

What is bi/multilingual education?

Pamphlet 1

February
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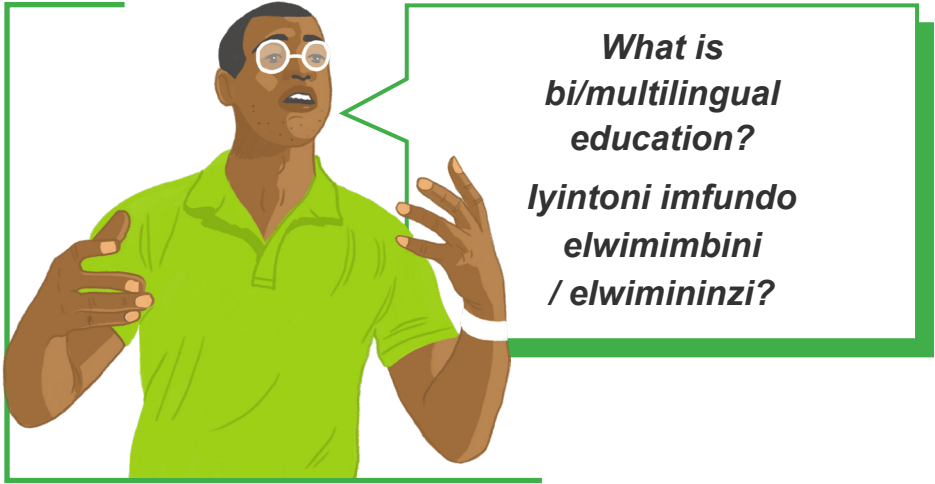
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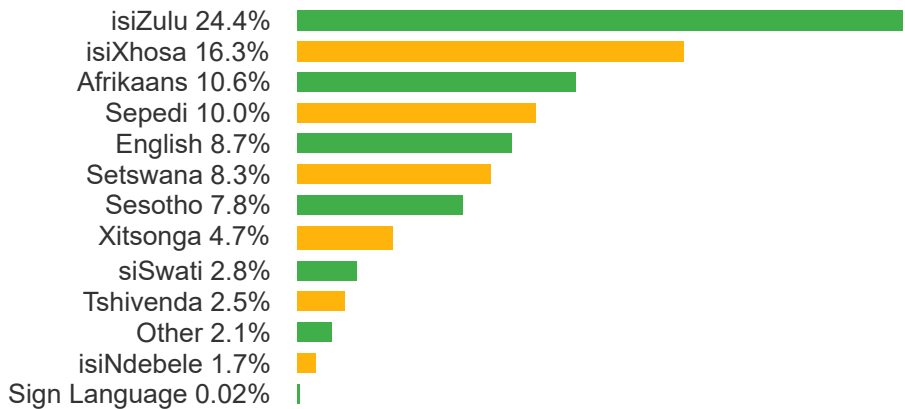


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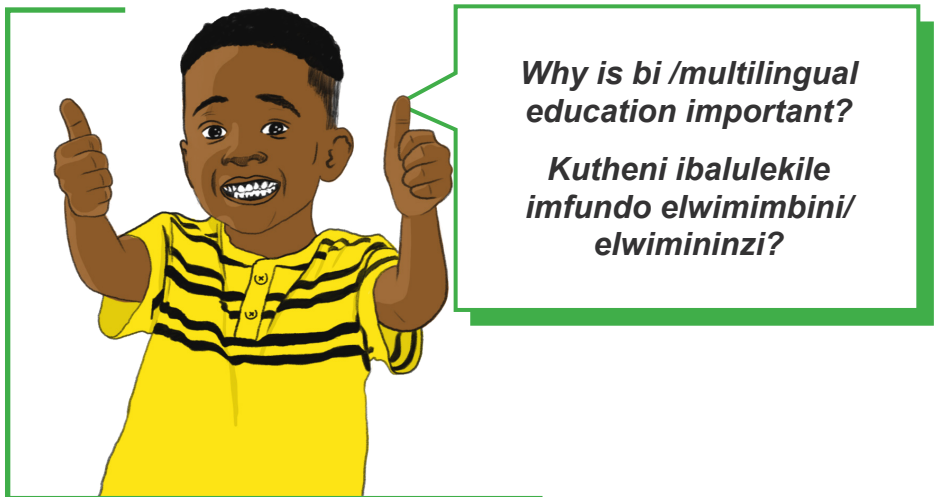


Bi/multilingual education involves the use of two or more languages of learning, teaching and assessment (LOLTA). Bi/multilingual education is mandated by the South African Language in Education Policy (1997) which encourages schools to use more than one LOLTA. The goal of bi/multilingual education is for children to become highly proficient in more than one language. There are different forms of this type of education. Sometimes it is called 'bilingual education' and sometimes 'multilingual education'. We use 'bi/multilingual education' to show that more than one language can be used in the same school or classroom. Common principles for all forms of bi/multilingual education are:

- **Resource orientation:** The languages and varieties of language that children bring to the classroom are an important resource for learning and not a problem.
- **Inclusion and diversity:** Teachers will value and include all languages and varieties.
- **Flexibility:** Teachers will adapt forms of bi/multilingual education to their specific context.

