Reading & Writing - Journal of the Literacy Association of South Africa
ISSN: (Online) 2308-1422, (Print) 2079-8245

Developing multilingual literacy for Mozambican immigrant learners in Nsanje, Malawi: A braided river in the borderland multilingualism framework

Check for updates

Authors:
Ben de Souza[1]
Sisonke Mawonga[2]
Alipo Kaphwiyo[3]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Secondary and Post-School Education, Faculty of Education, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa

[2]Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Education, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa

[3]Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Catholic University of Malawi, Limbe, Malawi

Corresponding author:
Ben de Souza,
ben.souza@ru.ac.za

Dates:
Received: 12 Jan. 2026
Accepted: 10 July 2026
Published: 14 Aug. 2026

How to cite this article:
De Souza, B., Mawonga, S. & Kaphwiyo, A., 2026, 'Developing multilingual literacy for Mozambican immigrant learners in Nsanje, Malawi: A braided river in the borderland multilingualism framework', *Reading & Writing* 17(1), a637. https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v17i1.637

Copyright:
© 2026. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Read online:
Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Background: Border districts in southern Malawi experience recurrent cross-border displacement from Mozambique because of floods, cyclones and political instability. In Nsanje district, Mozambican immigrant learners enter schools with multilingual repertoires shaped by Sena and Portuguese, while Malawi's 2014 language-in-education policy mandates a monolingual (English) medium of instruction from Standard 1.

Objectives: The study examined how literacy for immigrant learners in Nsanje could be re-conceptualised to address the linguistic exclusion created by the monolingual language policy. It focused on a specific borderland context to explore the broader implications for multilingual literacy education in African settings affected by mobility.

Method: The study employed a qualitative conceptual design. It analysed literature on literacy, language policy, multilingualism, border studies, and inclusive education. A theoretical synthesis was undertaken to examine the relationship between linguistic realities, literacy practices, and language-in-education policy.

Results: The analysis indicated that monolingual policy assumptions undermine learners' multilingual meaning-making practices, thereby limiting access to reading and writing. A braided river metaphor was developed to conceptualise literacy as fluid and mobile. Furthermore, a borderland multilingualism framework was proposed to explain how learners can draw on linguistic resources across languages.

Conclusion: Literacy inclusion in borderland contexts requires pedagogical and policy approaches grounded in multilingualism, as literacy practices that embrace learners' full linguistic repertoires provide greater access to learning.

