigenous education that is articulated around local knowledges and grounded on participation in and by the community (Briseño, 2013; Maldonado, 2016). These proposals resonate deeply with the concept and praxis of language reclamation. Introduced by Leonard (2012) as an alternate term for language revitalization, language reclamation encompasses familiar strategies intended to address the disruptions in cultural and linguistic intergenerational transmission, including language documentation, description and language learning. However, language reclamation offers a broader perspective, emphasizing the embodied and dynamic nature of language and its inseparable and reciprocal connections to human and more-than-human interaction. Language reclamation is never only about the language. It is relational, connected to autonomy, self-determination, and a sense of identity for communities and individuals (Hinton, 2001; Smith, 2012). Consequently, language reclamation initiatives cannot merely replicate dominant second language education practices and pedagogies and, as Hermes, Bang and Marin (2012) put it, need to be "part and parcel of building relationships and community health" (p.162).

The organizational structures of comunalidad, and the embedded relationality within comunalidad provide an important foundation, a framework and a platform from which to reclaim the many Indigenous languages within the state of Oaxaca. It also holds deep promise to help move the field and praxis of language revitalization in ethical ways that are consistent with its relational values. To achieve this vision, a clear understanding about the foundations and contextual factors that give rise to comunalidad is needed, as it can illuminate the ways that such a framework can inform and help deepen understanding and practices of language revitalization and reclamation. With this in mind, I ask: What is comunalidad? And how might comunalidad inform efforts toward language revitalization?

I argue that comunalidad offers a framework for considering the distinct principles, practices and processes in the communities where we work, prompting us to conceive of language reclamation as a collective purpose that arises from, informs and strengthens community relational practices and processes.

This essay starts with a brief background on Oaxaca and my positionality as a scholar engaging with Indigenous ways of knowing. I then trace comunalidad within the broader historical,

sociolinguistic and political context of Oaxaca, followed by a description of different educational initiatives and how they have envisioned a pedagogy grounded on comunalidad. The paper ends with a discussion on the relationship between language and comunalidad and the possibilities of engaging comunalidad in and for language reclamation.

## Background

As a woman of mixed Mexican, Spanish and German heritage with broken ties to indigeneity, my interest in comunalidad arises from a yearning to respond to the many ways that my own histories carry colonial burdens. It is a commitment to interrupt genealogies of violence, forge situated solidarities (Nagar, 2014) and strive towards reclaiming Indigenous ways of knowing and being—nurturing relationality with community and with the Land.

My doctoral dissertation research took me to Oaxaca City, where I taught a class at a language teacher education program aimed to nurture and create spaces for Indigenous languages through critical embodied pedagogies (Schwedhelm Ramirez, 2022). Committed to countering linguicide and epistemicide by grounding language reclamation on Indigenous knowledges and approaches (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Simpson, 2018), I encouraged my class to explore their/our inherited ancestral knowledges, learning from their/our lived experiences and engaging with their/our parents, grandparents and communities. In other words, students participated in their communities, reclaiming their languages alongside their parents and grandparents, and brought that knowledge—and comunalidad— back into our classroom through storytelling.

I was acquainted with comunalidad as a way of being in the world through friends and mentors before delving into the literature. Between 2016 and 2018, I had the opportunity to learn Mixtec from Dr. Juan Julián Caballero and later, Maestra Angelina Trujillo in Ixpantepec Nieves. Their teachings on each concept, phrase or metaphor were also teachings into the ways of living and knowing in their communities. Over the years, I have also learned much from colleagues, students and friends and from witnessing different manifestations of comunalidad in the festivities and ways of taking over the streets in celebration and in struggle.

Oaxaca is Mexico's linguistically and culturally most diverse state: 16 distinct languages are recognized by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), and close to a third of the population identifies as a speaker of an Indigenous language (INEGI, 2020).

The communities referred to by comunalistas are usually isolated and under five thousand people. Most base their livelihood on the farming of milpa, a triad of corn, beans and squash. It is within these communities that comunalidad has developed over thousands of years. Perhaps because of its rich cultural, linguistic and natural diversity, Oaxaca is also characterized by a history of struggle and political resistance against neoliberal interests and policies that have seized land and natural resources and aimed to Spanishize or shift to Spanish, the national language, and assimilate Indigenous communities to the nation-state in the name of 'progress.' The changes created by a neoliberal economy and assimilationist policies have profoundly affected communities in Oaxaca, resulting in societal changes that have disrupted cultural and linguistic intergenerational transmission (de León, 2017). Many communities continue to transmit their language to the younger generations, but others have shifted to Spanish or are in the process of shifting (de Leon, 2017; Hamel, 2008). Yet where there has been language shift, comunalidad remains. Many communities that have shifted to Spanish still retain strong elements of comunalidad (Maldonado, 2010a). To illustrate, while 31% of the population in Oaxaca identifies as a speaker of an Indigenous language (INEGI, 2020), 418 of the 560

municipalities are organized politically through "usos y costumbres, local processes of decision-making rooted in comunalidad" (Martínez Luna, 2013).

Zapotec is the most widely spoken language, with over 420,000 speakers (INEGI, 2020) and more than 60 variants. Some languages and/or dialectal varieties in Oaxaca are being rapidly displaced, while others have larger numbers of speakers and long history of activism and political support (Brügmann & Acevedo, 2013). Ayuujk or Mixe, another language spoken in the state, is spoken by around 118,000 people (INEGI, 2020) in the Sierra Norte, an area that borders and intertwines with Zapotec languages and communities. Renowned as one of the most vibrant languages in the state, Ayuujk owes its vitality to a geopolitical delimitation and collective identification which have fostered resistance strategies through comunalidad (Brügmann & Acevedo, 2013).

## Methods

This essay employs a narrative review approach (Creswell, 2012) to explore the concept of comunalidad and its potential to inform language revitalization practices. The narrative review method is well-suited to address the research questions, "What is comunalidad?" and "How might comunalidad inform efforts toward language revitalization?" because it allows for a flexible and comprehensive examination of scholarly and community-based sources.

To address the first research question, "What is comunalidad?", I reviewed foundational texts, beginning with Maldonado Alvarado (2010a, 2010b), which led me to the works of Floriberto Díaz (2007), Jaime Martínez Luna (2013), and Rendón Monzón (2003). These texts provide a comprehensive overview of the origins, cultural context, and key pillars of comunalidad. To broaden the scope, I conducted keyword searches for "comunalidad," "educación comunitaria," and "education and language revitalization" in both English and Spanish on platforms like Google Scholar, Scielo, and Redalyc. This approach enabled a broad exploration of the diverse perspectives and contexts surrounding comunalidad, particularly those relevant to education and community practices.

For the second research question, "How might comunalidad inform efforts toward language revitalization?", I analyzed the application of comunalidad principles to educational and language reclamation efforts, drawing from both the literature and my personal experiences as a student and educator in Oaxaca.

In summary, this methodology—combining a narrative literature review with an experiential analysis—aims to comprehensively address the research questions by providing both a theoretical foundation and practical examples of comunalidad in the context of language revitalization.

## Literature Overview

While much has been written about comunalidad since the 1980s, it has been mostly situated within the Oaxacan context through a group of authors, including Floriberto Díaz, Jamine Martínez Luna, Benjamín Maldonado, Joel Aquino, Adelfo Regino, Gustavo Esteba, Alajandra Aquino Moreschi and Arturo Guerrero Osorio, who are sometimes referred to as comunalistas (Maldonado, 2010a). Its first intellectuals were two anthropologists and political activists, Jaime Martínez Luna, Zapotec from Guelatao and Floriberto Díaz, Ayuujk from Santa María Tlahitoltepec, who conceptualized comunalidad as "the explanatory concept of the organizational modalities of Oaxacan society" (Martínez Luna, 2010, p.89) and "the element that defines the immanence of the community," (Díaz, 2007). Since the 1980s many scholars have added their reflections on comunalidad. Rendón (2003), through collective analytical processes in Oaxacan communities, arrived at a conceptualization of comunalidad as a flower composed of four fundamental pillars: territorio (land), trabajo (work), poder

(power) and fiesta comunales (community festivities). Others (e.g. Aquino Moreschi, 2013; Guerrero Osorio, 2013; Nava Morales, 2013) have also developed comunalidad as an analytical theory, putting it in conversation with decolonial and anthropological theories.

Within the field of education, Benjamín Maldonado (2010a; 2010b; 2016) has been an important contributor to comunalidad as theory and practice, actively developing, promoting and describing alternative education efforts that have applied comunalidad as a guiding principle. Lois Meyer, a US based applied linguist, has collaborated extensively with Maldonado and other educators and teacher-based organizations in the state of Oaxaca in the development of education programs, authoring and co-authoring most of the existing literature on comunalidad in English (e.g. Meyer & Maldonado, 2004; Meyer & Madonado, 2010). Alongside Maldonado and Meyer, many others have published empirical studies that describe educational initiatives centered on comunalidad (e.g. Argüello Parra, 2016; Briseño, 2013; Ruiz López & Quiroz Lima, 2014). Most of the available literature and media that narrate, describe and analyze experiences of education for comunalidad are centered in spaces of "formal" schooling and focus on the importance of a holistic education grounded on Indigenous ways of being.

## Origins and Meanings

Floriberto Díaz translated living energy of Ayuujk thinking into Spanish. The word "community," or in Spanish, "comunidad," and "comunal," the adjective used to describe that which belongs to the community, is not an Indigenous word, but, as Díaz (2007) notes, is the one that "comes closer to what we want to say" (p.38).

In his Ayuujk language, the idea of comunalidad is described through two words, "näjx," (earth/land) and "käjp," (pueblo), making the interrelationship and interdependence of earth/land and pueblo evident. As he tells us, näjx makes the existence of käjp possible while käjp gives meaning to näjx. Beyond the idea of "community" as an aggregate of individuals coming together in a specific geographical location, the community that Floriberto Díaz and Jaime Martínez Luna show us is characterized by a web of relationships primarily between people and the environment and then among people themselves.

Martínez Luna (2010) writes that "comunalidad is a way of understanding life as being permeated with spirituality, symbolism, and a greater integration with nature. It is one way of understanding that human beings are not the center, but simply a part of this great natural world" (p.94). This being in relation with the natural world is fundamental to many Indigenous cultures and around the world (e.g., Bang et al., 2015; Simpson, 2018; Wilson, 2001) and integral to Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2015; Smith, 2012). In his community of Santa María Tlahuitoltepec, Floriberto Díaz describes these relationships as manifesting through an underlying force or energy that mediates between people and people with each element of nature (in Nava, 2013, p.60). Human beings, he says, "entramos en relación con la Tierra de dos formas," enter in relationship with the Earth/Land in two ways, "a través del trabajo en cuanto territorio, y a través de los ritos y ceremonias, en tanto a madre," through work as land/territory and through rites and ceremonies as mother (Díaz, 2007, p.41). This conception of Earth/land contrasts deeply with the modern, Western notion of "nation-state."

