

Teachers' language attitudes towards the use of a nonstandard variety in the classroom in Grades 1–3: A case of isiBhaca in Umzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal



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South Africa is a democratic country, and as such, it is crucial that every individual's linguistic rights be protected. Also of paramount importance is that the South African government should revisit the issue of granting official status to some languages to the exclusion of others, such as isiBhaca, and consider the issue of a 'language variation'. The educational setting has experienced challenges over attitudes towards language varieties. Teachers' attitudes towards using a nonstandard variety of language or dialect in the education space have implications for effective teaching and learning. Therefore, this paper aims to establish the attitudes held by teachers towards the use of isiBhaca (a nonstandard variety of isiXhosa) in the education space in Umzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal. Using the qualitative research method, data were gathered from 22 purposively selected teachers in six schools in Umzimkhulu. Interviews were used to collect data, and the qualitative data were analysed thematically. The study found that teachers view integrating isiBhaca into the classroom as having immense benefits. The results further revealed that teachers felt that isiBhaca should initially be taught in the lower primary school grades (Grades 1–3) and up to the tertiary education level. The findings imply that learners' academic performance in Umzimkhulu is affected by the use of isiXhosa as a medium of instruction in schools. This is why teachers who were participants in this study believe that isiBhaca is a language of the people of Umzimkhulu, and thus their learners should be given a chance to be taught in isiBhaca.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by demonstrating the attitudes and experiences of teachers in communities where non-standard languages are used in South Africa and how teachers cope in such multilingual classrooms. In the case of isiBhaca, teachers felt that it should be adopted as a language adequate to be used in learners' education, even though it is a non-official language. Thus, teachers' attitudes and views should not be ignored when discussing teaching and learning pedagogies.

Keywords: isiBhaca; medium of instruction; language in education; mother tongue; nonstandard varieties.

Introduction

Section 6(1) of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution (*Act No. 108 of 1996*) recognises Sepedi, Setswana, Sesotho, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiZulu and isiXhosa as the 11 official languages. It is appropriate and justifiable to highlight in this article that while the Constitution stipulates that everyone has the freedom to use the language of their choice, it does not address how nonstandard varieties of languages such as isiBhaca should be treated. Learners from Umzimkhulu speak isiBhaca, which has no official status and is closely related to three Nguni languages: isiXhosa, isiZulu and siSwati (Soga 1930:443). According to Soga (1930), when learners start school, they are taught in isiXhosa, which they do not ordinarily speak at home or elsewhere, such as when they socialise with other children.

Based on a report by the Umzimkhulu Local Municipality, in 2020 the population of Umzimkhulu was about 197 280 people (Umzimkhulu Local Municipality Annual Draft Report: 2019–2020). During an official census conducted by Statistics South Africa (SSA), citizens are expected to choose their mother tongues from a list of languages with official recognition in South Africa (e.g. English and siSwati) or elsewhere (e.g. Shona and Kiswahili). This leaves the people of

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Umzimkhulu with no choice but to choose either isiXhosa or isiZulu, as these languages are closely related to isiBhaca. According to Census 2011, the people of Umzimkhulu chose their mother tongue as follows: isiZulu (47.2%), isiXhosa (41.5%) and others (11.3%).

IsiBhaca is classified as one of the many nonstandard varieties of isiXhosa, including Gcaleka, Bomvana, Tembu, Cele, Ntlangwini, Hlubi, Mpondo and Xesibe (Lanham & Prinsloo 1978:33). The educational context labels some of these speech forms as dialectal or as deviances from the norm. It stigmatises them by not including them in teaching and learning. According to Lanham and Prinsloo (1978:35), learners enter school with different advantages or disadvantages depending on the nonstandard variety of dialect they speak. Those learners who speak a widely spoken dialect are more advantaged than those who speak a less popular dialect. Although isiBhaca is mutually intelligible with isiXhosa, the two languages are distinct. In a study by Majola (2018), learners made a list of words in both isiXhosa and isiBhaca to indicate the differences in the above languages. Table 1 lists a few words and sayings which they mentioned.

Furthermore, Kubeka (1979) mentioned that isiBhaca affricates *tsh* in the place of *th* in the isiXhosa language and *dz* in the place of *nd* in the same. Hence, amaBhaca would pronounce the words *udadobawo* as *udzadzobawo*, which means 'my father's sisters', and pronounce the isiZulu word *shesha* as *tshetsha*, which means 'hurry'. Kubeka (1979) further posited that isiBhaca speakers introduce the sibilant after the letter *t*. For instance, instead of saying *ukuthi* in isiZulu, they say *ukuthsi* which in English means 'to say'. In addition, in isiBhaca, there is a transmutation of *u* and *owe* to *wi*. For instance, amaBhaca say *kwitshi* when saying the isiXhosa word *kowethu* or *kokwethu*, which means 'at home', as seen in Table 1. Thus, according to Doke (1954), isiBhaca has a combination of both *ukutekeza*, 'to quiver, speaking in a quivering voice', and *ukuthsefula*, which means 'to be oily or slippery'.

TABLE 1: A Brief Comparison of isiBhaca and isiXhosa.