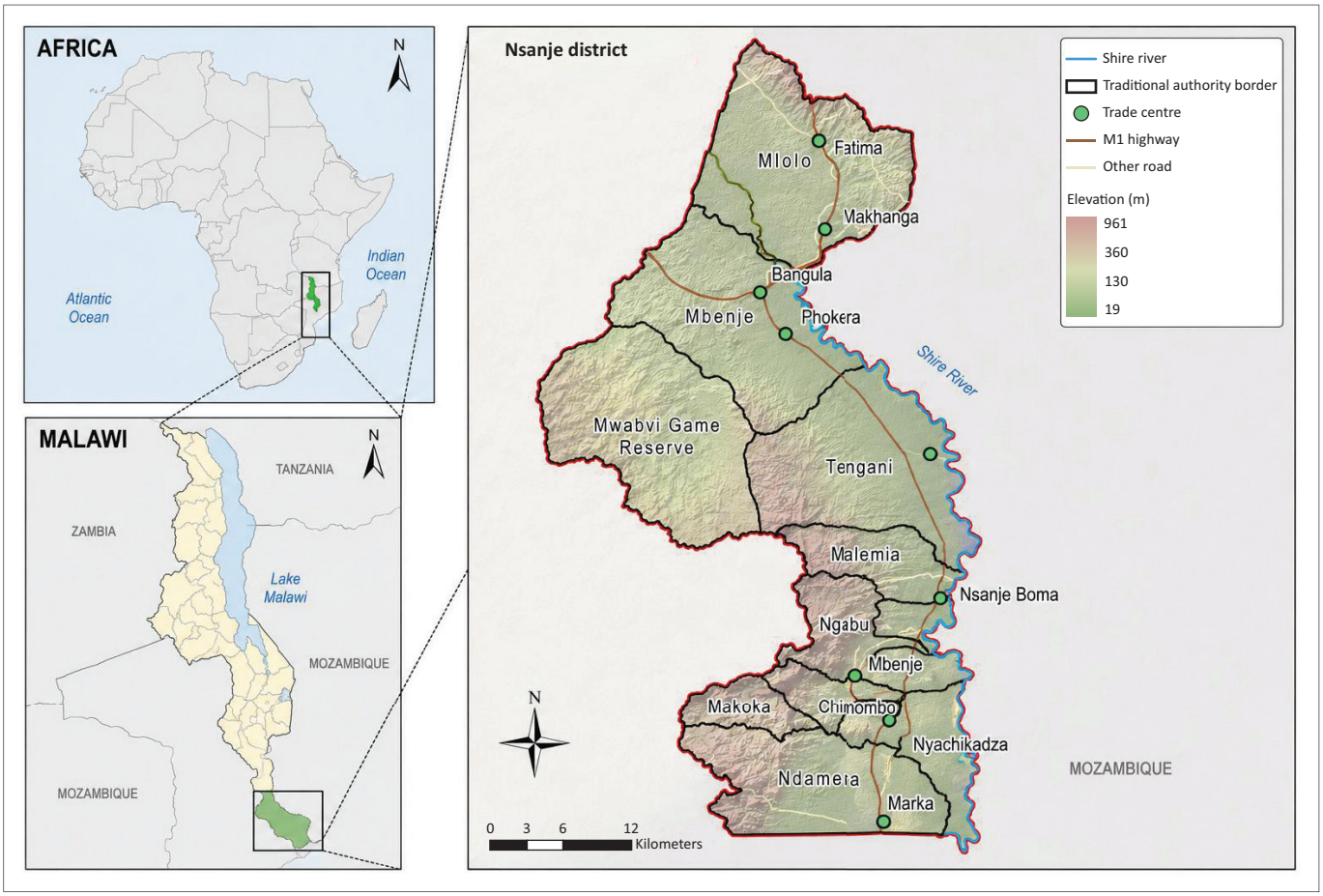
Contribution: The study contributes a metaphor and a theoretical perspective for understanding borderland literacies. It also advances multilingualism as a policy-relevant strategy for inclusive literacy education in African contexts characterised by displacement and linguistic diversity.

Keywords: borderland literacies; immigrant learners; language-in-education policy; multilingual inclusion; Mozambique; Nsanje.

Introduction

Southern Malawi's Nsanje District is located at the confluence of two forms of movement: human mobility and language circulation. Nsanje has long been a site of recurrent displacement and short-term migration. It attracts families fleeing both environmental disasters and episodic political instability across the border in Mozambique (Government of Malawi 2012). These movements are neither rare nor isolated events, but rather recurring patterns of displacement. Flood seasons, cyclones and election-related unrest repeatedly force Mozambican families into Malawian border communities, creating a lived geography of transience and return. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2025) documented waves of Mozambican arrivals into Nsanje during both cyclone-related crises and periods of election-related unrest. The UNHCR report highlighted the frequency of cross-border mobility and its implications for schooling. Figure 1 shows the location of Nsanje.

If Nsanje's geography pressures movement, its classrooms demand linguistic fixity. The dominant language-in-education regime in Malawi has historically favoured a narrow linguistic repertoire, principally Chichewa at lower levels and English from the upper primary grades onwards



Source: Adapted from World Atlas, 2026, *Maps of Malawi*, viewed 16 July 2026, from https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/malawi

FIGURE 1: Map of Malawi showing Nsanje district.

(Kayambazinthu 2004). This leaves little institutional space for the dozens of other languages spoken in the country or for the cross-border varieties that circulate in borderlands. Kaphwiyo and De Souza (2025:64) observed that, 'the Malawian case illustrates the complexity of language choice in multilingual societies'. Successive policy statements and reforms have shifted language roles with little provision for local multilingual ecologies, thereby producing a continued mismatch between policy design and classroom realities in linguistically distinctive contexts. In short, schools in border districts demand linguistic conformity, while communities live and learn across languages (Reilly 2019). This gap between de facto multilingual classroom interaction and monolingual requirements for reading and writing in English is not unique to Malawi; it has been documented empirically elsewhere in the region, notably in Limpopo Province, South Africa (Reeves et al. 2008).