## The Elements of Comunalidad

Floriberto Díaz (2007) emphasized the dual relationship of people with the Earth/Land as mother and territory, noting that these two relationships are simultaneous. He forefronted the spiritual connections with the land as underlying every relationship, including work. In fact, work constitutes

one of the main elements of comunalidad, both in relationship with the land, but also the value of donating work for the benefit of the community. Díaz described the following elements as being central to comunalidad:

> La Tierra, como Madre y como territorio. El consenso en Asamblea para la toma de decisiones. El servicio gratuito, como ejercicio de autoridad. El trabajo colectivo, como un acto de recreación. Los ritos y ceremonias, como expresión del don comunal (p.40).
>
> [Earth/Land as mother and territory. Consensus in assembly for decision-making. Free labor as exercise of authority. Collective work as an act of leisure. Rites and ceremonies as an expression of the communal gift].

Juan José Rendón (2003) distinguishes four main elements of comunalidad: Territorio communal (territory), poder comunal (governance), trabajo comunal (labor), and fiesta communal (enjoyment). These elements are considered to define Indigenous identity and form the basis of resistance (Maldonado, 2010a; Martínez Luna, 2010). While language is considered a marker of identity, Martínez Luna notes that it is not the only mechanism of resistance. The loss of language does not mean the loss of identity, then "even in Spanish," he says, "we are resisting" (in Rendón, 2003, p.24). It is in the social organization, the communal work, and the community that lie the main mechanisms of resistance.

Other elements that help in the recreation of life in the community are considered by Rendón (2003) as "auxiliary." These include Indigenous rights and values that regulate community life, traditional indigenous education (home), cosmovision (e.g. experiences, knowledges, myths), and language.

The four main elements are built on a strong social fabric that is weaved through relationships of reciprocity (Maldonado, 2010a). This social fabric starts with the interrelations in the family and the relations formed through compadrazgo, the extended family relationships formed through marriage, and other rituals that bind families together. Finally, the social fabric is weaved through wider relationships in the community and the practice of reciprocity that permeates life in the community. Reciprocity is a two-way relationship; it is inclusive, and as opposed to solidarity, which is temporary and reserved for times of difficulty, reciprocity is obligatorily permanent (Maldonado, 2010b). Let's now turn to the main elements of comunalidad as a lens into the life in the community.

*Territorio Comunal.* Territorio comunal represents the land where the community is located and the relationships with the more-than-human world through the work in the milpa and other rituals and ceremonies. Prieto (in Maldonado, 2010a) tells a story told by Uncle Pablito from the Zapotec community of San Antonio el Alto that shows the two simultaneous relationships to Earth/Land as territorio and as mother. In the story, God tells Adam that he will have to work the land. But when Adam begins, the land resists—trembling and roaring. God then asks Adam what he has offered the land in return. When Adam replies that he has not offered anything, God tells him to offer himself and ask the land to let him live and sustain him, as he will sustain her with his body after death. Uncle Pablito explains that this is where the custom of offering began. Because we can't offer our bodies until death, we make offerings as a thank you before and after each harvest as a promise of the final offer (p.52). This story illustrates the land both as territory, to be worked on for sustenance, and as a maternal and living presence with whom the community maintains a relationship of reciprocity.

***Poder Comunal.*** Poder comunal is represented through the asamblea (assembly) and the sistema de cargos (unpaid work for the community). The asamblea is the maximum organ of authority in the community. It is in the asamblea that the most important decisions in the community are made through a consensus-building process that is usually in the native, or Indigenous language. Every time the authorities face a difficult decision, they need to call the asamblea and it is also in the asamblea that the authorities are named. This system of horizontal organization is set to avoid the concentration of power. Once someone is named to a cargo or position to serve the community, they have the responsibility to fulfill that cargo. All men, and in some communities also women start serving usually as topiles or security guards in the community (Maldonado, 2010a; Rendón, 2003). As people get older and fulfill different jobs, they might be elected to positions of authority, which can be both political and religious. It is through serving and working that power is given by the asamblea, as "it is through the work of organizing community work that the authority is realized and legitimized" (Guerrero Osorio, 2013, p.46).

***Trabajo Comunal.*** Trabajo or tequio represents another type of unpaid work done for the benefit of the community, like building the access road or painting a public building. Some communities have obligatory tequio every Sunday, others make a call through the topiles or by ringing the church bell. When a call for tequio is made, everybody has the responsibility to attend or otherwise has to legitimize their absence. Belonging to the community carries the obligation to fulfill the responsibilities of cargos and tequio. Constantly failing to do so indicates a refusal to be part of the community and can result in the rejection and potential expulsion from the community (Maldonado, 2010a). The obligatory character of unpaid work, be it tequio or the cargo system, conserves the conditions that ensure the permanence of the collective. Fulfilling responsibilities as members of a community constantly reiterates the desire to belong to the community, but as much as it is an obligation, communal work is also joyful as it brings people together and celebrates the power of the collective to build something for the benefit of all.

Another type of unpaid work in the community is guelaguetza. It is mutual help between family, compadres, and friends during community events like agricultural labor, weddings, births, and funerals (Guerrero Osorio, 2013). The encounter and reciprocity through everyday guelaguetza represents both "ethics" and "esthetics." As Osorio (2013) writes "[Guelaguetza] forms all relationships within the community recursively… generating new nexus and commitments, weaving people in the We, in powerful circuits of giving, respect and gratitude" (p.48).

***Fiesta Comunal.*** Like the guelaguetza, la fiesta is a mechanism of social cohesion that is created and re-created through giving and receiving (Guerrero Osorio, 2013). A community celebrates many fiestas (festivities) each year, some of which last for several days. Comunalidad as an organizational structure comes particularly to light during times of fiesta. La fiesta is "where relationships between relatives and neighbors are best created, consolidated, repaired or broken." New familiar relationships like compadrazgos are solidified, people fulfill work for the community, share guelaguetzas and take part in collective expressions of identity.

**Comunalidad as Resistance**

From a sociocultural perspective, "culture" can be conceptualized as a set of "cultural practices that show both stabilities and changes across generations" (Rogoff, 2003, p.11). From this definition, comunalidad can be viewed as culture. The cultural practices or what anthropologists call "patterns," comunalistas would call "pillars," territorio (land), poder (power), trabajo (power) and fiesta (festivities), the main elements of comunalidad. There might be many other patterns that are shared between different communities that practice comunalidad, such as the everyday participation of

children and youth in the community. Yet conceptualizing comunalidad as culture deprives comunalidad of its theoretical significance. There are power dynamics embedded in the term "culture," with Indigenous ways of knowing being marginalized or devalued as "beliefs" or "cultural practices," inferior to Western scientific knowledge. Several Indigenous scholars (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Cajete, 2004) have addressed this marginalization as epistemic injustice, arguing that Indigenous science and knowledge systems are equally valuable and can offer unique insights. Viewing comunalidad as theory and praxis expands its significance and implications for research, education and resistance and contributes to fostering epistemic justice within academic and societal contexts.

Critics of comunalidad have accused its theorists of essencializing and painting an idyllic vision of an "authentic" past (see e.g. de la Cruz, 2011). But as Aquino Moreschi (2013) maintains, the comunalistas highlight not an origin or essence, but the organizational structures and processes that constantly create and re-create comunalidad and the sense of belonging to the community. Martínez Luna notes that anyone who is committed with communal life and contributes to the asamblea, tequio and cargo system can live and experience comunalidad (in Aquino Moreschi, 2013).

Comunalidad is conceived as the axis of resistance against colonial violence and globalizing processes, and in that sense also, it is always dynamic. Maldonado (2010) asserts that "if comunalidad is the key characteristic of life of Mesoamerican pueblos and they have continued being because they have resisted domination, then comunalidad has been the foundation of resistance" (2010, p.47). This everyday resistance can only be realized through constant re-production and re-creation.

Just as it is dynamic, comunalidad is paradox and contradiction. Martínez Luna recognizes that comunalidad originates through the history of oppression and domination that the Indigenous peoples have been submitted to, and in that sense, it too is a product of colonial history (2010). This affirmation, Aquino Moreschi (2013) notes, helps to break away from interpretations that seek an "authentic" prehispanic past or "legitimate" cultural practices (p.9). It also resonates with reminders from decolonial scholars that we cannot exist outside of modernity (e.g. Lugones, 2010).

The challenges posed by modernity are many, with individualism being the biggest threat because it fractures the community. It enters communities through Protestantism that disrupts community values and practices, political parties that disrupt self-governance through asambleas and the neoliberal economy, closely tied to migration out of the community (Aquino Moreschi, 2013; Maldonado, 2010a). Contradictions, Martínez Luna notes, "are a daily occurrence, not only of individuals, but also of communities.

Guerrero Osorio (2013) describes the paradox of comunalidad as consisting of "the conservation of itself by changing, changing to remain and endure; primordial adaptation between conserving and creating; endless renewal of what does not change" (in Esteva, 2016, p.181). He very aptly conceptualizes comunalidad as a spiral, a whirlpool that exists within the river of capitalism, swirling and being formed by the outside flow, yet also existing independently through a relatively stable flow against it. This whirpool spins from the root (the spiritual connection to the Land, "that turn where the earth becomes territorio") and it is realized through the diverse, but unifying, always generative collective values and communal practices.

## Comunalidad and Education

So far, I have traced the organizational structures of comunalidad and how it manifests itself as a dynamic spiral of everyday resistance. In this section, I describe educational experiences that center comunalidad at the heart of the curriculum, focusing on the role that they place on language. I offer these examples to illustrate the different ways that comunalidad has been conceptualized and has taken

root in these alternative education efforts to then turn our attention to the possibilities of these political-pedagogical foundations, and of comunalidad as a guiding principle for language reclamation.

**Comunalidad as Resistance in Education**

The goal of the federal Indigenous Education Program in Mexico has always been linguistic and cultural homogenization (Jiménez Naranjo, 2009). Floriberto Díaz (2007) describes the following grievances and demands voiced during an asamblea in Totontepec in 1979:

> La escuela desarraiga, hace flojos a nuestros hijos, se olvidan de nuestra lengua, pues solo se enseña el castellano, se combaten nuestras costumbres.
> Nosotros deseamos que los niños no olviden lo que les enseñamos en el hogar… (p.286).
>
> [The school uproots, makes our children lazy, they forget our language, because only Spanish is taught, our customs are combated.
> We wish for the children not to forget what we teach them at home …]

Almost 40 years later, those grievances and demands still resonate. The path to resolve them has been long, but advances have been made through the grassroots efforts of many people who have dedicated their work to the Indigenous movement.

One of the most notable examples of resistance in Mexico is the rise of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in 1994, which significantly influenced linguistic ideologies and language policies by shifting from top-down, state-initiated policies to a "more diverse mix of independent and grassroots processes generated 'from within and below'" (de León, 2017, p. 415). This shift also impacted education in Oaxaca, where in 1995, comunalidad was adopted as the fourth guiding principle of education. This principle emphasized that comunalidad should be "integrally implemented so that in future generations, it becomes the foundational knowledge and the basis of constructing all other knowledge" (Martínez Luna, 2010, p. 85).