English	isiXhosa	isiBhaca
Milk	Ubisi	Intusi
Walking, going	Ukuhamba	Ukukhamba
Beat, hit	Betha	Tshaya
Inside	Ngaphakathi	Ngekhatshi
At home, my home	Kokwethu	Kwithsi
Across	Ngaphesheya	Ngesheya
Down	Ezansi	Edasi
It is food	Kukutya	Hukudla
Here	Apha	Lana
There	Apho	Layo
Look	Jonga	Bheka
Finish	Gqiba	Shuba
Hurry	Khawuleza	Tshetsha
Mother	Umama	Umhanha
Father	Utata	Ubawo
We are at home	Sisekhaya	Sikekhaya
They are at the river	Basemlanjeni	Bakemlanjeni

Research problem

Most of the learners in Umzimkhulu speak isiBhaca and identify as amaBhaca. However, since isiBhaca is not officially recognised in South Africa, they align with either isiZulu or isiXhosa, the two dominant and official languages used in Umzimkhulu. The challenge faced by teachers is that learners mostly come into the classroom with no knowledge of isiXhosa or isiZulu but only of isiBhaca. As a result, learners take time to grasp instruction in isiXhosa, the language used in education and as a medium of instruction (MOI) from Grades 1–3 in numerous schools in Umzimkhulu. Children born in Umzimkhulu face challenges of growing up speaking and being taught isiBhaca until they go to a school where isiXhosa is used as a MOI. The benefits of mother-tongue education have been studied since 1953. At the time, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) experts on using nonstandard languages in education emphasised its significance, adding that it is self-evident that a child's mother tongue is the finest medium for educating him or her. For instance, inside a child's brain, the system of meaningful signals operates spontaneously for articulation and comprehension. Sociologically, it is a type of identity amid his or her community members. He or she learns faster with it than with an unfamiliar language (UNESCO 1953) medium in schooling. Cassimjee (1998) believed that the status of Bhaca as a distinct and recognisable language requires more investigation.

The experts referenced in this article's review of the literature generally agree that learners should be taught in their mother tongue and that learners learn better when taught in a language they are acquainted with. This is not the case in Umzimkhulu, and as such, learners seem not to enjoy the benefit of being taught in their mother tongue, isiBhaca, but in isiXhosa, which is not the dominant language in Umzimkhulu. The researcher notes that isiXhosa and isiBhaca are mutually intelligible; the two are not identical. Against this context, the researcher wishes to determine teachers' attitudes about the possible implementation of isiBhaca as a MOI in the educational environment in Umzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal province (see Figure 1).

Objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' views regarding the usage of isiBhaca in Umzimkhulu schools. The study's objectives were to:

- investigate language teachers' attitudes towards the use of isiBhaca as the MOI from grade 1 to 3
- examine the extent to which learners could benefit if isiBhaca was to be used as a MOI in Umzimkhulu schools.

Sociocultural theory as a theoretical framework that underpins the study

This study is guided by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of human learning, which conceptualised learning as both a



Source: <https://www.cabscahire.com/south-africa/map-of-south-africa/>

FIGURE 1: Map of South Africa showing Umzimkhulu.

sociological phenomenon and the genesis of artificial cognition in either society or culture. As it is with all learners in the world, learners in Umzimkhulu belong to a sociocultural group, which shapes their thinking and upbringing. IsiBhaca is tied to that sociocultural environment, and when they are detached from isiBhaca in their education, they separate from their social identity. A key component of Vygotsky's (1978) theory is social interaction, which plays a crucial role in cognition development. In a study by Majola (2018), a majority of learners who were participants from certain schools indicated that they mostly spoke isiBhaca when with friends and with family. They further suggested that this is because their knowledge of isiBhaca is better than that of isiXhosa. Vygotsky's (1978) belief about how learning occurs is twofold. In the first instance, learning occurs when children interact with others and gradually incorporate them into their individual mindsets. Considering Vygotsky's view above, learners who speak isiBhaca at home and school may take longer to conceptualise knowledge received through isiXhosa because it is a language they only use for educational purposes. Learning development occurs twice – firstly, between people, then within that person. This is known as the inter-psychological process, and the intra-psychological process is similar to it. This applies similarly to voluntary attention, logical memory and the formation of concepts. Relationships between individuals are the basis for all higher functions.

Literature review

Kaschula and Kretzer's (2019) study contrasting isiXhosa teaching issues in the Eastern Cape with Kaschula and Kretzer's (2019) argued that although there is a Language in Education policy Language in Education policy (LiEP) which is underpinned by the constitution in South Africa, there are

still gaps, particularly as it relates to implementation thereof. Although their paper is based on research conducted in the two provinces mentioned above, the case of isiMpondo, which is in the Eastern Cape, is related to the argument made by the researcher in this study. Kaschula and Kretzer (2019) found that teachers in Port St Johns have difficulties teaching standard isiXhosa to some learners because the language they use at home is isiMpondo, which they bring into the classroom. Similarly, Heugh (2002) contended that, while the LiEP exists, its execution is incoherent, mainly in terms of the usage of South African indigenous languages. African indigenous languages, according to the African National Congress (2012:6–7), are not only learners' mother tongues or languages learned in school but also sources of pride and identity. As a result, language plays a vital role in developing, preserving and promoting the learners' culture. Some of Kaschula and Kretzer's (2019) findings include that learners in the Eastern Cape do not speak standard isiXhosa but are skilled in isiMpondo, which is likewise a nonstandard variant like isiBhaca. Maqam (2015) confirmed that even though isiXhosa and isiMpondo are mutually intelligible, there exists some lexical difference between the two. Therefore, Maqam (2015) suggested that isiMpondo affects learners learning isiXhosa simply because they struggle to differentiate between the two. In her conclusion, Maqam (2015) recommended that teachers need to understand and accept learners' linguistic background and knowledge, even if such learners speak a nonstandard variety, and that teachers should honour the learner and their situation so that they honour isiXhosa. Letsholo (2009) made interesting inputs that the preservation and maintenance of nonstandard and minority languages rely heavily on the youth. She mentioned that the youth are the ones who should ensure that their

nonstandard varieties survive for the future generation, since language is tied to one's culture.