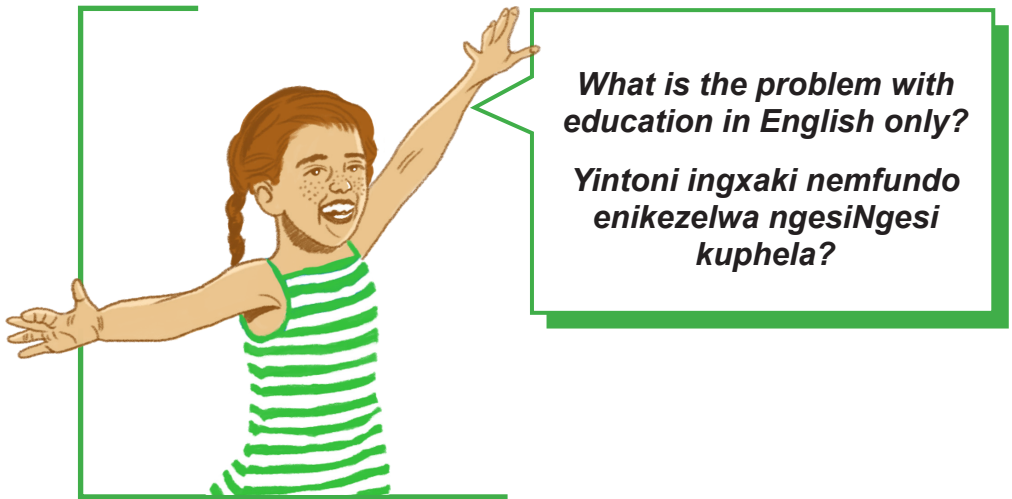


Percentages of home languages spoken in South Africa (Census 2022).



Research tells us that children learn best through the languages they know best. For the majority of South African children, these are African languages. In South Africa, English is also an important language for economic opportunities and for wider communication. Bi/multilingual education enables children to learn through the languages they know best as well as develop proficiency in English.

For many years African languages have not been recognized as languages of learning, teaching and assessment. Bi/multilingual education will allow African languages to be used for knowledge sharing and creation of new knowledge. Children will get the message that they themselves are important because their languages are valued. Giving African languages high status in education will also increase their status in society more broadly.



By the time they reach Grade 4, many African language speaking children have not had enough opportunity to learn English. They are not prepared to learn all their subjects through the medium of English only. Children are silenced in their classrooms because they have to change from home language LOLTA to English LOLTA in Grade 4. They do not have a chance to show what they know, or to feel confident to participate actively in their learning. Excluding children's languages makes them feel unvalued. This is not something English and many Afrikaans speaking children have to struggle with.



What kinds of bi/multilingual education exist?

*Zeziphi iindidi ezikhoyo
zemfundo elwimimbini/
elwimininzi?*

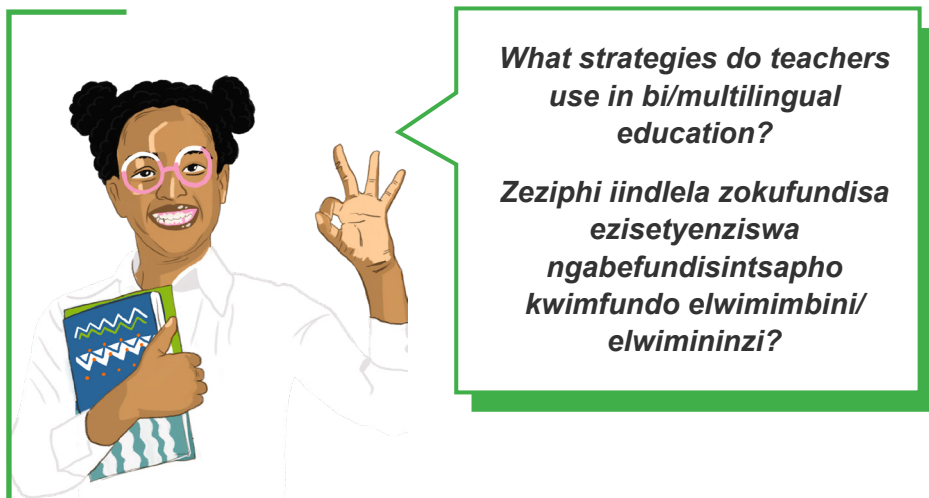
Bi/multilingual education exists all over the world. In Canada, French/English bilingual education is well established. In Wales, children learn in Welsh and English. In India, schools can choose from textbooks written in three dominant regional languages. South Africa also has a history of established bilingual education for Afrikaans and English speakers which still exists. But English and African language bilingual education has not been made available. Here are some examples of bi/multilingual education:

- **Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTBME) & Mother Tongue Based Bilingual Education (MTBBE)** : Use of child's most familiar language (mother tongue) as LOLTA in Foundation Phase and continuing to use the child's mother tongue as the LOLTA while adding another language (English) as a complementary LOLTA in the Intermediate Phase and beyond. This means content subjects such as mathematics, natural science and technology and social sciences are taught in more than one language.
- **Dual medium schools:** Two languages are used as LoLTAs in the same class. Teaching, learning materials and assessment are available in both languages. Children become equally proficient in the two languages. Examples are Afrikaans/English schools in South Africa and Welsh/English schools in the UK.

- **Parallel medium:** To accommodate children with different mother tongues, parallel classes use different LOLTAs eg. an Afrikaans stream; isiXhosa stream; English stream in the Foundation Phase.

Then similarly to MTBBE, two LOLTAs are used in each of the streams in the intermediate phase (e.g. English and Afrikaans; English and isiXhosa).

- **Flexible bi/multilingualism:** the class has children from a range of language backgrounds and the teacher may not be proficient in all children's languages. With the help of glossaries and peers, all the languages of the children are used in learning and teaching as far as possible.

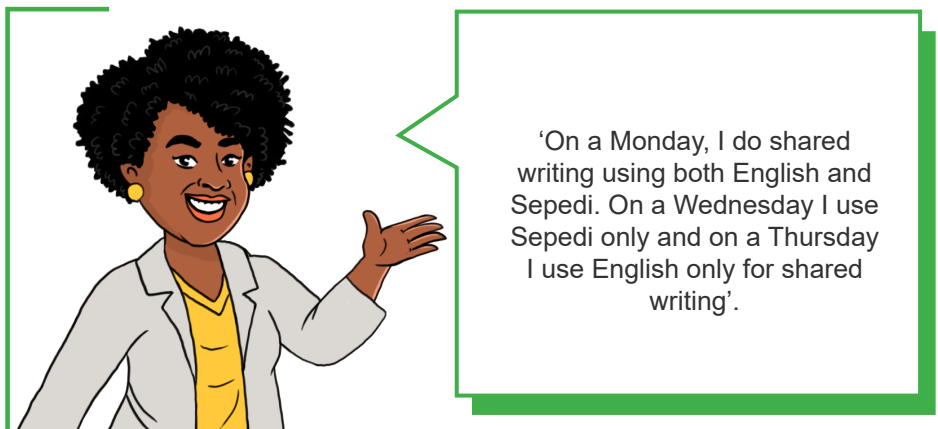


Teachers in bi/multilingual education use a variety of strategies when they bring different languages into their teaching. This has become known as translanguaging.

Translanguaging describes the use of the different languages and varieties that a multilingual person has to communicate. For multilingual speakers, translanguaging is normal. Sometimes teachers keep languages separate and sometimes they mix them. Many South African teachers have experience in explaining concepts by switching languages. We know this as **code-switching**. Sometimes they encourage translation and interpreting to different languages. In bi/multilingual education, teachers go beyond using multiple languages in

spoken form. These teachers and their learners use more than one language in writing, in materials development and in assessment. Here are some examples:

- Teachers and children use multilingual dictionaries.
- Teachers and children develop multilingual glossaries.
- Children translate an isiXhosa poem into English.
- Children summarise an English story in isiZulu.
- Teachers do shared writing in a mix of two or more languages and bilingual as well as monolingual writing exercises.
- Teachers provide test questions and instructions in two languages.
- Teachers allow children to answer tests in their choice of language.
- Teachers and children make multilingual word walls using different languages.
- Teachers have conversations with children about words in different languages.
- Children use bi/multilingual textbooks.
- Teachers and children use the same book in more than one language.
- Teachers allow children to speak in their most familiar languages, even mixing languages.



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