These political and policy conditions intersect with a distinctive transnational linguistic ecology. The Sena language (referred to as Chisena in Malawi or Cisena in Mozambique) is widely spoken on both sides of the Malawi–Mozambique border and constitutes a core everyday repertoire in Nsanje and the adjacent Mozambican provinces of Tete, Sofala, Zambezia, and Manica. Equally, (Guissemo 2018) observed that:

> the reconstruction of postcolonial Mozambique was thus built around the Portuguese-ification of urban spaces, although these spaces were already inhabited by Mozambicans who were mostly not speakers of Portuguese, but rather were first language speakers of Bantu languages. (p. 10)

The resulting linguistic landscape comprises layered repertoires. Local Sena dialects, Portuguese-influenced forms and varying degrees of contact with national languages (and with English) circulate simultaneously in homes, marketplaces, and cross-border kinship networks. Guérois (2024) documented Sena's vitality in the Zambezi Valley and the presence of language-internal features alongside contact phenomena. Likewise, Guissemo (2018) observed pervasive Portuguese borrowing and nativisation in local languages. This gives rise to hybrid communicative practices that travel with people as they cross borders.

How, then, do reading and writing – school literacies that typically presuppose relatively stable and standardised language forms – function in such braided linguistic environments? Johnston (2025) reported that unitary or autonomous models of literacy have been widely rejected. Instead, socially situated literacy practices are preferred. In this regard, multilingualism in education has been particularly influential. It reconceptualises bilingual and

multilingual learners' practices as dynamic, repertoire-based forms of meaning-making. Van der Walt (2013) referred to this situation as dynamic bilingualism, in which learners and teachers draw on different linguistic repertoires to facilitate learning.

Research on multilingualism demonstrates the pedagogical value of drawing on learners' full communicative repertoires to scaffold comprehension, composition, and critical thinking. One influential example is Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBME). This approach focuses on developing learners' primary language, or the language predominantly spoken in the community (eds. Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas 2010), before introducing English as the language of instruction while continuing to draw on learners' linguistic repertoires throughout the process. However, much of the research on MTBME originated in the South African context, where the late Neville Alexander initially proposed it as MTBBE (Alexander 2003, 2009). The concept emerged in response to the complex geolinguistic and political realities of the South African schooling system. Since then, the approach has been researched and implemented across various sectors of South African education to challenge linguistic dominance and revalue learners' primary languages (Heugh 2021).

Much multilingualism research and theorisation has also been conducted in urban or linguistically diverse school settings across the Global North and the urban Global South (Gobodwana 2023; Lepheana 2021). Comparatively little theoretical work has focused on borderland contexts where displacement, emergency response, and transnational repertoires interact in ways that make reading and writing part of mobility and survival. This article argues that Nsanje's reality exposes a fundamental problem: languages cross borders, but policies do not. To theorise and respond to this mismatch, we propose a conceptual pairing: the metaphor of the 'braided river' and a theoretical framework that we term the borderland multilingualism framework (BMF). The article pursues two objectives. First, it synthesises evidence to characterise the linguistic and institutional mismatch shaping immigrant learners' literacy opportunities. Second, it elaborates on the implications of the BMF for pedagogy and policy. The article reframes reading and writing through a borderland perspective, thereby contributing a theoretically grounded and practically oriented account that speaks to inclusivity, multilingual policy reform and literacy interventions in African border zones.