Medium of instruction

Ball (2010:13) defined MOI as any language used to teach the core curriculum at the elementary level, whether in or out of school. Depending on the circumstances, the medium of teaching may encompass many languages rather than just one. Most countries permit teachers to use only one language as a MOI, while others do allow the use of more. Section 6(2) of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution further states that official languages shall be treated equally and with equal respect, which is the foundation of the LiEP. Furthermore, Section 29(2) of South Africa's Bill of Rights, which is included in the constitution, reaffirms learners' rights to receive education in the official language of their choice in schools. According to Debreli and Oyman (2016), learning in one's native language is the basis of all learning in some circumstances, and learners find it simpler to digest knowledge provided and processed in their mother tongue.

According to the Constitution of the South Africa, learners shall be taught in their mother tongue or any other language of their choosing, as long as that language is recognised and acknowledged by the South African Language Policy (Department of Education 1996). According to Prinsloo (2007:15), this policy not only encourages the use of one's home tongue but also offers an exemption for additional languages. In tandem with this view, Cekiso (2014:5) conducted a study in Idutywa district in the Eastern Cape. The study proved that learners demonstrate better understanding when writing or reading in their mother tongue. His study looked at how the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) affects students' reading skills. It collected data from two primary schools, one where the home language (IsiXhosa) was used as the MOI from Grades 1 to 3 and the other where English was taught as a subject. Beginning in Grade 1, the other school employed English as the MOI, with the home language (IsiXhosa) as a taught language. He used assessment to examine if the two groups' mean reading comprehension scores differed statistically significantly on both exams. The findings demonstrated a significant difference in IsiXhosa reading comprehension between students in the two schools, with those taught in their mother tongue or home language faring better.

Language of Learning and Teaching

Section 6(2) of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution supports using and promoting indigenous languages as a means of redress. Section 6(2) further states that official languages shall be treated equally and with equal respect, which is the foundation of the LiEP. Furthermore, Section 29(2) of South Africa's Bill of Rights, which is part of the constitution, reaffirms learners' rights to receive education in the official language of their choice in schools. The South African LiEP safeguards learners' rights by allowing them to select any of the above-mentioned official languages as their

home language or first additional language. In South Africa, learners in Grades 1 through 3 should be exposed to at least one recognised language as a subject. However, beginning in Grade 3, learners shall be supplied with a LOLT and at least one other official language. Myburgh, Poggenpoel and Van Rensburg (2004) mentioned situations where learners do not speak or comprehend the language of instruction or the home language in circumstances when these are distinct.

Hoadley (2012, 2016) conducted a small-scale study on language acquisition and instruction in South African primary school classrooms. She discovered components of classroom practices that impact learning and reveal gaps in teachers' comprehension. There was minimal student involvement with books or print material, a prevalence of oral discourse, low levels of cognitive demand combined with a slow delivery pace, little individualised reading or writing and insufficient evaluation methods. More excellent curriculum covering at an acceptable pace; instructor adaptation to students' abilities; more substantial cognitive effort with an emphasis on reading and writing; and adequate evaluation were all connected with learning improvements. Makoni and Pennycook (2007) agreed with Makoe and McKinney (2014) when they said that language is perceived as pure and bounded. According to Probyn (2009), this influences teachers' often-guilty views regarding their use of code-switching in the classroom while also hindering them from putting their students' multilingual repertoires to good use in the school. According to Makalela (2015, 2016), good language attitudes among instructors create opportunities for innovative multilingual pedagogies that may be more relevant in South African classrooms. This is because teachers engage learners linguistically, emotionally and intellectually.

Language attitudes

Cooper and Fishman (1974) described language attitude as negative or positive feelings toward a specific language, as well as the behaviour of speakers of that language toward that language. Specific social events might influence individuals' attitudes about a particular language. Furthermore, particular generalisations held by language speakers may result in poor language demeanour (Giles, Hewstone & Ball 1983:82). This article aims to investigate views about isiBhaca held by language instructors (most of whom identify as amaBhaca) in Umzimkhulu schools.

However, 'language attitudes' is an umbrella word that incorporates a wide range of possible empirical research dealing with various specific attitudes. Baker (1992:29–30) defined the primary attitudes toward:

1. language variety, dialect and speech style
2. language acquisition
3. a specific minority language
4. linguistic groups, communities and minorities
5. parental attitudes concerning language instruction
6. specific language usage
7. attitude toward language preference.

Bangeni and Kapp (2007:6) called attention to the fact that it might be valuable to characterise a 'language disposition' as far as its referent. Commencing on a language mentality is a disposition with language as its referent. Bangeni and Kapp (2007:258) characterised 'language demeanour' as 'eligible on who talks what, when and how'. In investigating their definition, Zhang and Slaughter-Fefoe (2009:79) contended that it avoids mentalities important to sociolinguistics, for example, perspectives toward sorted out endeavours associated with language arranging, language support, or language move.

Similarly, Edwards (2009) defined 'language attitude' in terms of its effects: the inclination that drives language behaviour and behaviour regarding language. This definition, too, has flaws; Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) argued that it is overly broad, and once accepted, it is unclear how language viewpoints can be distinguished from other mindsets because almost any demeanour, under the right conditions, can influence language behaviour or conduct toward language.

The use of a dialect in the classroom

According to Tegegne (2015), the usage of nonstandard varieties has piqued the curiosity of many scholars throughout the world, particularly those concerned with learners' rights to education in their home language. However, it is worth noting that findings of such investigations differ. According to Jorgensen and Pedersen (1989), learners who speak dialects in Denmark are not at a disadvantage when compared to those who speak standard languages. Hagen (1989), on the other hand, found that in the Netherlands, learners who speak dialects were at a disadvantage compared to those who speak standard languages.