Significant grassroots Indigenous education initiatives emerged in Oaxaca as part of this movement, driven by Indigenous intellectuals like Floriberto Díaz. Simultaneously, the Coalition of Indigenous Teachers and Promoters of Oaxaca (CMPIO) advocated for culturally relevant education models (Maldonado, 2016). Comunal education gained further traction with the implementation of the PTEO (Plan de Transformación de la Educación de Oaxaca), an alternative education proposal developed by the Instituto Estatal para la Educación Pública de Oaxaca (IEEPO) in collaboration with the Sección 22 teachers' union. The PTEO, grounded in a critical comunal intercultural framework, aims to revitalize and strengthen Indigenous languages and comunal knowledge by fostering strong connections between communities, schools, and the personal development of students (Maldonado & Maldonado, 2018; PTEO, 2013; Ramos, 2012).

The political context continuously shapes comunalidad as a counter-hegemonic effort from a pedagogical front (Maldonado & Maldonado, 2018). While language reclamation is always a form of decolonization, (Hinton et al., 2018), the political struggles centered around education and the predominant role that indigenous teachers and communities have played within the resistance, make the relationship between language reclamation and decolonization especially salient in the Oaxacan context.

**Grassroots Initiatives**

As a response to the grievances about the state of education voiced during the asambleas comunitarias, Floriberto Díaz (2007) presents "our ideas for an integral Mixe education," which he presents as follows:

> El contenido del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje debe basarse en el amor a la tierra en donde hemos nacido y que nos han heredado nuestros antepasados; en la vida en comunidad como forma manifiesta de nuestra igualdad social, y en el tequio que nos garantiza armonizar nuestras fuerzas humanas con las de la naturaleza y nos permite asegurar la construcción conjunta de nuestro futuro como individuos, como pueblo, como ciudadanos de un país y de un mundo civilizado (p.296).
>
> [The content of the teaching-learning process needs to be based on the love of the land where we were born and that we have inherited from our ancestors; in life in the community as a manifest form of our social equality, and on the tequio, that guarantees us to harmonize our human forces with those of nature and allows us to secure the joint construction of our future as individuals, as pueblo, as citizens of a country and a civilized world].

Educational proposals that emerge in community asambleas recognize the need to build a model of education that is pertinent to the communal context (Meyer, 2010). But while referred to as an educational model (e.g. Briseño, 2013), to be pertinent to the (ever changing) communal context, this "new pedagogy" must be necessarily dynamic and adaptable. As Martínez Luna (2010) notes, we cannot speak of one pedagogy when the aim of comunalidad is to liberate the exercise of knowledge. There are however shared characteristics that frame these educational proposals and that distinguish educación comunitaria from the hegemonic curriculum. Maldonado (2016) lists these characteristics as: 1) The articulation of knowledges around local and regional knowledges, 2) research as the pedagogical axis, 3) the communal philosophy as a horizon, 4) the participation of the community in the learning process, 5) the extensive use of the Indigenous language, 6) a curriculum suitable to the reality in which students and the community works, and 7) the collaboration of teachers, who, more than teach, help students learn (p.48).

According to Dietz (2012), educación comunitaria aims to achieve a dialogic education that combines and negotiates local forms of knowledge with external, colonizing models of education. It needs to be rooted in the community first, and from the cultural and linguistic matrix approach different ways of knowing.

The emphasis on research, learning through experience, and the integration between school and community in educación comunitaria echoes Dewey's experience in education (1986), but it differs in important ways. Educación comunitaria is rooted in the community, and it emphasizes the collective, relationality with the land, and the responsibility of belonging and responding to comunalidad through cargos, tequio and guelaguetza. It also differs from other forms of experiential or project-based education in its political orientation. This critical perspective is reminiscent of Paulo Freire (2018) in that it seeks to raise awareness of unequal power relations and of McCarty and Lee's (2014) critical culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy in that it seeks to challenge these asymmetrical power relations while aiming to revitalize what has been lost.

Educación comunitaria also resonates with the Māori model of language Nests (King, 2001), which has been adopted into the Oaxacan context (Meyer, 2018) and put into practice in early education and in preschools in communities around the state. Lois Meyer (2018) describes a teacher education program in community-based initial education that aimed to enrich the communal

knowledge of teacher participants through a process of reflection and community-based research of local child-rearing practices. The goal was to collaborate with communities "on the creation of an authentic, alternative, bilingual, and community- appropriate Initial Education" (Meyer, 2018, p.94). As this example illustrates, education programs grounded on comunalidad exist in dialogue and conversation with other theories and experiences, including trans-Indigenous collaboration.

In preschools and at the elementary school level, schools operated by CMPIO through the PTEO have incorporated comunalidad as a guiding principle through project-based learning and bilingual education. Though few experiences have been documented, the Ikoots preschool in San Mateo del Mar has been mentioned as an example of successful practices in bilingual education (Maldonado & Madonado, 2018). One of the documented experiences has been that of the formative evaluation through the participation of the community in what is called a guelaguetza pedagógica. During this ritual of mutual giving, students from the local preschool perform and explain to the community a ritual-making of tortillas for ancestors in Huave, their Indigenous language ("Pedagogía," 2014).

The secundarias comunitarias have been described as having "the most innovative and pro-positive model of communal education in Oaxaca," one that has served as model for the development of PTEO and other grassroots projects (Maldonado & Maldonado, 2018, n.p.). These schools follow a project and community-based research curriculum where students learn research skills in their first year and then go out to their communities to apply their knowledge and try to solve real problems. Students use their Indigenous language to interview elders in the community and to analyze the information gathered. Additionally, their findings are shared bilingually in community asambleas where everybody is invited and participates in the formative evaluation of the students' work. Through this pedagogical process, the secundaria comunitaria promotes the use and importance of the Indigenous language while also leading students to re-value the local knowledges (Briseño, 2015; Ruiz López & Quiroz Lima, 2014). Many of them are published as bilingual texts, and also noteworthy is the actual impact that some of the projects have after being presented in the asambleas. A project on whitetail deer that was published as "El venado, ¿víctima o ser sobrenatural?" also resulted in the community banning the hunting of deer. A second project that investigated and reported on the level of pollution in the community resulted in plastic bags being forbidden in stores and restaurants, inviting people to bring their baskets (Ruiz López & Quiroz Lima, 2014).

Students who graduate from the secundarias comunitarias may continue their education at the bachilleratos inteagrales comunitarios (BICs), a community-based high-school model (grades 10$^{th}$ through 12$^{th}$). The first bachillerato comunitario, (Bachillerato Integral Comunitario Ayuujk Polivalente or BICAP) was the materialization of the ideas of Floriberto Díaz among other Indigenous intellectuals in Santa Maria Tlahitoltepec and provided a model for the BICs founded by IEEPO in 2001 (Morán, 2013). The main objectives of the BICAP include strengthening education in the mother tongue and in other languages. Like in the secundarias, this is done through interdisciplinary research and closely connected to communal, cultural and natural realities, oriented towards the common and communal well-being. An important pedagogical principle in the BICAP and in Mixe comunal education is that of wejën kajën, the sprouting, awakening of person-people. According to Mixe cosmology, human beings don't create; "they only re-create what has already been created, that means they construct, invent to transform what is already given by the natural world." Within that construction, "the person-people sprouts, awakens, puts the wejën kajën in motion" (Morán, 2013, n.p.). Learning through wejën kajën is an act that is never finished.

Communal education efforts have extended to higher education and especially teacher education to train teachers who are committed to the communal philosophy of education and to

developing proficiency in their Indigenous languages. Perhaps the best-known teacher training institution rooted in comunalidad and intercultural education is the ENBIO (Escuela Normal Bilingüe Intercultural de Oaxaca). The aim of the ENBIO is to contribute to "the revitalization, valuing, empowerment, and strengthening of the world view, communal knowledge, customs, traditions, festivals and cultural logic of Indigenous communities" (Reyes, 2007, p.4 in Meyer, 2018, p.393). Students at ENBIO are required to be speakers of an Indigenous language and have deep knowledge of their culture. As part of the program, they spend one year in their communities during which time they collaborate with them to propose a project, transforming community knowledges into a teaching approach that encompasses different themes and subjects, all of this in the Indigenous language (Caraballo, 2015; Reyes & Vázquez, 2008).

Schools have been and remain highly contentious spaces (Rockwell & Gomes, 2009), but it is precisely because schooling has always tended to be hegemonic, that the efforts of grassroots education movements have concentrated on reverting the violence perpetuated by the education system through an appropriation and complete transformation and integration of schools with the local reality and local knowledges. Even though ever-changing and fraught with multiple tensions, comunalidad as daily praxis is already assumed to be present in the home and the community. The challenge always remains to conceive and re-create education projects that constantly address and respond to these changes and tensions, moving with and along the dynamic spiral of comunalidad. One particular challenge is how to address language loss in communities where the language of the community has shifted or is shifting from the Indigenous language to Spanish.

## Language and Comunalidad

While there is widespread agreement among comunalistas that the native, Indigenous language of a community should be an important pillar of an education grounded on comunalidad, there are only a few in-depth discussions on the relationship between language and comunalidad. For Floriberto Díaz, who grew up speaking Ayuujk in a community where the language is still actively spoken, the local language variety is one of the main characteristics of an Indigenous community (2007). On the other side, Martínez Luna (2013), from Guelatao, a Zapotec community which has shifted to Spanish, emphasizes that an Indigenous identity is not contingent on the language spoken by the individual or the community. Rendón (2003), a linguist and anthropologist who collaborated closely with different communities in the Sierra Norte, agrees. Similar to Martínez Luna, he does not consider language as one of the four main elements of comunalidad, but as a secondary or auxiliary element of culture (along with cosmovisión, religiosity and technologies) that crosses the main elements of comunalidad in a permanent cyclical process. This is not, as Maldonado (2010a) argues, because language is any less as important than the main elements of comunalidad, but because the loss of language, as the loss of other secondary elements, does not translate to a loss of identity. When comunalidad but not language has been able to survive decades of ethnocide, the communal social structure provides the foundation from which language can be brought back. It is through comunalidad, through territorio, trabajo, poder and fiesta, and the ways in which people relate to each other, that the Indigenous language can be reclaimed.

Yásnaya Aguilar Gil (2013), a Mixe linguist and activist who works on the revitalization of Indigenous languages in Oaxaca, captures the ambiguous relationship between language and comunalidad, noting that "on the one side, the demand for respect and strengthening [of the Indigenous language] is fundamental, while, on the other, the use of the Indigenous language is not established as a fundamental characteristic to define a pueblo or indigenous community" (2013, p.71). Aguilar Gil (2013) considers language as central to comunalidad, saying that "if language is not one of

the pillars of comunalidad, it is one of its main creations" (p.81). It is after all through language that interaction within comunalidad is mediated while comunalidad impacts, changes and creates language. But she also argues that the language of comunalidad does not necessarily need to be the Indigenous language. It can also be Spanish in cases where it has displaced the Indigenous language(s) of the community. Both processes of language revitalization and language displacement are communal processes because it is through interaction within the communities, in government, *fiesta*, *asambleas*, etc. that a language can be revitalized or a new language "preferred." In cases of language displacement, the local Spanish variety spoken in the community would become endemic, the *lengua propia*.