Literature review

Borderland mobility, linguistic ecologies, and education

In response to cyclones, flooding, and political insecurity following the 2024 Mozambican general election, tens of thousands of Mozambicans fled across the border into Malawi, particularly into the Nsanje and Dedza districts (Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Malawi [EU] 2026). Emergency responses included humanitarian assistance supported by the EU. This situation illustrates the scale and urgency of the displacement experienced by local communities and schools. The linguistic impact of these movements is equally evident. Mozambique is itself a highly multilingual society with more than 40 languages, including Sena, which is spoken in the areas affected by extreme weather events and displacement, alongside Portuguese (Translators without Borders 2019). Moreover, cross-border linguistic continuity is sustained through Sena varieties spoken on both sides of the Malawi–Mozambique border. For example, a Sena-Portuguese-speaking immigrant entering Nsanje would immediately be understood by local speakers when asking to borrow a dish: *palato* in Sena and *prato* in Portuguese. Miscommunication would arise only if Chichewa, Malawi's national language, were the sole language of interaction, as dish translates as *mbale*, a word that bears no phonetic resemblance to either Sena or Portuguese. Similarly, an immigrant would be understood when asking for *batata* (Portuguese), *bambaya* (Sena), or *mbatata* (Chichewa), but not potato (English). These examples illustrate the transnational nature of everyday linguistic repertoires.

Borderland scholars across Africa (e.g. Ndhlovu 2013a, 2013b; Ndhlovu & Masuku 2025) have documented precisely this kind of linguistic dynamism, in which cross-border languages and communicative practices do not conform to political boundaries. These scholars challenge the assumptions underpinning national language policies that view languages as fixed and bounded entities. This has direct implications for literacy, as literacy practices, including reading and writing, are shaped not by a single language code but by repertoires that continually flow and reconfigure through mobility, community ties, and crisis contexts (Abdi 2025). The educational value of such languages and practices has long been recognised at the continental level. Obanya (1999, cited in Alidou et al. 2006) identified 16 shared languages spanning 34 African countries and spoken by well over 140 million people, figures that have undoubtedly grown since then. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) designates these as inter-African languages: languages that predate colonial borders and constitute important resources for education and regional communication, even though they are routinely excluded from what officially counts as languages of wider communication. Sena belongs to this category. Spoken on both sides of the Malawi–Mozambique border, it functions as the shared language of everyday borderland life in Nsanje yet holds no recognised place in the educational systems of either country. This exclusion mirrors, at a local level, the broader continental pattern documented by scholars.

Most language policies in multilingual African contexts remain heavily influenced by Western models, with policy approaches largely borrowed from the Global North (Aroge & Makalela 2024; Ndhlovu 2013b). This orientation overlooks local realities and contributes to tensions between policy and practice, thereby undermining effective implementation

because of the disconnect between policy frameworks and the actual conditions within schools. Reilly, ResCue and Chavula (2022) argued that such policies reflect a monoglossic view of language because they view languages as distinct and separable instead of recognising the fluid multilingual repertoires that learners bring into classrooms. Importantly, Reilly et al. (2022:83) found that 'in direct contrast to the monolingual English-only policy, the language practices which were observed in the primary schools in the Mangochi and Nsanje districts were highly multilingual'.

Malawi's language-in-education policy has historically been unstable, reflecting both political reforms and contested debates over national identity and educational access. Mchazime (2001) and Kayambazinthu (2004) traced this history, showing that early post-independence policies recognised English and Chichewa as the official and national languages, respectively. This left limited functional space for other local languages in formal education, even though at least a dozen local languages were actively spoken (Chimpololo 2010). During the mid-1990s, with the advent of multiparty democracy, policy shifted to allow the use of local languages in education. The intention was to align classroom instruction with learners' home languages. However, inadequate preparation, learning materials, and implementation support undermined this policy. As a result, the education system continued to oscillate between competing objectives: promoting national languages while responding to the realities of a multilingual population (Chimpololo 2010). In 2014, Lucius Kanyumba, the then Minister of Education, announced at a press briefing that Malawi's language-in-education policy had changed and that English would become the language of instruction from Standard 1 (Kaphwiyo & De Souza 2025). For this reason, the current verbal policy is mockingly known as 'Kanyumba English-Only Policy'.