Spofana (2011) discovered that instructors employed dialectic vocabulary for education and learning reasons. Mtatse and Combinck (2018) employed multilevel modelling to examine the influence of dialects and code-switching on the literacy and numeracy outcomes of isiXhosa Grade 1 learners while controlling for other factors such as between-school variance, socioeconomic status, and gender. In their study, students responded in class with dialectic language and used dialectic terminology while completing classroom writing assignments. Maqam (2015) observed that Grade 8 learners were punished for using their native languages in submitting tests, although their teachers used nonstandard varieties in class. Teachers, parents and learners in Spofana's study also had negative sentiments about standardised isiXhosa, believing that imposing a standardised version on them was culturally and politically wrong.

Cekiso (2014:3) added that although some learners demonstrated a better understanding of reading and writing when using their mother tongue – isiXhosa, in this case (from Grades 1 to 3). There were, however, concerns that other learners found it challenging. Some words found and used in

the English language do not exist in isiXhosa in subjects such as Life Sciences and Physical Sciences.

In contrast, Adger, Wolfram and Christian (2007) held a different view that as much as several dialect speakers advocate for the accommodation of their nonstandard variety, there is always a negative connotation associated with nonstandard varieties. Learners who use nonstandard varieties are often ridiculed because they use a language of lower status, especially in cases where there are learners who speak official languages in such schools.

Gxilishe (1996) added that since the South African LiEP encourages multilingualism in schools, which is confined to officially recognised languages, this may be an indication that nonstandard varieties should be developed and used in the education space, particularly in lower grades, to introduce learners to the content. In a more general sense, Jahr (2014) defined both language and dialect as basic means for communication, different only through classification by the language policy of a country.

Translanguaging as a pedagogy

Williams (1996) proposed translanguaging pedagogy in Wales, which consisted of employing both English and Welsh as media of teaching interchangeably. Translanguaging, according to Hornberger and Link (2012), is the deliberate alternation of spoken and written languages and is a method used to improve bilingual learners' understanding in the classroom. Teachers at Umzimkhulu schools alternate between writing in isiXhosa and speaking in isiBhaca. Baker (2011), on the other hand, claimed that Cen Williams originated the term translanguaging in 1996, derived from the Welsh word *trawsieithu*. According to Baker (2011), translanguaging originally signified an educational approach in which the language of teaching by instructors and the language of reception by learners were purposely transformed.

To put it another way, the method entailed giving instruction in one language and having learners reply in another. Teachers in Umzimkhulu mainly teach in isiXhosa but occasionally transition to isiBhaca to assist learners in comprehending learning topics better, as well as because students react in isiBhaca. Baker (2011) characterised it as a process of making meaning, modelling experiences and collecting knowledge and information by employing two unique languages.

Translanguaging has its roots in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning (1978), according to Baker (2011), because it allows for the co-construction of knowledge through meaningful interaction. Translanguaging in the school setting is a learning experience in which the teacher allows a student to use both languages, but in an intended, neurodevelopmental and strategic manner, to maximise a student's linguistic and cognitive capability and to reflect that language is sociocultural in both content and process.

Research design

The qualitative research approach was used in this study to determine teachers' perspectives regarding the potential use of isiBhaca as a method of instruction in the Umzimkhulu education sector. Methods of qualitative research seek to comprehend human beings' social, linguistic and cultural characteristics (Alasuutari 2010; Flick 2004). Qualitative research describes participants' perceptions of phenomena by providing understanding and descriptions and situating information embedded in the local context (Kura 2012). The qualitative research approach was most relevant to the study's objectives to use qualitative research to accomplish the study objectives. The nature of quantitative research is to interpret natural phenomena by taking data from the natural setting and recording, transcribing, interpreting and describing them according to their meaning.

The sample population of the study

The research sample consisted of 22 participants who were chosen at random from six schools in Umzimkhulu that were deemed as being appropriate for the investigation. Umzimkhulu has approximately 50 schools, and the six were selected based on the distance between them, meaning that each school represented the region it belongs to. Teachers were chosen depending on the school's demographics. The school with the fewest teachers (10) was School B. The researcher interviewed two teachers from School B. School A, C, D, E and F had 12–16 teachers, and the researcher interviewed four teachers from each of the five schools. Most participants (79%) indicated that they were born and bred in Umzimkhulu and identified as amaBhaca. A minority stated that they came to Umzimkhulu for work purposes. They identify with isiZulu (14%) and isiXhosa (7%). In schools, the participants were Grade 1–3 teachers, particularly in primary schools. Purposive sampling, as defined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), is the act of identifying and choosing people or groups of persons who have specific knowledge or expertise with the topic of interest. Bernard (2002) underlined the necessity of being open, expressionistic, eager to contribute and able to articulate and reflectively transmit experience and ideas in addition to knowledge and experience.

Methods of data collection and analysis

The conversation or dialogue which involves an interviewee and participants is well known as interview responses (Forcece & Richer 1973:169; Summers 1995:746). The interviewer poses questions to participants to collect data on their ideas, beliefs, perspectives, opinions and behaviour. There are various methods for conducting interviews, including face-to-face, telephone and e-mail (Polit & Hungler 1991:647). In this paper, interviews were conducted face-to-face. In this study, open-ended questions were employed in the research interviews. Open-ended questions allow participants to express their thoughts without being swayed by the researcher (Foddy 1993:127). These can provide the researcher with insights that otherwise might be missed if

they were not asked (Jackson 1995:372). This study used semistructured interviews to get detailed information from teachers about their perspectives on the possible usage of isiBhaca in the classroom.

The researcher recited and elucidated the consent form before the participants could participate in the study. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, and Delpont (2011:65), every person who participates in a study should sign an informed consent form, which gives details about the research. A date for interviews was set with those who were available and interested in participating.