Because comunalidad as a process intricately exists within modernity, determining what constitutes lo propio or "endemic" is a complex and contentious question. Guerrero Osorio (2013) argues that lo propio represents the "originario" or Indigenous, e.g. land, language, agreements, not as something exclusive or that takes priority in time but in terms of its reproduction or recomposition. What is important is not the origin of something but the use that is given to it in the community and whether it aids in its autonomy. Lo propio, Martínez Luna argues, "se comparte, no se guarda," it is shared, not saved. Only when shared does it gain meaning and does it become embodied (in Guerrero Osorio, 2013, p.54). Thus, whatever language is used becomes the lengua propia, though only as long as it aids in its automomy. Aguilar Gil (2013) acknowledges, however, that the loss of Indigenous languages is directly associated with long standing discrimination towards its speakers and while the maintenance of the Indigenous language does not in fact determine the sustainability of comunalidad, language loss is a violent and systematic process that makes language shift appear as thus it was voluntary. Language displacement is an affront to a community's autonomy and self-determination.

Responding to this violence, one of the main goals of educación comunitaria is to generate a praxis of resistance against cultural homogenization and form individuals who are able to visibilize the power relationships that are reproduced in schools in order to strengthen the way of life and knowledges in the community (Briseño, 2013). This entails bringing the community into the schools and the Indigenous languages from the community into the school and back into daily use.

## Discussion

In this essay, I describe the concept of comunalidad through a narrative literature review of its meanings and pillars, its application to educational initiatives, and its relationship with language. Comunalidad cannot easily be worded, as it lives within the processes that weave the fabric of a community. With that foundational understanding, this section turns back to the second research question namely, how might comunalidad inform efforts toward language revitalization?

Language is (re)created through the interactions and relationships of the social fabric that is the foundation of comunalidad. It is inextricably linked to the epistemologies produced and re-produced through comunalidad and in this sense it is a creation of language just like language is a creation of comunalidad. This echoes Hermes, Bang and Marin's (2012) assertion that "our epistemological foundations are deeply embedded in our languages; that is the core of what constitutes knowledge, knowing, and being." A broader conception of language embedded with knowledge and being in the world in particular ways opens new possibilities for language reclamation with strong cultural roots. From this perspective, language reclamation exists in a dynamic, symbiotic relationship with comunalidad. It forms and informs comunalidad while it is informed and strengthened through comunalidad as a framework and practice of everyday resistance.

This interreationality between language and comunalidad invites new ways to think about language reclamation as a collective process embedded in the community and for the collective benefit of the community. A pedagogy of comunalidad is strictly based on common action (PTEO, 2013). When, for example, students from the secundaria comunitaria participate in tequio, interview elders or present their projects through asambleas or guelaguetzas pedagógicas, the intergenerational interactions that take place strengthen the social fabric of the community. The social fabric or comunalidad that is created through those processes strengthens the Indigenous language. There is a collective purpose in language reclamation. Through the language, the individual identity is strengthened in relation to others, human and more-than-human, bringing about a sense of belonging to the collective. Just like comunalidad is (re)created through collective work, we can conceive of language reclamation as a collective responsibility to strengthen comunalidad, both through the Indigenous language as well as through the very process(es) and pedagogies through which it is reclaimed.

Conceiving of language reclamation as a collective task, embedded in and emerging from relational processes, situates it within comunalidad as a pedagogía propia that cannot be generalized (Martínez Luna, 2010). There are however guiding principles that can help us distinguish language reclamation efforts rooted in comunialidad from other, top-down efforts and pedagogies. Echoing the principles guiding educación comunitaria (Maldonado, 2016), language reclamation must extend beyond the extensive use of the Indigenous language. It needs to be articulated around local and regional knowledges, the participation of the community in the learning processes, a curriculum suited to the local reality and the communal philosophy as a horizon.

Given the wider urbanization trend— more than 50% of Indigenous peoples in Mexico lives in urban areas (ELAC, 2014)— it is important to also consider how comunalidad can inform education and language revitalization efforts in diverse contexts. The ENBIO (Escuela Normal Bilingüe e Intercultural de Oaxaca) offers an example of this approach, where students periodically return to their communities to collaboratively develop and implement projects that strengthen the Indigenous language and fabric of their communities.

Even when returning to their communities is not feasible, comunalidad can be integrated into academic environments by storying and adopting comunalidad as an epistemological framework, fostering spaces that strengthen relationships, processes, and collaboration in the classroom, with families and across the various communities that students belong to.

## Conclusion

In and through this essay, I set to understand comunalidad as theory and praxis and the ways that it can inform and help nurture and deepen understandings and practices of language revitalization and reclamation. Through a lens of comunalidad and informed by the grassroots efforts towards educación comunitaria in Oaxaca, we can conceive of language reclamation as a collective responsibility to strengthen community relational practices, both through the use of the Indigenous language (as epistemology, identity, self-determination and resistance) as well as through the very process(es) and pedagogies through which it is reclaimed. A collective orientation towards language reclamation rooted in community practices and processes can open new possibilities to bring the language forward in self-determination. This approach can also have deep relevance for practices and scholarship in other contexts of colonization and struggles for language rights. Thinking of language reclamation as existing within comunalidad is an inherent decolonial project, a praxis of daily resistance. If comunalidad has been the basis of resistance against ethnocide and linguicide for more than a century,

then processes of language reclamation rooted in comunalidad have the potential to be not only counter-hegemonic, but especially resilient.

**Acknowledgements**

The grassroots efforts in Oaxaca to bring languages back into use through educación comunitaria are the result of many actors; scholars, teachers, and other activists working daily on the ground for the benefit of their communities. Some of them I have cited but many more I can never adequately know of acknowledge. I offer this essay in support of all teachers, students, parents, grandparents and other activists working to reclaim their languages and right to self-determination.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## References

Aguilar, Y. E. (2013). La diversidad lingüística y la comunalidad. Cuadernos del Sur, 18 (34), 71-82.

Aquino Moreschi, A. (2013). La comunalidad como epistemología del Sur: Aportes y retos. Cuadernos del Sur, 18 (34), 7-19.

Argüello Parra, A. (2016). Pedagogía mixe: contribuciones para una filosofía (decolonial) de la educación desde las Américas. Estudios Pedagógicos XLII, N° 3: 429-447

Bang et al. (2015). Learning by Observing, Pitching in, and Being in Relations in the Natural World. Advances in Child Development and Behavior, *46*, 303-313.

Barnhardt, R. & Kawagley, A.O. (2005). Indigenous knowledge systems and Alaska Native ways of knowing. *Anthropology & education quarterly, 36*(1), 8-23.

Briseño, J. (2013). La formación de educadores comunales. *Cuadernos del Sur*, *34*, 29-38.

Briseño, J. (2015). Entrevistas comunitarias, la recuperación del conocimiento comunitario desde la escuela. El caso de las Secundarias Comunitarias Indígenas, Oaxaca, México. *Education policy analysis archives*, (*23*) 95.

Brügmann, M.T. & Acevedo, M.L. (2013). *La dinámica sociolingüística en Oaxaca: Los procesos de mantenimiento o desplazamiento de las lenguas indígenas del estado (Tomo 1).* México: CIESAS (Publicaciones de la Casa Chata)

Cajete, G. (2004). Philosophy of native science. In A. Waters (Ed.), *American Indian thought: Philosophical essays* (pp. 45-57). Blackwell.

Caraballo (2015). La lengua que los parió: resistencias al lingüicidio en Oaxaca. *Contrapunto: Educación: lo público, lo privado y lo común*, *6*, 119-134.

de la Cruz, Víctor (2011), Comunalidad y Estado de Derecho. *Cuadernos del Sur, 12*(31), pp.35-54.

de León, L. (2017). Indigenous Language Policy and Education in Mexico. *Language Policy and Political Issues in Education*, 415-433.

Dewey, J. (1986). Experience and Education. *The Educational Forum*, *50*(3), 241-252, DOI: 10.1080/00131728609335764

Díaz, F. (2007). Escrito: comunalidad, energía viva del pensamiento mixe = Ayuujktsënää'yën - ayuujkwënmää'ny - ayuujk mëk'äjtën, Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Dietz, Gunther (2012), *Multiculturalismo, Interculturalidad y Diversidad en Educación*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Esteva, G. (2016). Para sentipensar la comunalidad. *Bajo el Volcán* 15(23), 172-186.

Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Guerrero Osorio, A. (2013). La comunalidad como herramienta: una metáfora espiral. *Cuadernos del Sur*, *34*, 39-55.

Hamel, R. E. (2008). Bilingual education for indigenous communities in Mexico. In *Encyclopedia of language and education* (pp. 1747-1758). Springer, Boston, MA.

Hinton, L. (2001). Language revitalization: An overview. *The green book of language revitalization in practice*, pp.3-18. Brill.

Hinton, L., Huss, L., & Roche, G. (2018). *The Routledge handbook of language revitalization*. New York: Routledge.

Hermes, M., Bang, M., & Marin, A. (2012). Designing Indigenous language revitalization. *Harvard Educational Review*, *82*(3), 381-402.

INEGI (2020), *Censo de Población y Vivienda*, México.

Jiménez Naranjo, Y. (2009). *Cultura comunitaria y escuela intercultural más allá de un contenido escolar*. Mexico: SEP-CGEIB.

King, J. (2001). Te kōhanga reo: Māori language revitalization. In L. Hinton & K. Hale (Eds.), *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice* (pp. 119–128). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Kovach, M. (2015). Emerging from the margins: Indigenous methodologies. *Research as resistance: revisiting critical, Indigenous, and anti-oppressive approaches*, 43.

Leonard, W. Y. (2012). Framing language reclamation programmes for everybody's empowerment. *Gender & Language*, *6*(2).

Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, *25*(4), 742-759.

Maldonado Alvarado, B. (2010a). Comunidad, comunalidad y colonialismo en Oaxaca, México: La nueva educación comunitaria y su contexto. PhD Thesis. University of Leiden.

Maldonado Alvarado, B. (2010b). Comunalidad and the education of Indigenous peoples. In L. Meyer and B. Maldonado (eds.) *New world of Indigenous resistance: Noam Chomsky and voices from North, South, and Central America*, pp. 367–380. San Francisco: City Lights.

Maldonado-Alvarado, B. (2016). Hacia un país plural: educación comunitaria en Oaxaca frente a la política de interculturalidad cero. *Liminar*, *14*(1), 47-59.

Maldonado-Alvarado, B., and Maldonado Ramírez, C. L. (2018). Educación e interculturalidad en Oaxaca: avances y desafíos. *Sinéctica*, (50). Retrieved from: https://sinectica.iteso.mx/index.php/SINECTICA/article/view/788/1017

Martínez Luna, J. (2010). The Fourth Principle. In L. Meyer and B. Maldonado (eds.) *New world of Indigenous resistance: Noam Chomsky and Voices from North, South, and Central America*, pp. 85-100. San Francisco: City Lights.

Martínez Luna, J. (2013). Testimonio: Origen y ejercicio de la comunalidad. *Cuadernos del Sur*, *34*, 83-90.

McCarty, T., & Lee, T. (2014). Critical culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy and Indigenous education sovereignty. *Harvard Educational Review*, *84*(1), 101-124.