There was little evidence of systematic language planning. Language planning is essential for fostering social cohesion, inclusivity, and educational equity. It encompasses deliberate efforts by governments to influence the status, structure, and acquisition of languages in response to broader social needs (Cooper 1989). Even when multiple indigenous languages were promoted alongside Chichewa and English, policy intentions did not translate into effective classroom practice, largely because of resource constraints, limited teacher preparation and inadequate curricular support for multilingual instruction (Chiuye & Moyo 2008). Instead, Chichewa continued to serve as the primary medium of instruction in the early years of primary education, with English assuming dominance from Standard 5 onwards. A similar disjuncture has been documented south of the border. In their evaluation of literacy teaching in primary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa, Reeves et al. (2008) found that although classroom discourse was de facto multilingual, with teachers routinely code-switching, learners were required to read, write, and be assessed monolingually in English from Grade 4. This gap between multilingual practice and monolingual literacy demands closely parallels the Malawian situation described in this article.

Studies have shown that learners, particularly in multilingual contexts, are seldom linguistically prepared for the abrupt shift from Chichewa to English as the language of instruction. Moreover, promoting a single national language within policy is problematic because it marginalises other languages. This concern was anticipated in the continental policy literature. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the UNESCO Institute for Education advocacy brief, which synthesised evidence from a 25-country review, recommended that African education systems promote mother-tongue-based multilingualism while cautioning that 'colonial monolingualism is not replaced with African monolingualism' (Ouane & Glanz 2010:6). Malawi's elevation of Chichewa illustrates precisely this concern: a policy presented as a decolonial affirmation of an African language reproduces, for Sena-speaking borderland learners, the same exclusionary logic it claims to replace, namely instruction through a language that is not their own, rendering their actual linguistic repertoires invisible. Ouane and Glanz (2010) therefore argued for a gradual and all-inclusive approach to language choice in education instead of the *either-or* logic that positions one language against another. Earlier, Mchazime (2001) similarly argued that this mismatch limits meaningful participation, depresses achievement in Social Studies and other content areas, and encourages teacher-centred instruction while constraining learners' active engagement.

Learners must attain certain proficiency thresholds in both their primary language and the language of instruction for bilingualism to be effective, particularly in terms of cognitive development. Heugh's (2006) typology of language education models in Africa makes the structural problem clear. Malawi's longstanding arrangement, in which Chichewa served as the medium of instruction until Standard 4 before English assumed that role, represents a transitional model that withdraws learners' familiar language after only 4 years. This falls well short of the minimum of 6 years of mother-tongue instruction that continental evidence indicates is necessary, and even further short of the 6 years to 8 years generally required for learners to develop sufficient proficiency in a second language to learn successfully through it. According to the continental stock-taking study, such weal bilingual models leave learners with inadequate proficiency in the international language by the end of schooling, resulting in poor performance across the curriculum. The 2014 directive did not address this weakness; instead, it intensified it by shifting Malawi from a transitional model to a subtractive, straight-for-English model, the configuration associated with the poorest documented outcomes.

Developing cognitive skills and proficiency in one language before progressing to another enables learners to cope more effectively with academic demands, and this proficiency positively influences academic achievement (Chaudhary 2018). This approach aligns with multilingual education research, which identifies two intertwined challenges in contexts such as Malawi: (1) policy frameworks

that fail to harness learners' full linguistic repertoires for meaning-making; and (2) classroom pedagogies that view languages as discrete codes rather than as interconnected resources through which learners make sense of texts and contexts (Reilly et al. 2022). These challenges are not merely technical; they are also deeply socio-political because they marginalise linguistically minoritised learners whose everyday communicative practices are erased or devalued in schooling (Manthalu & Ngwira 2020).

This monoglossic orientation is neither new nor undocumented. More than two decades ago, a 25-country stock-taking study commissioned by UNESCO–ADEA (Alidou et al. 2006) concluded that education delivered through ex-colonial languages unfamiliar to learners results in systemic failure across the curriculum. The study did not stop at diagnosis; it advanced substantive recommendations for mother-tongue-based bilingual and multilingual models. The fact that the situation described in Nsanje persists more than two decades after this continental diagnosis confirms that the linguistic exclusion of borderland learners is not an unforeseen consequence of recent displacement, but rather the predictable outcome of a long-recognised and persistently neglected policy failure.