To analyse data, the researcher coded and categorised the acquired data. The selected participants were audio-recorded, and their responses were afterwards transcribed for data analysis purposes with their permission. Even though the participants teach in isiXhosa, the interviews were conducted in English, which all of them understood and accepted. The researcher carefully read the transcripts to acquire a general understanding of every response from the participants. Thematic analysis was used to generate the qualitative topics, which were then explored separately. Qualitative themes are defined as the perspectives repeatedly cited by nearly all, if not all, of the participants, such that the researcher believes that they answer the research question. Traditionally, one might argue that if the emergent qualitative themes were appropriately formed, they would also need to speak with the study's initiator (problem statement) and the study's findings.

Findings

Semistructured interviews, comprising seven questions, were conducted with 22 teachers. This was done to establish their positions regarding the extent to which isiBhaca could be recognised officially by the government and used for educational purposes as a MOI. Seven questions posed were on the basis of the following categories:

1. Category 1: Comparing isiBhaca against isiXhosa and isiZulu (Question 6)
2. Category 2: Recognition and development of isiBhaca (Questions 1, 4 and 5)
3. Category 3: The use of isiBhaca for educational purposes (Questions 2 and 3)
4. Category 4: Translanguaging between isiXhosa and isiBhaca. (Question 7).

The researcher asked the 22 teachers to provide answers to the following questions regarding their profiles:

1. sex
2. language teaching at school
3. language spoken with family members
4. language spoken with friends and colleagues.

Concerning language teaching at school, an overwhelming majority taught isiXhosa (100%), but none of them taught isiZulu as they indicated that it is not offered at their school.

Prior to the researcher interviewing the participants, he first asked them for information regarding their language use; the answers were as follows. Considering the use of languages, more teachers spoke isiBhaca with family members (18) compared to isiXhosa (2) and isiZulu (2). When it came to speaking with friends and colleagues, more spoke isiBhaca (18) compared to isiXhosa (2) and isiZulu (2).

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the 22 participants from the six schools were referred to as follows:

- MLE (male language educator from one of the schools – 12 participants).
- FLE (female language educator from one of the schools – 10 participants).

Category 1: Matching isiBhaca against isiXhosa and isiZulu

Interview Question 6: Would you support the idea that isiBhaca should replace isiXhosa and isiZulu at Umzimkhulu schools?

In response to question 6, a majority (15) of the participants indicated that in an event where isiBhaca is introduced for educational purposes in Umzimkhulu schools, it should replace isiXhosa. The remaining seven participants mentioned that if isiBhaca can be taught in Umzimkhulu schools, it should not replace isiXhosa.

Eight participants said it was a good idea that isiBhaca should be developed and replace isiXhosa and isiZulu in teaching and learning in Umzimkhulu schools.

Direct quote from MLE-2:

‘Yes, I support the idea that it should replace isiXhosa or isiZulu, in Umzimkhulu and other areas where it [isiBhaca] is spoken. In this regard, learners will realise and understand their historical background as the Bhaca people, because amaBhaca do not know their history because their language is not catered for, especially in the education sector.’

Seven participants felt that, indeed, isiBhaca should replace isiXhosa and isiZulu in Umzimkhulu because, besides the fact that teachers in Umzimkhulu learnt isiXhosa and isiZulu, they do not understand it to the extent of teaching it either as a home language or using it as a MOI in the lower grades. For example, their accent is not like that of amaXhosa but is more like that of isiBhaca speakers.

Direct quote from FLE-5: ‘I think it should replace isiXhosa and isiZulu, especially in Umzimkhulu, because as teachers, we have no deep understanding of isiXhosa and isiZulu’.

Five participants pointed out that they do not support the idea that isiBhaca should replace isiXhosa or isiZulu because both these languages (isiXhosa and isiZulu) are official and are already entrenched; much work would still be needed to be done in order to get isiBhaca to that level.

Direct quote from MLE-6:

‘IsiXhosa and isiZulu have become as entrenched as languages, and forced gravitation towards isiBhaca could be resisted by the people. While people should be the ones who determine which language should be official, I feel that the status quo in Umzimkhulu schools should remain.’

Two participants felt that although isiBhaca could be recognised or developed, it should not replace isiXhosa or isiZulu but should be a third option for learners to choose from.

Direct quote from MLE-9: ‘IsiBhaca should be developed as a language, but learners should be given a chance to choose which language is suitable for them, isiBhaca, isiXhosa or isiZulu’.

Category 2: Recognising and developing isiBhaca

Interview Question 1: How would you propose that isiBhaca be developed for learning and teaching in Umzimkhulu and other areas where this variety is used?

In response to question 1, a majority (15) of the participants indicated that isiBhaca could be developed over time, which means that it may be developed step by step, starting from Grades 1 to 3 and then afterwards in upper grades until tertiary. A minority (7) of participants indicated that the development of isiBhaca should be limited to Grades 1 to 3.

Fifteen participants indicated that isiBhaca should be developed until it is taught in all lower grades, for example, from Grade 1 to 3, until learners and teachers adapt to the use thereof, and then later be taught from Grade 4 right up until tertiary education level. They believe that it is the language of the people of Umzimkhulu; therefore, they deserve to be given a chance to be taught in their mother tongue instead of other people’s languages.

Direct quote from MLE-1:

‘An isiBhaca-speaking population dominates in Umzimkhulu, and I believe isiBhaca could be developed for teaching and learning purposes in Umzimkhulu schools. IsiBhaca could also be developed to promote and revive the history of the Bhaca people.’

Seven participants felt that isiBhaca could be developed in Umzimkhulu for teaching and learning purposes, but only to a certain extent.

Direct quote from FLE-1:

‘I think isiBhaca could be developed for teaching and learning purposes in Umzimkhulu, but it might cost the government a lot of money and people who are already used to isiXhosa might not have an interest.’

Interview Question 4: Should isiBhaca be developed for use in education, up to which level (viz., primary, high or tertiary) do you think it should be studied?