Meyer, L. (2010). Introduction: Hemispheric conversation among equals. In L. Meyer and B. Maldonado (eds.) *New world of Indigenous resistance: Noam Chomsky and Voices from North, South, and Central America*, pp. 7–37. San Francisco: City Lights.

Meyer, L. (2018). "Carrying on the Word that I know": Teacher-community language revitalization collaborations in Indigenous Oaxaca, Mexico. In L. Hinton, L. Huss and G. Roche (eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language revitalization*. New York: Routledge. Pp. 384-394.

Meyer, L. and Maldonado, B. (2004). *Entre la normatividad y la comunalidad: Experiencias educativas innovadoras del Oaxaca indígena actual*. Oaxaca: IEEPO.

Meyer L. and Maldonado B. (eds.) (2010). *New world of Indigenous resistance: Noam Chomsky and Voices from North, South, and Central America*, pp. 7–37. San Francisco: City Lights.

Morán, N. (2013). El Modelo Intercultural del Bachillerato Integral Comunitario Integral Ayuujk Polivalente (BICAP): una experiencia mixe de educación compleja. *Revista Iberoamericana para la Investigación y el Desarrollo Educativo*, *10*. Retrieved from: http://ride.org.mx/1-11/index.php/RIDESECUNDARIO/article/view/336/328

Nagar, R. (2014). *Muddying the waters: Coauthoring feminisms across scholarship and activism*. University of Illinois Press.

Nava Morales, E. (2013). Comunalidad: semilla teórica en crecimiento. *Cuadernos del Sur*, *34*, 57-69.

[Pedagogia] (2014, July 3). Guelaguetza Pedagógica Infantil - San Mateo del Mar [Video File]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZGYVouHq2M.

PTEO (2013). EL Proceso de masificación del PTEO como movimiento generador de conciencias críticas. Oaxaca: IEEPO, SNTE, CNTE. Retrieved from: http://www.transformacion-educativa.com/attachments/article/94/CuadernilloPTEO.pdf

Ramos (2012). Plantea DEI en Oaxaca documento base para la educación indígena. Buen Día Tuxtepec, December 6th, 2012. Accessed at: http://www.buendiatuxtepec.com.mx/plantea-dei-en-oaxaca-documento-base-para-educacion-indigena

Rendón Monzón, J. J. (2003). *La comunalidad. Modo de vida de los pueblos Indios*, tomo I. México: DGC.

Reyes, S. & Vásquez, B. (2008). Formar en la diversidad: el caso de la Escuela Normal Bilingüe e Intercultural de Oaxaca (ENBIO). *Trace*, *53*. pp. 83-99.

Rockwell, E. & Gomes, A. M. (2009). Introduction to the Special Issue: Rethinking Indigenous Education from Latin American Perspective". Antrophology &Education Quarterly, 40(2), 97–109. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1492.2009.01030.x

Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford University Press.

Ruiz López, A. & Quiroz Lima, E. (2014). Educación comunitaria: una propuesta alternativa para los pueblos indígenas de Oaxaca–México. *Polis Revista Latinoamericana*, *13*(38), 225-241.

Schwedhelm Ramírez, M.C. (2022). *Language, Power and Art: Towards an Embodied Praxis for Language Reclamation in Language Teacher Education.* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. New Zeland: Zed Books Ltd.

Simpson, L. B. (2018). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Wilson, S. (2001). Self-as-relationship in Indigenous research. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, *25*(2), 91-92.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Nova Scotia, Canada: Fernwood.

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025, pp. 126-131**
**DOI 10.14434/ijlcle.v5i.41957**

# Book Reviews

John Corbett, Edith M. Y. Yan, Jackie Yeoh, and Juyoung Lee. (Ed.) (2023), ***Multilingual Education Yearbook 2023: Teaching with Technology in English-Medium Instruction Universities in Multilingual China,*** *Springer.* (255 pp.), $169.00 US (Paperback), ISBN: 978-3-031-32810-7 (Print), 978-3-031-32811-4. $129.00 (eBook)

The *Multilingual Education Yearbook 2023: Teaching with Technology in English-Medium Instruction Universities in Multilingual China* seeks to explore the relationship between technology and English-Medium Instruction (EMI) within a contextually specific multilingual and multicultural framework of Chinese higher education. This exploration is especially relevant as the use of English as the medium of instruction (MOI) in multilingual contexts complicates understanding how MOI policies align with broader geopolitical and socio-political agendas (Liyanage & Walker, 2019, p. 1). Macaro et al. (2018, p. 64) observe that the growth of EMI in higher education is a global phenomenon, though it faces challenges and even declines in certain regions, reflecting the diverse global landscape of educational policies. Using examples from different disciplines and abstract arguments, the book shows how digital tools can support EMI teaching and learning. The chapters highlight a possible increase in effectiveness within collaborative action research among English teachers and content specialist teachers. This makes it valuable to dive in deeper into the difficulties and innovations associated with technology that is used for improving language learning, as well as academic performance or educational advancement. Learning about these challenges and triumphs helps educators from all lanes more effectively incorporate technology tools in their classrooms for better learning outcomes.

Reviewed by Yanjuan Huo, Shanghai Institute of Technology
E-mail: huoyanjuan@sit.edu.cn

## Summary

This book explores the incorporation of technological innovations in EMI within multilingual universities in China. The collected fourteen chapters provide a wide-ranging examination of what practices are in place to transform learning outcomes within multilingual and multicultural university settings by taking the research literature into account when considering technology potential.

In Chapter 1, ("Technology and English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education Institutions in Multilingual China"), Edith M. Y. Yan et al. contextualize the case studies with a description of the rise in EMI programs under Sino-foreign institutions throughout mainland China and Macao. This introductory chapter describes the functions that technology can play in providing support to EMI programs at higher education institutions. The case studies are categorized into three themes: (i) technological resources for specific language skills, (ii) learning management systems for content engagement in English and other languages, and (iii) technological interventions transforming academic learning (Corbett et al., 2023, p. 5). The chapter aims to be useful in its stimulation of international EMI instructors and researchers by resonating with their experiences.

In Chapter 2, ("Simplifying Texts for Easier Comprehension in an Introductory Computer Science Course: An Evaluation of *Rewordify*"), Alice Shu-Ju Lee et al. critique the use of a text simplification tool, *Rewordify*, as implemented at EMI university in Macau. The study, however, was conducted on a class of sixty-eight tertiary second language (L2) Computer Science majors to see if simplified texts help students understand the content better. The results conclude that content teachers have a daunting task in supporting their L2 students and although *Rewordify* is not perfect it is free and easy to use (Corbett et al., 2023, p. 18). The authors argue that investigating which reading materials should be simplified and exploring alternative instructional methods would benefit EMI students.

In Chapter 3, ("Using Technology for English-Medium Instruction: The Use of Livestreaming in the Marketing Classroom"), Angela Kit Fong Ma explores how technology can enhance the acquisition of both English and marketing content knowledge. This study, focusing on Eighty-seven business learners and drawing from the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model investigates how livestreaming facilitated by mobile devices supports in a multilingual space for meaningful learning. The author argues that "integrating technology in EMI enables students who are future citizens to access global information, and, via participation in global communication, to become active global players" (Corbett et al., 2023, p. 40). According to this chapter, including the appropriate technology can improve students' academic achievement.

In Chapter 4, ("Technological Approaches to Student Participation while Studying the History of Psychology in an EMI Institution"), Malila C. A. Prado and Thomas J. Huggins focus on their use of digital tools to encourage student participation in the course titled *History and Systems in Psychology* through English-medium instruction. This chapter investigates how technology was wielded within existing teaching practices in response to student feedback and aimed at improved learning outcomes, additionally highlighting the part played by translanguaging and cultural context toward a more transformative educational encounter. The authors, specialists in technology-mediated activities, find that such activities may be either beneficial or detrimental to students' learning. This chapter suggests that future work will delve into how encouraging translanguaging can foster the development of more profound and richer learning.

In Chapter 5, ("Implementing Collaborative Technology to Facilitate Undergraduate TESOL Trainees' Collaborative Writing in an EMI Institution"), Juyoung Lee analyses undergraduate students' attitudes toward Microsoft Teams (MTs) use when completing a group writing task. There are thirty-

two undergraduate students from an EMI college assigned to small groups for a collaborative writing project over one semester. During the final week, they filled in a survey and satisfaction scale. The finding, based on the student survey results, indicates that students generally prefer working collaboratively online. However, the author also notes that "half of the students also reported that they were unwilling to use MTs in the future" (Corbett et al., 2023, p. 71). The chapter provides factors that influence students' adoption of collaborative technologies and offers some advice for their successful integration within EMI scenarios.

In Chapter 6, ("Using Online Peer Assessment Activities to Foster Student-Centered Learning in Two Undergraduate EMI Courses"), Edith M. Y. Yan explores the application of online peer assessment (OPA) activities as a mechanism towards student centered learning (SCL) within two English major undergraduate courses at an EMI university in China. After checking results, Yan indicates that these OPA activities brought about a significant improvement in autonomous learning and audience awareness among students writing by saying, "The findings suggest the enhancement of students' autonomous learning and audience awareness in writing after participating in the OPA activities" (Corbett et al., 2023, p. 95). Lastly, this chapter discusses the role of OPA in building an interactive and responsive learning environment, which helps to achieve educational aims aligned with SCL in EMI settings, and suggests further research on OPA activities.

In Chapter 7, ("Improving Listening and Autonomous Learning Among Multilingual Students with a Digital Learning Tool: An EMI Teacher-Training Course in TESOL"), Jackie Yeoh focuses on technology for teaching and autonomous learning among multilingual students using the context of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). This chapter explores an online learning tool aimed at improving listening comprehension ability and facilitating English autonomous study for multilingual students in a TESOL content course in China's EMI university from a southern area. The study was conducted with English majors from diverse multicultural backgrounds at a university that uses EMI in Mainland of China. Jackie Yeoh investigates the effectiveness of this digital learning tool in autonomous learning through a mixed-methods approach, with students providing conflicting feedback on its use. The author (Corbett et al., 2023, p.123) notes that this chapter provides "insights to pedagogical and research implications of using technology as a teaching and learning tool for training English language teachers".

In Chapter 8, ("The Implementation of Technology in Supporting English-Medium Instruction in Multilingual University Settings: A Case Study of Economics"), Fiona Xiaofei Tang et al. explore how to use technology in supporting EMI in a multilingual university setting, specifically focusing on an economics course. This study investigates ways to use technology in helping Chinese-speaking students overcome language barriers, including understanding lectures and getting a handle on discipline-specific terms. It employs various research methods including "a focus-group discussion with students, an online questionnaire, class observation, and semi-structured interviews with instructors" (Corbett et al., 2023, p.141). This research indicates that the L2 English learners are required to be working steadily on raising their level of language skill and equipped with digital readiness if they wish to possess a sense of agency in learning from EMI settings.