Theoretical framework

A braided river in the borderland multilingualism framework

Conventional approaches to literacy education are deeply shaped by what has been described as a monoglossic ideology of language, an epistemological stance that views languages as bounded, stable, and nameable entities that can be cleanly separated, standardised, and sequentially acquired (Reilly et al. 2022). Within this worldview, reading and writing are conceptualised as technical skills that develop through mastery of a single authorised language of schooling, while other languages are positioned as obstacles, transitional scaffolds or, at best, extracurricular resources. Such assumptions continue to underpin language-in-education policies across much of Africa, despite decades of sociolinguistic evidence demonstrating that multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception (eds. Erling et al. 2022; eds. Kretzer & Kaschula 2022; Maalim 2014; Schroeder, Mercado & Trudell 2022).

Philosophically, this fixation on linguistic stability reflects a deeper modernist impulse. It reveals a desire to govern complexity through order, classification, and containment. Languages are imagined as objects that can be mapped onto countries, curricula, and assessment models, while literacy is framed as a stand-alone technology detached from social life. However, in contexts shaped by displacement, precarity, and mobility, such as Nsanje, this epistemology becomes untenable. Ehret and Rowsell (2021) argued that literacy is not acquired under conditions of stability but forged under conditions of movement, uncertainty, and contact. Reading and writing are therefore not merely school practices but also survival practices in border crossings, humanitarian encounters, and negotiations of belonging.

Ndhlovu (2013a) argued that languages derive their value from the social capital generated through social networks and their practical functions within communities. In the context of this study, languages have become essential for communication within communities and across schools. This has important implications for educational practice. If these languages function as communicative resources beyond the classroom, then excluding them from pedagogy represents both a missed educational opportunity and an epistemological contradiction. When learners' linguistic repertoires are subordinated to colonial languages, their languages and their capacity to draw on lived realities in learning and meaning-making are devalued. These repertoires embody community knowledge and distinctive networks of meaning-making that should likewise be recognised as resources for literacy development.

From this perspective, the question is not whether immigrant learners from Mozambique possess the 'right language' for literacy learning, but how schooling can recognise, embrace and pedagogically mobilise the repertoires they already use to make meaning across borders. To theorise literacy under conditions of borderland mobility, we introduce the metaphor of the braided river. We do not claim to have invented this metaphor, as it has been used widely in other contexts (e.g. Curtis et al. 2013; Keyes, Ross & Chan 2012; Prentice 2025). Rather, we contextualise it within multilingual literacies for immigrant learners. Unlike a single-channel river that flows predictably within fixed banks, a braided river consists of multiple interweaving channels that diverge, converge, and shift over time in response to environmental pressures such as flooding, sedimentation, and changing terrain. Stability in such rivers is achieved not through rigidity but through adaptive movement. Applied to language and literacy, the braided river metaphor offers several important insights.

First, it captures the plurality of linguistic currents that characterise Nsanje's classrooms: Sena varieties shared across the Malawi–Mozambique border, Portuguese-influenced registers carried by Mozambican learners, Chichewa as a national language of schooling, and English as a gatekeeping language for academic progression. These are not separate streams flowing in isolation but interdependent channels that continually shape one another through constant contact. Second, the metaphor highlights the role of disruptive events – floods, cyclones, and election-related violence – as forces that continually reconfigure linguistic practices. Just as flooding reshapes a river's channels, displacement reshapes learners' literacy trajectories. In turn, these generate new communicative needs and hybrid practices that schools are seldom prepared to accommodate. Third, the braided river challenges policy imaginaries that seek to 'canalise' language use in classrooms. Language-in-education policies that insist on a single medium of instruction attempt to force a braided river into a narrow channel (cf. Curtis et al. 2013). The result is not clarity but erosion, as learners' meaning-making resources are stripped away, participation narrows, and literacy becomes an

exclusionary rather than an inclusive practice. The braided river metaphor therefore serves as a conceptual bridge between philosophical critique and pedagogical design. It invites educators and policymakers alike to ask not how linguistic multiplicity can be eliminated, but how teaching can occur within it.