In response to question 4, a majority (15) of the participants supported that isiBhaca should be developed as a language adequate for use in education. However, they had different views on the level at which it should develop. Six indicated that isiBhaca should be developed from Grade 1 up until tertiary education level. Five participants indicated that it should be developed only between Grades 1 and 4, while the last group felt that isiBhaca should be developed from Grades 1 to 3. In their argument, one of the participants mentioned that since MOI in a mother tongue is only permissible between Grades 1 to 3, they did not see the need to develop it for grades above that since it will not matter.

A minority (seven) of the participants indicated that isiBhaca could not and should not be developed because learners and teachers are already used to isiXhosa. Others in this group felt that it was not feasible to develop isiBhaca due to the lack of budget from the side of the government.

Five participants outlined that isiBhaca could be developed from Grades 1 to 4 at first until such time that people have a proper understanding of it and are comfortable with the language. Then it can be used for studying purposes from primary school up to tertiary education level.

Direct quote from MLE-3:

'If isiBhaca can ever be taught at Umzimkhulu in the education sector, I can suggest that at least it must start from Grades 1 to 3 until everyone understands it, and then later extended to upper levels until tertiary education level.'

Six participants pointed out that the idea of developing isiBhaca would be very crucial and necessary at all levels. However, it should be developed gradually in that it will enable the learners to understand isiBhaca at an early age and also be able to use it in their education and also see it as a relevant language even though not given official status.

Direct quote from MLE-1:

'I support the idea of having isiBhaca developed for teaching purposes, as it will assist our children to know that it is a language like others and not think that it is a useless language, our children must learn isiBhaca from grade 1 up until matric, but this needs to be done one step at a time.'

Seven participants said that they do not feel that it would be feasible to have isiBhaca developed because of the lack of material, and it would be costly because the first step would be to train people who are going to teach the language.

Direct quote from FLE-3:

'I do not think it will be possible considering the amount of work and money that this process will need, starting from training teachers, making textbooks and any material, isiBhaca is not the only priority now so that the government could use that money for other useful things.'

Four participants pointed out that isiBhaca is as serious as other languages but would not help the learners because

isiBhaca is somehow closer to isiZulu, and them giving it special attention will just make them be occupied with something that will not greatly assist them, so it could only be used at Grades 1 to 3 as a MOI.

Direct quote from MLE-5:

'Although I love isiBhaca and think the learners should know it, I do not think teachers in grades above three will assist because there is not much to be taught in any case, and they can always learn isiBhaca at home; as it is mostly used in most of their homes.'

Interview Question 5: How open are you to this idea that isiBhaca be recognised as a language in its own right and be given official status, at least in KwaZulu-Natal and/or the Eastern Cape, in education?

In response to question 5, eight participants indicated that they support the idea that isiBhaca be recognised as an official language in South Africa. Furthermore, they indicated that isiBhaca should co-exist with isiZulu and isiXhosa in education to allow flexibility in teaching and learning. Another six participants indicated that isiBhaca also supported the idea that isiBhaca be officially recognised. They further indicated that it should replace isiXhosa in education. The remaining eight were against the idea that isiBhaca be officially recognised due to budgetary constraints from the government's side.

Eight participants felt that it would benefit learners if isiBhaca could be given official status in areas where it is spoken, like Umzimkhulu. Thus, it should replace isiXhosa and isiZulu in teaching and learning because a significant number of people in areas like Umzimkhulu speak isiBhaca as a home language.

Direct quote from FLE-8:

'I am 100% positive that if isiBhaca could be given official status, learners and teachers would like it and get to know it more. IsiBhaca also represents the culture of the people of Umzimkhulu, so they need to have it officialised because when they use isiXhosa or isiZulu, they might lose their culture.'

Six participants stated that isiBhaca should replace isiXhosa and isiZulu in Umzimkhulu on the basis that people of Umzimkhulu do not understand isiXhosa and isiZulu, and neither are they Xhosa or Zulu people; they are forced to belong to one of the two because of isiBhaca is not an official language.

Direct quote from FLE-3:

'It should be recognised as a language on its own because as isiBhaca-speaking people we are not happy when we fill forms and have to write that our HL is isiXhosa or isiZulu because our own language is not recognised as an official language. I would be proud and happy to write isiBhaca because it represents us as the Bhaca people.'

Five participants said they did not think that isiBhaca should be made official and neither should it replace isiXhosa or

isiZulu because not many people speak this language, and it would cost the government much money to develop it.

Direct quote from MLE-4:

'If it happens that isiBhaca is recognised officially, it would be very expensive for the DBE because everything will be new, starting from textbooks and other study material, yet we all know that government always complains about the lack of funding in the country.'

Three participants said that due to the fact that Umzimkhulu and other areas where isiBhaca is spoken are small towns, it would be useless to either develop or give amaBhaca any official status.

Direct quote from MLE-7:

'If one looks at the statistics, the number of people who speak isiXhosa in the Eastern Cape and those who speak isiZulu in KwaZulu-Natal, you will notice that isiBhaca-speaking people are very few. Therefore, it would not be possible for isiBhaca to be made official.'

Category 3: Using isiBhaca for educational purposes

Interview Question 2: Do you think the development of isiBhaca would significantly improve learners' performance in Umzimkhulu?

In response to question 2, an overwhelming majority of 15 participants indicated that they believed learners' performance would drastically improve if isiBhaca was developed as a language for teaching and learning in Umzimkhulu. Their reasoning was that learners were not so familiar with isiXhosa. Furthermore, learners of Umzimkhulu use isiBhaca with friends and family. The remaining seven indicated that they do not think the introduction of isiBhaca would improve learners' performance, mainly because their knowledge in isiXhosa does improve significantly over time.

Fifteen participants stated that if the government availed resources to develop isiBhaca for teaching and learning in Umzimkhulu schools, learners' performance would significantly improve because isiBhaca is the language they understand instead of isiXhosa and isiZulu.