In Chapter 9, ("Applying Software-Engineering Thinking to Teaching in EMI Sino-Foreign Higher Education"), Matthew Pike et al. talk about educators quickly changing gears towards a remote and hybrid learning landscape brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors, whose backgrounds are in software engineering (SE), included applying SE thinking to address these issues. They can use Agile methods to achieve a feedback model for computer science students. The authors state, "In the future, we plan to continue exploring ways to integrate SE-thinking principles into our

teaching practices" (Corbett et al., 2023, p.167). This chapter also discussed potential benefits of SE-inspired interventions and proposed future integration of SE principles into teaching practices.

In Chapter 10, ("Using Digital Pedagogy to Redefine Design Education"), Amarpreet Gill et al. explore how new-age learning methods like microlearning, gamification, and immersive virtual reality can be blended into what is taught today to make it more interactive and out-of-the-box educational experience. It covers two unique case studies involving supplementary microlearning videos for a visual communication class, and an immersive virtual reality (VR) use-case in design history. In considering the educational impact of these technologies, Gill et al. observe that "when utilized appropriately, this combination can increase engagement in learners, encourage intrinsic motivational behaviour, and support autonomous learning" (Corbett et al., 2023, p. 184). In addition, practical use of technology using the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification and Redefinition (SAMR) model by educators is recommended for being utilized effectively as well more research to explore the potential and application of modern learning theories in education.

Chapter 11, ("Using a Moodle-Based Digital Escape Room to Train Competent EMI Lecturers and Instructors in a Multilingual Environment"), written by Na Li and Xiaojun Zhang, presents a compelling case study. It examines the innovative use of digital escape rooms which is an example of game-based instructional technology that targets interactive teacher education at Sino-British EMI university Xian Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU). HeXie, a hybrid characteristic of eastern and western culture, is XJTLU's educational philosophy along with their pedagogical model. A digital escape room has been used as "introduce trainees to the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) and the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) using H5P through the Moodle-based learning management system" (Corbett et al., 2023, p.191). This chapter contributes to the literature by providing practical recommendations and reflective experiences, as well as demonstrating several limitations that future studies should address.

Chapter 12, titled 'On the Same Page' with *Perusall* – Using a Social e-Reader to Engage Chinese Undergraduates with Literature in English, was written by Thomas Kaufmann. The author examines *Perusall*, a social e-reading tool, in a literature and creative writing course at an institution in China. *Perusall* allows teachers to post documents for students to read and annotate asynchronously, in a social space. Kaufmann states, "*Perusall* is an innovative social e-reader that facilitates the transformation of reading as a solitary activity to a collective one" (Corbett et al., 2023, p. 228). Thus, the chapter purports that *Perusall* has potential affordances for second-language students in EMI contexts as evidenced by offering engagement metrics and contributing data-driven curriculum design, all as part of an effort to foster collaborative learning on multiple levels.

In Chapter 13, ("Technology, Hybrid Identities, and the Art and Craft of Song-Writing in English"), Fernando Martin Pastor and John Corbett discuss the experience of teaching song-writing to multilingual learners at a university in China using technology. This chapter emphasizes the necessity for course instructors to utilize technology in music education and its impact on students' globalized identities. And as the authors mention, "Presently, the course instructor takes the initiative in choosing the songs used to illustrate different genres; more space could be opened up for student choices" (Corbett et al., 2023, p. 246). This chapter highlights the potential of educational technology to develop those intricate multilingual settings that promote mobility and interaction within the fast-paced world we live in.

In Chapter 14, ("Prospects for the Integration of Technology in English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education"), Edith M. Y. Yan and her colleagues present a synthesis of insights from twelve case studies. These studies explore the benefits and limitations of using technology to support English-

Medium Instruction across various subjects within multilingual universities in China. Reflecting on a broader perspective of how the findings might be, the authors state that "The accumulation of evidence and insights from such case studies may, in due course, identify and help disseminate good and innovative practices" (Corbett et al., 2023, p. 250). This chapter showcases how technology can transform English Medium Instruction by boosting student engagement and enhancing teaching methods. It also emphasizes the need for more thorough research to ensure these educational innovations gain wider acceptance.

## Evaluation

The *Multilingual Education Yearbook 2023: Teaching with Technology in English-Medium Instruction Universities in Multilingual China* provides a thorough investigation of the integration of technology and English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Chinese higher education. It is important to recognize, as noted in related literature, that the survey focused on 53,000 secondary students from 14 European countries who completed tests of second language proficiency (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013, p. 592), highlighting the widespread engagement with English across diverse educational contexts. With chapters discussing EMI across disciplines, the book ranges from how curricula are designed using technology to delivery using the EMI model to a broader discussion of how technology can be used conversely as an agent in creating formative developments. For readers to enhance their understanding and application of the theoretical frameworks, the book should provide more discussions on how technology can be used in different linguistic settings with real-world examples as well as practical exercises. This book features case studies that showcase a variety of technological tools enhancing English-medium instruction in Chinese universities, effectively capturing the diverse linguistic landscape in which these technologies are employed. Take chapter 1 for example, these authors profile how the university of Macau adopts technology to provide an EMI solution, highlighting both the educational context and the technological innovations that have emerged in response to the unique linguistic landscape (Corbett et al., 2023, pp. 1-2). This book is particularly timely, given the accelerated adoption of technology in educational settings during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Corbett et al., 2023, p. 2), which forced institutions worldwide to rethink their teaching methods.

While offering important insights into technology integration itself, *Technology Integration in EMI* does have the limitations common to books. Take Chapter 11 as an example, the case study investigates the novel use of the digital escape room for EMI professional development at Xian Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU). It explores how technology can be integrated into an academically multilingual and multicultural setting. Although the research highlights that using digital escape rooms with H5P enhances interactive teacher education and learner engagement, it also references difficulties in implementing them. Addressing these difficulties requires thoughtful consideration of how digital solutions are applied in curriculum design, instructional development, and technological deployment. This is due to ensuring balanced synchronous and asynchronous blended learning activities within a hybrid learning space. Authors claim that the digital escape room format is more conducive to fostering intercultural communication and self-directed learning; however, they encounter some degree of difficulty in the design and delivery of these activities as well as adequate support for teaching while working within a blended e-learning hybrid mode. However, it falls short of addressing potential drawbacks, such as increased screen time or the digital divide. These issues could be explored in more depth in future research.

## Conclusion

This edited volume explores a range of digital tools and their utilization in various education contexts, examining digitally enhanced simulations, interactive online materials, and online courses designed for education and teacher training. Providing perspectives from multiple universities, this book includes chapters that address the various advantages and disadvantages universities may face while incorporating EMI with technology. These chapters examine how technology can enable inclusive multilingual instruction and address real-world local challenges in a global, digitally connected environment. This book will be a key resource for researchers, educators, and policymakers focused on the intersection of technology, English-medium instruction, and multilingual education development at universities in China.

## References

Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2013). Towards a Plurilingual Approach in English Language Teaching: Softening the Boundaries Between Languages. *TESOL Quarterly, 47*(3), 591-599. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.121

Corbett, J., Yan, E. M. Y., Yeoh, J., & Lee, J. (Eds.). (2023). *Multilingual Education Yearbook 2023: Teaching with Technology in English-Medium Instruction Universities in Multilingual China*. Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32811-4

Liyanage, I., & Walker, T. (Eds.). (2019). Medium of instruction and multilingual contexts: Unravelling the questions and unpacking the challenges. In *Multilingual education yearbook 2019: Media of instruction & multilingual settings* (pp. 1–24). Springer.

Macaro, E., Curle, S., Pun, J., An, J., & Dearden, J. (2018). A systematic review of English medium instruction in higher education. *Language Teaching, 51*(1), 36–76. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000350

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025, pp. 132-135**
**DOI 10.14434/ijlcle.v5i.41958**

Avineri, N., & Baquedano-López, P. (2024). ***An Introduction to Language and Social Justice: What Is, What Has Been, and What Could Be***. Taylor & Francis. (184 pp.), $41.59 US (Paperback), ISBN 978-0367725297

Linguistic anthropology reveals how language both shapes and is shaped by culture, identity, and power. This book offers a unique and innovative approach with a clear structure, using the Applied Linguistic Anthropology Framework (ALA) as guidance. For this book, the two authors' positionalities deeply reflect who they are and how their personal backgrounds influence their perspectives on language and social justice. The diversity of their backgrounds contributes significantly and uniquely to their research views and values, promoting an ideology rooted in social justice. This is an excellent textbook for curriculum design, yet it goes beyond a typical textbook. It includes a variety of elements, such as chapter overviews, learning objectives, and guiding questions, providing students and audience with a comprehensive and engaging learning experience.

Reviewed by Mengjie Lei, Indiana University
E-mail: menglei@iu.edu


## Summary

The readership and audience for this book, as envisioned by the authors, differ from the traditional approach: they 'invite the audience to be part of the inquiry and action process' (p.1), encouraging participation in language use and practice. The first chapter, ("Applied Linguistic Anthropology and Social Justice") serves as a general introduction to the entire book. The authors begin by defining language and exploring its concept, moving away from a traditional structuralist perspective. Instead, they emphasize the socio-political dimensions of language, particularly how it intersects with factors such as race, accent, and body type. Importantly, they argue for the need to unlearn and critically examine traditional approaches to language. It also discusses social justice, emphasizing inclusivity and the ways in which linguistic markers are intertwined with social justice issues. As the book highlights, the core value of language social justice is:

> the recognition that present-day language study and analysis must be understood in the historical context of European colonization and expansion into Indigenous lands on this continent, which has led to the marginalization of languages other than the variety of English known as Academic English.

This emphasis underscores the importance of viewing language within a broader historical and social framework.

After clarifying these two concepts, the authors address and explain how language and social justice are interconnected, how they work together, and how they can be applied to real-life social practices through a critical pedagogy approach. Each chapter follows a structured format, covering

topics such as linguistic and human rights. At the end of the first chapter, the authors introduce an applied linguistic anthropology framework, defining it as

> "a multi-scaled, temporally-shaped critical engagement with socially-situated language issues, balancing contextual knowledge, relationship-building, and aspiration for action."

They also provide a timeline-based structure for the book: what is (chapter 3), what has been (chapter 4), and what could be (chapter 5), with each chapter representing a different dimension.

In chapter two, ("Centering Language: A Lexicon for Language and Social Justice Issues"), the authors address that language is "central" to social justice (p.29). One of the most significant tools they create is a "terms of engagement" framework and a language and social justice lexicon, referred to as LSJL. This lexicon provides a set of terms that offer clear guidelines for addressing language and social justice issues. These terms serve as a helpful starting point for conversations and research ideas alike. LSJL is explored from two key perspectives: the recognition of language in education and the representation of Indigenous groups.

Chapter three ("What Is: Applied Linguistic Anthropological Methods for LSJI Inquiry") mainly discussed how ideology reflects on the Chapter three and chapter four as the book says go "hand in hand", they have provided us with the framework on two different levels. As the book suggests, Chapters Three and Four go "hand in hand", offering a framework that examines both large-scale social structures and systems as well as smaller, individual-level interactions and everyday behaviors. Chapter Three delves into methods of linguistic anthropology for LSJI inquiry, presenting a robust framework for understanding the "linguistic and cultural landscape". It introduces six thoughtfully sequenced activities; each paired with questions that can serve as interview prompts for qualitative research. Each activity is followed by a vignette that highlights real-world examples, using scaffolding to guide readers toward a deeper understanding. These activities effectively demonstrate how language practices intersect with social justice issues in daily life, providing rich insights into the connections between language and social equity. Additionally, the chapter underscores the importance of the intersectionality of identity and positionality in relation to one's research topic, highlighting the critical role of subjectivity.