Building on the braided river metaphor, we propose the BMF for understanding and designing literacy education in contexts of cross-border mobility and displacement. This framework builds on Heugh's (2021) notion of transknowledging. Because the use of multiple languages engages both linguistic and epistemic dimensions, and because knowledge developed in one language may not have direct equivalents in another, multilingual pedagogies enable the exchange of diverse knowledge systems, a process that Heugh (2021:43) identified as transknowledging: 'the process of knowledge exchange and production'. The systematic use of multiple languages in classroom contexts therefore promotes inclusivity and social cohesion among learners while enhancing their capacity for meaning-making. This begins by normalising the use of learners' primary languages and broader linguistic repertoires. Second, it requires the strategic deployment of multilingual practices, involving deliberate decisions about when and why different languages should be drawn upon. Recognising multiple languages also requires teachers to possess the knowledge and skills needed to use learners' repertoires effectively as pedagogical resources. This further entails recognising that each language embodies distinctive knowledge systems. These knowledge systems can then complement one another in constructing new understandings. In this way, transknowledging maximises knowledge exchange while facilitating literacy development and recognising the significance of language, knowledge, and inclusive meaning-making.

The BMF argues that place, mobility, and crisis are not peripheral factors but constitutive conditions of meaning-making. Borderlands are not merely multilingual spaces. As Ndhlovu (2013a) argued, they are politically charged zones in which languages, identities, and educational futures are continually renegotiated. From this perspective, the BMF is underpinned by five propositions:

- **Repertoire over language:** The BMF conceptualises learners as drawing on integrated linguistic repertoires rather than switching between discrete languages. For immigrant learners in Nsanje, reading and writing may simultaneously draw on Sena lexical items, Portuguese orthographic patterns, oral narrative structures, and emerging English vocabulary.
- **Mobility as a pedagogical condition:** Instead of viewing displacement as a disruption external to schooling, the BMF positions mobility as a structuring condition of literacy learning. Learners' reading and writing practices are shaped by interrupted schooling, temporary settlement, and transnational family networks.
- **Multilingualism as design, not remediation:** Within the BMF, multilingualism is not viewed as a compensatory strategy for learners who 'lack' proficiency in the language of instruction. Instead, it is a deliberate pedagogical design principle that structures classroom interaction, engagement with texts, and assessment. Multilingualism therefore becomes the means through which inclusive literacy is enacted rather than an informal practice tolerated at the margins.
- **Literacy as border practice:** Literacy in borderland contexts is understood as encompassing both boundary-making and boundary-crossing practices. Learners read not only textbooks but also official notices, humanitarian messages, electoral discourses and cross-border communications. The BMF therefore expands conventional understandings of literacy.
- **Inclusivity as epistemic justice:** The BMF regards linguistic inclusion as a matter of epistemic justice. When schools refuse to recognise learners' languages and literacies, they do not merely exclude them instructionally; they also dismiss their ways of knowing and lived experiences.

Collectively, the braided river metaphor and the BMF provide a conceptual framework for multilingual literacy education, as illustrated in Figure 2.

The braided river metaphor captures how linguistic currents (Sena varieties, Portuguese-inflected registers, Chichewa, and English) diverge and recombine across social sites and over time. It also demonstrates how disruptive events, such as floods and elections, reconfigure channels, deposit new linguistic practices and require adaptive literacies. The BMF builds on multilingualism and borderland discourse to position mobility, crisis responsiveness, and repertoire entanglement as central analytical perspectives for literacy research in cross-border contexts. The philosophical and theoretical reframing offered by the braided river metaphor and the BMF lays the foundation for a pedagogical shift from