Direct quote from MLE-8:

'Yes I think that developing isiBhaca and using it for teaching and learning in Umzimkhulu schools could certainly improve the performance of learners because isiBhaca is the only language they know and understand better.'

Seven participants noted that even if the government availed funding for the development of isiBhaca for teaching and learning in Umzimkhulu, it is impossible to use it either as a MOI in lower grades (1–3) or have it substitute isiXhosa or isiZulu in any school in Umzimkhulu because of the lack of existing formal books or material in isiBhaca language.

Furthermore, even those who claim to be Bhaca-speaking are also not fluent in isiBhaca but have shifted towards speaking and understanding more of isiXhosa and isiZulu. The results or performance of learners would not necessarily improve because of the shortage of written and formal information in isiBhaca.

Direct quote from MLE-2:

'I do not think that the development of isiBhaca can improve the performance of learners because isiBhaca is not spoken by many people in the Umzimkhulu area, even those who speak isiBhaca do not speak the proper isiBhaca.'

Interview Question 3: If isiBhaca was to be recognised and used formally in education, what challenges do you think might learners face using the language at school?

In response to question 3, 16 participants indicated that they do not think that the magnitude of the challenges associated with the recognition of isiBhaca would be manageable, since learners already use isiBhaca at home and with friends. A minority (seven) of the participants indicated that there would be significant challenges if isiBhaca was to be recognised, especially because new books would have to be written and published, and new people would have to be trained.

Sixteen participants felt that although there might be a few challenges in the introduction of isiBhaca in teaching and learning in Umzimkhulu schools, having this language taught in the area would make people around Umzimkhulu happy and feel accepted as the isiBhaca people.

Direct quote from FLE-1: 'There is no challenge we can face if we have the support from both government and learners, and secondly because isiBhaca is our mother tongue as people of Umzimkhulu'.

Six participants outlined that the development of isiBhaca for teaching and learning in Umzimkhulu schools would come with several challenges, namely not having enough references and material (books, dictionaries) of isiBhaca, and secondly, most people who understand isiBhaca now are significantly older people, and the young ones do not understand isiBhaca very well.

Direct quote from FLE-7: 'I think the challenge can be teaching proper isiBhaca, because both teachers and learners do not really understand proper isiBhaca (isiBhaca that is influenced by isiXhosa)'.

Category 4: Translanguaging between isiBhaca and isiXhosa

Interview Question 7: How do you deal with a situation where learners do not understand isiXhosa words or examples?

In response to question 7, a majority (18) of the participants indicated that because of knowing the nature of learners they have (being amaBhaca), the teachers use both isiXhosa and

isiBhaca in the classroom. They do this particularly when explaining complex terms in isiXhosa. The remaining four participants indicated that they only use translanguaging as a pedagogy when learners face problems, and they further indicated that at times they find it challenging to explain terms in isiBhaca because some of them are not native speakers. They further indicated that this helps them to slowly introduce learners to isiXhosa, by using isiBhaca to explain some isiXhosa terms.

Nine participants said that the strategy they used was translanguaging to overcome language barriers in the isiXhosa classroom.

Direct quote from MLE-5:

'It is true that our learners mostly struggle with the conceptualisation of isiXhosa concepts since they were hardly exposed to it before coming to schools. That is why as a teacher, one of the strategies I use is so from time to time switch between isiXhosa and isiBhaca to help learners understand the content better.'

Five participants felt that translanguaging was the only way to go, mainly because, as teachers, they also find it much easier to communicate in isiBhaca than isiXhosa, mainly regarding the accent of isiXhosa. Therefore, translanguaging becomes their way out.

Direct quote from FLE-3:

'Although I have studied isiXhosa, I do not speak it the same way as isiXhosa speakers, which is why I find it easy to explain isiXhosa difficult terms using isiBhaca to learners. I also use both isiXhosa and isiBhaca in the classroom with the intention to help learners not to find it difficult to transition from isiBhaca, which they speak at home, to isiXhosa, which is used at school.'

Four participants indicated that they do not ordinarily use both isiXhosa and isiBhaca when teaching unless learners struggle with the conceptualisation of isiXhosa terms. Teachers in this group also mentioned that even though as teachers they do not always use isiBhaca, they encourage learners to use isiBhaca in case they cannot express themselves in isiXhosa.

Direct quote from FLE-3:

'I also struggle with isiBhaca, because I am an isiXhosa native speaker. So it becomes a problem when learners do not understand isiXhosa. I, however, try to use isiBhaca here and there to help them to understand difficult isiXhosa concepts. So in most cases, I allow learners to give responses in isiBhaca, which helps me understand them better.'

Discussion of findings

Category 1: Matching isiBhaca against isiXhosa and isiZulu

With regards to category 1, the response to interview question 6 shows that interviewees acknowledged that isiBhaca is mutually intelligible to isiXhosa and isiZulu. However, the

former needed to be developed further in its own right with a view to use it for educational purposes.

This study's findings also demonstrated that isiBhaca was exclusively employed in traditional or colloquial settings. In a similar study, Appel and Muysken (1987:20) observed that nonstandard varieties could, to a certain extent, be valued in the broader social context of society. They further give an example of the isiXhosa context, which has variants associated with particular cultural activities, such as the Pondo variant word *indlamu* [Pondo tribal dance] and the isiBhaca variant word *ukufukutha* [eating uncooked meat]. This shows that even though such variants are not allowed for use in education, they have significant cultural importance. As noted earlier, the introduction of isiBhaca for official use will boost the self-esteem of Umzimkhulu learners. This is because their language will be known, and they will not be associated with other languages, as this might give room for other people to assume that since they use isiXhosa, for instance, then their culture is also associated with isiXhosa, which therefore can mean isiBhaca is on its way to extinction.