In Chapter Four ("What Has Been: Deepening the Connections between Past and Present"), by discussing what the situation of language justice has been, the chapter developed the connection between the past and present. This chapter mainly focused on analysis two cases, one about the dominance of English, one about the indigenous representation. I find the juxtaposition of these two cases powerful and effective. In my opinion, placing the dominance of English alongside the marginalized status of Indigenous languages creates a powerful contrast, further highlighting English's dominance and the vulnerability of other minority languages. It works like a mirror, reflecting their stark differences regarding their linguistic social status.

Chapters five ("What Could Be: Relationships, Aspirations, and Actions") and six ("Now What") serve as guides for taking practical steps toward social change. These chapters provide a future-oriented direction, connecting theory and framework with actionable practices. Students are encouraged to develop a "multi-faceted plan for a specific LSJI-related action project". The concept of the "multiplicitous self" emphasizes how individuals exist in relation to others, both affectively and experientially, engaging in acts of resistance and liberation. Chapter Five offers numerous advocacy resources, giving students clear guidance for action. The final chapter includes a note to both students and educators, underscoring the unique interaction between the authors and the audience. This message aligns perfectly with the book's themes and ethos, embodying a deeply humanistic and

compassionate approach. It reflects the book's core commitment to language and social justice, providing a true humanistic perspective that resonates with the work's overall mission—language and social justice.

## Evaluation

This textbook is structured to be easy to read and effectively conveys new topics. One of the innovations of this book is its clear structure; it presents a well-defined framework along with a chronological narrative that moves through the past, present, and future. Understanding history allows us to grasp the root causes of current social, cultural, and political issues. By knowing what led to certain events or systems, we can better understand why things are the way they are today. As Avineri and Baquedano-López state, "many forms of representation can become issues of language and social justice." As what Irvine and Gal (2000) noted in their classic piece: "history inquiry also has a contemporary relevance, to the extent that early representations of sociolinguistic phenomena influenced later representations and even contributed to shaping the sociolinguistic scene itself." Languages are socially and historically constructed, and awareness of historical injustices through the lens of language can be a powerful driver for social justice and reform. Only by understanding the historical context of inequities and injustices, as well as their sociohistorical roots, can we effectively look toward the future and be better equipped to advocate for change and promote social justice.

This book transcends the conventional boundaries of a textbook, offering not only academic insights but also a profound exploration of its subject matter. I particularly appreciate that each chapter features a 'vignette' sharing real-life experiences related to language and social justice. The combination of theoretical frameworks and personal narratives gives this book a unique structure, as the vignettes vividly illustrate real social justice issues connected to language. Their inclusion makes the material both compelling and persuasive. Additionally, each chapter offers reflective sections that enrich the examples and analyses, encouraging readers to revisit familiar issues and prompting a deeper examination of topics we may have thought we already understood. This "cyclizing of thoughts" would encourage both educators and students to think deeper.

As a teacher, I appreciate the richness of the content in this book. However, due to its diverse elements, the structure may feel somewhat complex when first using it as a textbook. It would be beneficial for the authors to provide a brief 'how to use' note for each section, alongside those detailed questions, to help educators maximize the effectiveness of these elements.

## Conclusions

The book comprises six chapters and serves as an essential resource for anthropology and social justice studies. Structured as a textbook, each chapter includes guiding questions to prepare readers for discussion, as well as follow-up questions, reflections, and detailed practical activities and project ideas for educators. This makes it an invaluable pedagogical tool. The book is suitable for use as semester-long course material and is an excellent resource for self-guided learning. In the field of education, we often say that language theory is ideally applied at both practical and pedagogical levels. This book exemplifies the ethos of this combination. As I mentioned earlier, it provides detailed scaffolding with questions, making it particularly beneficial for pedagogical purposes.

## Reference

Irvine, J. T., & Gal, S. (2000). Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. *Regimes of language: Ideologies, polities, and identities*, *81*, 35-84

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025, pp. 136-140**
**DOI 10.14434/ijlcle.v5i.41956**

Park, J. S. (2021*).* ***In Pursuit of English: Language and Subjectivity in Neoliberal South Korea*** (1st ed.). Oxford University Press. (202 pp.), $155 US (Hardcover), ISBN: 9780190855734

The purpose of the book *In Pursuit of English: Language and Subjectivity in Neoliberal South Korea* by Joseph Sung-Yul Park is to demonstrate the connection between English and neoliberalism in South Korea through the lens of subjectivity. Park argues that, within the context of South Korea's neoliberal transformation, English language learning is positioned not only as an economic asset, but also as a moral obligation. It is the moral dimension and affective experience of language users that produces and reinforces both neoliberal power structures and English hegemony in South Korea.

This book has a broad scope, addressing neoliberal policies and language education policies at the state level. This book consists of nine chapters, with Park examining the theoretical foundations of neoliberalism (Chapter 2), the historic processes of South Korea's neoliberalization (Chapter 3), the roles of institutions such as education systems, media, and major corporations influencing language experiences (Chapters 3-6). Following this, Park evaluates the significance of affective stances of anxiety (Chapter 6), linguistic insecurity (Chapter 7), and precarity (Chapter 8). Park uses ethnographic methods and theoretical analysis to make his argument. This book critiques the association of English with neoliberalism purely through the commodification of English and language learning and intervenes by connecting English to neoliberalism through subjectivity and the production of language users as human capital.

Reviewed by Christine Anne McLellan, University of British Columbia
E-mail: camc0101@mail.ubc.ca


## Summary

In Chapter 1, ("Introduction"), Park begins by outlining how different countries have developed English language learning programs to remain competitive in global economy, highlighting the global language shift towards English and the global socio-political shift towards neoliberalism. The introduction emphasizes the importance of analyzing subjectivity in political-economic research in order to better understand the semiotic processes that lead to English dominance in neoliberal states. The introduction establishes the layout of the book, previewing the key ideas that will be relevant in each of the proceeding chapters of the book.

Chapter 2, ("Language and Subjectivity in Neoliberalism"), defines the practices of neoliberalism relevant to producing idealized neoliberal English using subjects. Park discusses neoliberalism as it manifests in complex, dynamic ways, as an ideological condition promoting market-based freedom through deregulation, privatization, financialization, flexibilization of labour and reduction of welfare and socialist policy. Chapter 2 explores the key theoretical frameworks underpinning neoliberalism and subjectivity, such as the Marxist approach which looks at the precarity

of labour and political-economic relations, and Foucault's notions of governmentality and the technologies of the self. Park argues that English language learning functions as a technology of the self, molding individuals into ideal subjects of capitalist social orders.

In Chapter 3, ("English and Neoliberalism in South Korea"), Park presents the ethnographic context of this book by providing a historical overview of neoliberalism in South Korea (especially with regard to the role the United States and other key political figures had), English fever, and the affective stances of South Koreans relating to their subjectivity in language learning. This chapter discusses the cyclical relationship between corporate demands for English proficiency, middle-class parental investments in children's language education, and government policy reforms reflecting societal inclinations towards English. Some of the policy changes Park gives examples of include educational reforms such as the shift to emphasis on commodifiable skills, opening of specialized private schools, encouragement of publishing in English at universities, and recruitment of native English speakers from inner circle countries to teach in South Korea. This chapter emphasizes the role of emotions, discussing the sense of junuk or shame that occurs as English is constructed as desirable for modernization, yet unattainable as racialized figures of white native speakers are imagined as the linguistic authority over Korean non-native speakers.

Chapter 4, ("Language as Pure Potential") examines the affective stance of desire, focusing on how historical processes of modernization and globalization shape the pursuit of English. Park discusses how the desire for English varies across social classes, impacting the way English is pursued and valued. Park argues that Korean's perceptions of English reflect their self-perceptions, and so the desire for English is also a desire for self-actualization and social mobility. English is associated with the potential for more, simultaneously naturalizing the logic of human capital development. The discourses surrounding English and economic relations establish moral elites, where those with a higher socio-economic status are associated with higher levels of morality, and better language ability.

In Chapter 5, ("Language Learning as Technology of the Self"), Park analyzes the role of the conservative press in Korea as it frames English language learning as a moral responsibility tied to self-development in the neoliberal world. Many people in South Korea are critical of English as it is seen as a language of socioeconomic inequality, with the upper class having the ability to invest in English language learning in a greater capacity. Park gives the examples of, those with more economic capital being able to send their children to prestigious domestic private schools, or send children abroad to learn English, which will increase their linguistic and social capital. The conservative press endorses success stories of English language learning to promote intense investment and effort in learning English, creating the figure of the morally elite language learner and proposing that English language learning is the ultimate form of self-care and self-development.

Chapter 6, ("The Biopolitics of Language Learning") addresses the formulation of youth as a limited resource under neoliberalism, especially with regard to language learning. Younger children are considered to be more adept at language learning, so parents find it crucial to manage their children's learning to capitalize on this and encourage children to develop their English/language skills as much as possible before they reach adulthood. The view of the self as human capital creates moral affect as children will view themselves as more valuable or of greater worth if they have greater English-speaking abilities. The view of youth as a limited resource instills anxiety in both children and parents as they have to constantly be conscious of how they are managing themselves in a way that is for their future benefit. This chapter explores early English education programs, norms of completing school abroad, and the concept of biopolitics, to demonstrate how neoliberal values of human capital development are embodied by children in their language learning.

Chapter 7, ("Deferring to the Other"), discusses the linguistic insecurity that is experienced by 12 male mid-level managers in multinational corporations. These managers connect their career aspirations to their linguistic competence, and through interviews with these managers, Park discusses the tensions between their confidence in their language ability and insecurity in their deference of authority to white native speakers. The colonial ideology of racialized native speakerism reinforces the neoliberal project of constant self-development that neoliberal subjects are expected to pursue, as English is promoted as a commodifiable skill but also as belonging to native speakers first and foremost.

In Chapter 8, ("Becoming Precarious Subjects"), Park explores the notion of precarity, analyzing the rise of work that is insecure, unstable, and unpredictable. Precarity becomes naturalized as the promise that learning English will lead to job security and social status is constantly deferred due to the definition of linguistic competence constantly shifting. This is highlighted in Park's discussion of the how assessments of language ability, such as the Test of English for International Communication, are constantly changing to reflect the neoliberal job market's demands. The constant recalibration of criteria for what is considered a valuable skill invalidates worker's qualifications and perpetuates insecurity and feelings of anxiety.

Chapter 9, ("Conclusions"), finishes the book by summarizing the arguments for the relationship between English and neoliberalism through subjectivity. The structures of control in neoliberalism are reproduced by subjectivities of English such as Korean English learners hopes and fears about how learning English will impact their futures in a socially and economically precarious context. The argument of this book is that it is important to understand the subjectivity of language learning within specific political-economic contexts, looking at the ways neoliberalism has manifested in the desire for English and insecurity of linguistic competence in language learners in the context of neoliberal South Korea.