The notion is pertinent that isiBhaca should be awarded official status and, as a result, replace isiXhosa or isiZulu as a MOI because it differs from these two languages in many ways. For example, Louw and Jubase (1963) and Jordan (1942) agreed that isiBhaca is a *Tekeza* dialect which is closely related to Swati and Ntlwangwini. IsiBhaca has /t/ where isiXhosa has /z/ so that *ukuzazi* is heard as *ukutati* 'to know oneself'. This phonological difference still exists, as evidenced by the form *abafati*, 'women' (standard *abafazi*). This is also the case with *ukutshefula* (Jordan 1942). This is based on the teachers in uMzimkhulu schools' responses to the interviews, which showed that they find it challenging to use isiXhosa as a MOI. However, most teachers also indicated that they are faced with a situation of having learnt isiXhosa as a mother tongue despite them speaking isiBhaca at home and with friends. This therefore makes isiXhosa a language they only use in formal environments.

On the contrary, in a study conducted by Nomlomo (1993) [1.28] before South Africa became a democratic state, the author found that teachers showed less interest in using varieties of lower status, as this was part of the reason variants are not taken seriously. Although this was during the Bantustan, these findings concur that only the use of a standard variety uplifts one's status in society.

Category 2: Recognising and developing isiBhaca

As far as category 2 is concerned, interview questions 1, 4 and 5 show that the majority of interviewees believed that isiBhaca should be given official recognition, at least in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, where it has L1 speakers. This recognition should then translate into isiBhaca being developed and gradually introduced at lower grades at schools to replace isiXhosa and isiZulu, then build it up to higher grades and eventually the tertiary education level.

The rights of diverse nonstandard language speakers and equitable educational opportunities for them have long been a social and intellectual concern in numerous regions of the world (Jorgensen & Pedersen 1989). Many scholars have focused on the influence of dialectal variables on student learning and accomplishment. Tegegne (2015) contended that linguistic variants play a significant role in educational contexts. Furthermore, the development of a language needs to start at the lower stages and gradually move towards the higher grades, especially in education.

Category 3: Using isiBhaca for educational purposes

Looking at category 3, the majority of interviewees believed that if teaching and learning were to be conducted in isiBhaca, not only would such a move appease its L1 speakers, but learners' performance would improve as they would be receiving education in a language they understand best.

The findings of this study indicate that using isiBhaca as a MOI is likely to benefit students at UMzimkhulu Schools. This is based on evidence that learners comprehend isiBhaca better than the two standard languages with which it has intelligibility (isiXhosa and isiZulu), implying that they do not appreciate being taught in isiXhosa as it is. This finding is supported by the theoretical framework (sociocultural theory) of this study which points out that based on a UNESCO (2003) study, the issue of mother tongue is intertwined with the community and the values supporting the learner's idea of the world. One of the advantages of a mother tongue in education is the facilitation of a smooth and nontraumatic transition from home to school, allowing learning to take place in an atmosphere that is linguistically familiar to the learner. Gxilishe (1996) asserts that learners face trauma when arriving at school only to be taught in a foreign language when they only went to school for educational purposes. This is likely to impact the learners' lives negatively and shift them from their culture and community, let alone educational progress (Gxilishe 1996:18).

Category 4: Translanguaging between isiBhaca and isiXhosa

As far as category 4 is concerned, interview question 7 shows that most interviewees use translanguaging as a pedagogy to overcome the language barrier of learners not fully understanding isiXhosa. Even though the teachers' reactions show that they have various opinions on the use of isiXhosa and isiBhaca in the classroom, they all agreed that learners struggle with the conceptualisation of some concepts in isiXhosa and that there was a need to use isiBhaca to help learners understand better.

As already stated by Baker (2011) in the literature of this article, translanguaging is the purposeful mixture of the language of the learner and the teacher in order to ensure the successful reception of the message in the classroom. This is a good approach by teachers because at the centre of their

teaching is not just the learners' understanding of content but also learners' ability to recite the content they were taught. Translanguaging, according to Baker (2011), is essential in bilingual or multilingual classrooms because it assists learners in making meaning, modelling experiences and gathering knowledge and information. Therefore, translanguaging, as articulated by Baker (2011), complements Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical framework, which allows for the co-construction of knowledge through meaningful interaction.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' attitudes towards the use of isiBhaca in Umzimkhulu schools and to investigate the impact of using isiBhaca as a MOI in Umzimkhulu schools, particularly in lower grades (1–3).

The adoption of isiBhaca, especially in teaching and learning, would be beneficial to both learners and teachers because the use of this language would increase its speakers' connection to their daily lives and their social and sociolinguistic experiences. Although the development of isiBhaca would not be an easy exercise, it would be a worthwhile exercise for government to invest in the language's development because research has shown that learners learn best when taught through languages they understand best. At the same time, isiXhosa and isiZulu are closely related to isiBhaca. They remain second languages to isiBhaca L1-speaking learners.

L1 speakers of isiXhosa and isiZulu who resided in Umzimkhulu might not favourably receive the development of isiBhaca. From their perspective, the inclusion of isiBhaca in education might complicate matters for learners, as it would increase the number of language choices from two to three (viz., isiXhosa, isiZulu and isiBhaca).

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Competing interests

The author has declared that no competing interest exists.

Author's contribution

Y.L.P.M. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

Participants in this study were asked to sign a permission form before being interviewed by the researcher, who advised that the interview may last up to 30 min. The study was approved by the Tshwane University of Technology (ref. no. FCRE/APL/STD/2016/03). This article came from the dissertation that was done by the author, Yanga L.P. Majola. The participants agreed verbally to take part in the study. No

contract bound them to the research. Because their involvement was optional, people might decide not to participate or quit at any time (including no payments).

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the Tshwane University of Technology Digital Open Repository.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author, and the publisher.

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