## Evaluation

Overall, *In Pursuit of English* is well written and conveys the importance of conducting further research on subjectivity in language learning. This book is relevant to researchers who are studying affect and emotional significance to language learning, and the impact of neoliberalism on affective stances towards language learning. This book is especially important to researchers for its relevance in interdisciplinary fields, including but not limited to anthropology, sociolinguistics, and education. Research-practitioners or professionals who teach English as an additional language, especially in the context of South Korea, may find it helpful to read this book to gain insights into the subjective experiences of learning and sociocultural dimensions of language ideologies like native speakerism that might otherwise not be considered in their practice.

However, while this book effectively analyzed the social categories of race, class, and age, it would benefit from recognizing intersectionality and paying attention to the potential gendered differences in subjectivity. Due to the nature of the context Park was analyzing, Park's analysis focuses solely on male managers, leaving women's subjective experiences unexplored. Examining women's experiences in this context could provide perspective into the nuance of subjectivities and affective stances towards language learning. Future research should address this gap to provide a more comprehensive understanding of subjectivity, language learning, and neoliberalism in South Korea.

## Conclusions

Throughout this book, Park effectively establishes the connection between language learning and human capital production through neoliberal subjectivity. By critically challenging the dominant narrative of English as inherently and universally economically valuable, Park shifts our focus to the affective dimensions of language learning in South Korea that shape the perceptions of English as necessary for self-worth and belonging in society. The lived experiences of language learners discussed in this book reflect the ongoing negotiations of identity and value in a neoliberal context, where language becomes embedded in individuals' aspirations and anxieties. In an increasingly globalized world, Park invites us as researchers to develop a greater understanding of how language learners' ideological constructions of language are shaped by specific material, social, political, and historical contexts.

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education*
**ISSN: 2642-4002**

## Submission Preparation Checklist

- As part of the submission process, authors are required to check off their submission's compliance with all of the following items, and submissions may be returned to authors that do not adhere to these guidelines.
- The submission has not been previously published, nor is it before another journal for consideration (or an explanation has been provided in Comments to the Editor).
- The submission file is in Microsoft Word document file format.
- Where available, URLs for the references were provided.
- The text is double-spaced; uses a 12-point font; employs italics, rather than underlining (except with URL addresses); and all illustrations, figures, and tables are placed within the text at the appropriate points, rather than at the end.
- The text adheres to the stylistic and bibliographic requirements outlined in the Author Guidelines.
- The submission meets international standards of scholarly English and has been edited by a professional editor to ensure that it is free of grammatical, spelling, and other common language errors.
- The submission has been formatted following the 7th edition of APA style.
- A title page with the author's identifier should be separate from the anonymized manuscript file.

## Author Guidelines

**All submissions must be in APA Format** (*Handbook of the American Psychological Association*, 7th edition) and must be less than 9,000 words in total length (including references). Please use headers and subheaders to demarcate important sections and include a word count for your paper. For blind review purposes, remove any language that identifies the author or institution.

Submissions to the *International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education (IJLCLE)* will be handled through an online submission system. Articles should be submitted as a Word file in Times New Roman font, size 12, with one-inch margins, double spaced. Insert page numbers in the lower right, with the first page of the manuscript starting as Page 1. Do not add page numbers to the abstract or title page.

**Abstracts** should contain 200 words. The names of the authors and institutions should only appear on the title page. Remove these identifiers from the abstract.

**Book Reviews** of recent publications in areas specified above are also welcome. They should not exceed 2,500 words including the references. Please refer to the samples (Single author book review, edited volume book review) here.

**Structure of Submissions**

Authors are invited to submit manuscripts in one of the following types of contributions: 1) theoretical and conceptual article, 2) empirical research using qualitative and/or quantitative methodologies, and 3) literature review articles often known as state-of-the-art articles.

Guidelines for the empirical research using qualitative and/or quantitative methodologies should include the following structure: Title page; 200-word abstract; six keywords; introduction, theoretical framework, research questions, methodology/methods, findings, discussion, and conclusion; acknowledgments; declaration of interest statement; references; appendices (as appropriate). Table(s), figure(s), image(s), and chart(s) should be included in the body of the manuscript accompanied by a caption. Placeholders, Endnotes, and footnotes are not accepted.

**Authors' Information**

All authors should include their full name and affiliation on the cover page of the manuscript. One of the authors will need to be identified as the corresponding author by providing his/her email address. Authors' affiliations are the affiliations where the research was conducted. If any of the named co-authors change their affiliation during the peer-review process, the new affiliation can be specified in a footnote. No changes to affiliation can be made after your paper is accepted.

**Funding**

Authors should provide, if necessary, all details required by their funding and grant-awarding bodies.

**Figures & Tables**

Please include in the body of the papers all related components: figures, images, charts, graphs, footnotes, references, appendices, or other relevant information.

Figures should be of high quality (1200 dpi for line art, 600 dpi for grayscale, and 300 dpi for color, at the correct size). Figures should be supplied in the following file formats: EPS, PS, BMP, PNP, JPEG, GIF.

Tables should present new information rather than duplicate what is in the text. Readers should be able to interpret the table without reference to the text. Please supply editable files.

**Ethical Guidelines**

1. Manuscripts that have been published are being considered for publication elsewhere and will not be considered for publication in *IJLCLE*. If your submission is part of a larger study or if you have used the same data in part in other papers published or under review, you must disclose relevant information in a cover letter stating where the paper is published or being reviewed and describing how the current submission to *IJLCLE* makes a different contribution.
2. Submitted manuscripts that contain substantial portions of already published papers are considered plagiarism and will not be considered for publication in *IJLCLE*.
3. Submitted manuscripts that contain substantial portions of the author's own work that have been published elsewhere are considered self-plagiarism and will not be considered for publication in IJLCLE.

### Use of AI

Authors who use AI tools in the writing of their manuscript, the production of images, or the collection and analysis of data must be transparent in disclosing in the paper how the AI tool was employed in which parts, and which AI tool was used. Please refer to APA guidelines for citing AI-generated content (see https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt). However, manuscripts that are considered to contain substantial portions of AI-generated content and do not have proper citations of the content will not be considered for publication in *IJLCLE*.

### Third-Party Material in your Paper

Authors should obtain the necessary permission to reuse third-party material in their articles. The use of short extracts of text and some other types of material is usually permitted, on a limited basis, for the purposes of criticism and review without securing formal permission. If authors wish to include any material in their paper for which they do not hold copyright, they should obtain written permission from the copyright owner prior to submission.

### Publication Fees

There are no submission fees, publication fees, or page charges for this journal. Color figures/images will be reproduced in color in your article free of charge.

### Research Misconduct Policy

The editors of *IJLCLE* will take reasonable steps to identify and prevent the publication of papers where research misconduct has occurred, including plagiarism, citation manipulation, and data falsification/fabrication, among others. If the editors are made aware of any allegation of research misconduct relating to a published article in their journal, the editor shall follow the Committee on Publication Ethics' guidelines in dealing with allegations.

## Submission Guidelines for Special Issues

The *International Journal of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education (IJLCLE)* publishes Special Issues on a specific topic or theme related to literacy, culture, and language education from multiple perspectives. If you are interested in becoming a guest editor, please find below some guidelines to consider when putting together your proposal.

A Special Issue is a collection of scholarly papers that comprise a specific topic, and it should be of relevance to a wide range of inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary audience. Authors should understand that the same criteria of originality, quality, and significance apply to articles in Special Issues as to regular articles.

Please note that a Special Issue is not a Conference Proceedings, but rather a scholarly collection of selected articles from a wide range of perspectives in charge of Guest Editor(s) in coordination with the Editor-in-Chief. The specific topics for a Special Issue may originate from discussion at conferences, academic meetings, symposia, panels, or be solicited with a Call for Proposals, etc.

A full Special Issue to be included in *IJLCLE* should encompass approximately 8-10 articles. The Special Issue should contain a total of 90,000 words maximum in length (8-10 articles) and an introductory essay written by the Guest Editor(s). Book reviews of recent publications in relation to the Special Issue are also welcome. Book reviews should not exceed 2,500 words, including the

bibliography. **All submissions must be in APA Format** (*Handbook of the American Psychological Association*, 7th edition).

If you are interested in becoming a Special Issue Guest Editor, you need to submit a formal proposal to the Editor-in-Chief at scoronel@iu.edu by clearly indicating the details of your proposed Special Issue. After we receive your proposal, the Editor-in-Chief will carefully review it before its acceptance or rejection. If you have any questions, please email the Editor-in-Chief at the above-mentioned email address.

## About the Guest Editor(s)

**The Guest Editor(s)** should be an expert(s) about the Special Issue and ideally will be sufficiently well-connected through professional networks and social media to attract renowned authors and high-quality articles to *IJLCLE*. The Guest Editor(s) will oversee developing a proposal summarizing the rationale and content for the Special Issue.

**The Guest Editor should also have a clear understanding of the nature of their commitment** and their obligations. They should understand the journal's schedule and be aware of the limits on article length. At the end, the Editor-in-Chief will be responsible for the overall content published in *IJLCLE*.

**A formal Special Issue proposal** should include the following:

- The title of the Special Issue
- Names and institutional affiliation of the Guest Editor(s)
- Brief objective of the Special Issue
- Brief description and significance of the Special Issue
- Possible Audience for the Special Issue
- 400 words abstracts of each paper (with names and affiliations of each author).
- A detailed timeline for paper submissions and revisions
- A detailed biographic information of the Guest Editor(s)
- Detailed biographic information of the authors/contributors

### Guest Editor(s)' Responsibilities

Papers will be reviewed using *IJLCLE*'s standard procedures. Guest Editor(s) will be responsible for:

- Collecting the papers from the authors/contributors
- Identifying and recruiting potential blind reviewers
- Rejecting the initial submitted papers if they do not meet quality standards even before sending to the blind reviewers
- Sending the selected papers to two blind reviewers
- Receiving the blind reviewers' comments and sending them back to the authors
- Receiving the modified/revised papers from the authors
- Checking the modified/revised papers
- Sending the modified/revised versions to the blind reviewers again for their final approval (if possible)
- Receiving the final approval from the blind reviewers (if possible)
- Proofreading the whole content of the volume.
- Overseeing all other tasks associated with the editorial work related to the Special Issue

- Writing a concise introduction that will describe the content of the contributions to the Special Issue
- Sending the final proofreading to the *IJLCLE* Editor-in-Chief for final approval, production, and publication

Please note that the double-blind peer review of each paper will be carried out via *IJLCLE*'s online submission and peer review system, managed by the Guest Editor (s). Once reviews are returned, the Guest Editor(s) will need to decide, and this will be communicated to the Editor-in-Chief for their confirmation of such a decision. The Editor-in-Chief will make an executive decision if any disagreements emerge during the editorial process.

## Copyright Notice

*International Journal of Literacy, Culture and Language Education*
**Volume 5, July 2025**

# Contents



IJLCLE

INDIANA UNIVERSITY