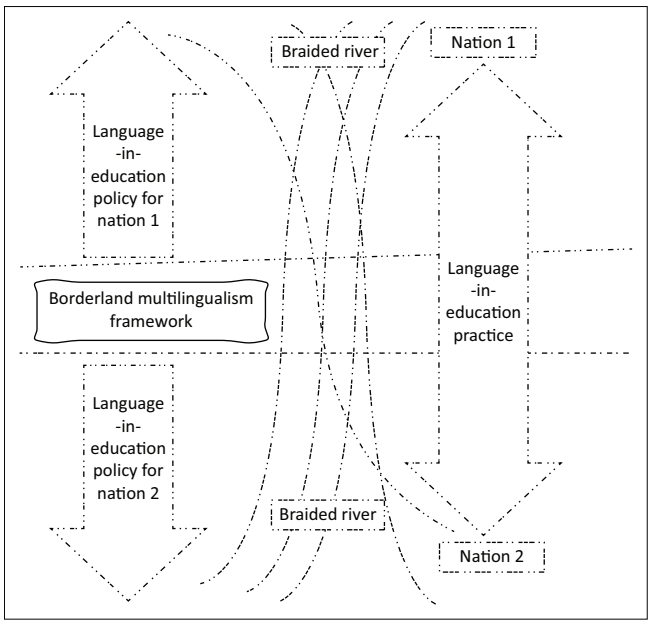


FIGURE 2: Braided river in borderland multilingualism framework.

monolingual transmission models of literacy towards multilingual, repertoire-based approaches to reading and writing. Instead of asking how immigrant learners can be assimilated into existing language regimes, the more pertinent question becomes how classrooms can be reimagined as linguistically porous spaces that reflect the realities of borderland life.

Research methods and design

This study adopted a qualitative conceptual design to theorise multilingual literacy in borderland contexts characterised by mobility, displacement, and linguistic fluidity. A conceptual research design is appropriate when the purpose is not to generate new empirical data but to reframe existing problems, synthesise literature, and advance new theoretical perspectives that can guide future empirical and pedagogical work (Jaakkola 2020). Although no fieldwork was conducted, the borderland context was analytically significant because it shaped the literacy practices, linguistic repertoires, and educational challenges under consideration (Ndhlovu 2013a, 2013b). Ethical considerations were addressed in accordance with accepted standards for research that does not involve human participants.

Findings and discussion

In this section, we undertake a conceptual and theoretical synthesis of key literature and debates on developing multilingual literacy for immigrant learners. We first consider the pedagogical implications for literacy when learners cross borders. We then examine how language policies remain rigid despite the realities of cross-border migration and education.

When languages cross borders: Pedagogical implications for literacy

Under monolingual policy regimes, literacy instruction typically aims to develop proficiency in a single authorised language and views multilingual resources as noise within the system (Eisenchlas, Schalley & Guillemin 2015). In contrast, multilingualism-informed pedagogy reframes literacy goals towards meaning-making and epistemic access through and across multiple knowledge and language systems. This shift aligns with sociocultural conceptions of literacy as a practice rather than merely a skill. Research on multilingual education demonstrates that when learners' full linguistic repertoires are recognised as resources for learning, participation, comprehension, and identity affirmation, all these aspects are enhanced (Carrim & Nkomo 2023). For example, in South Africa, multilingual strategies such as terminology development (Nkomo & Madiba 2011), translation (Mawonga, Maseko & Nkomo 2014), the use of learners' linguistic repertoires, and translanguaging (Lepheana 2021) have been shown to enhance multilingual learners' literacy development by enabling home language use, translation, and flexible language practices in support of deeper meaning-making. In Nsanje, such a reframing would mean that reading lessons do not merely focus on decoding in Chichewa or English. Instead, reading becomes a process of meaning negotiation in which learners draw on their existing Sena repertoires and Portuguese-influenced linguistic patterns to make sense of texts presented in any language of instruction.

Multilingual pedagogy encourages the use of text sets that draw on multiple languages. In the context of this study, these could include oral stories narrated in Sena, short written texts in Portuguese, picture books with bilingual captions, and multilingual glossaries. This, in turn, requires teachers to understand how to respond to and implement multilingual pedagogies effectively. Research shows that such multimodal and multilingual learning environments promote learner engagement and a sense of ownership of literacy tasks (Tai 2022). Teachers can structure reading tasks that invite learners to compare, contrast, and synthesise meanings across languages. Such tasks both acknowledge learners' linguistic repertoires and strengthen literacy across languages. For example, at an appropriate school level (e.g. Standard 5), learners could read a simple informational text on flood safety in Chichewa, discuss the same topic orally in Sena, and then write reflections in English informed by both discussions. Similarly, at a more advanced primary school level (e.g. Standard 8), learners could develop multilingual reading dictionaries that link key vocabulary across Sena, Portuguese, Chichewa, and English. Such activities can promote metalinguistic awareness and strategic language use.

Traditional writing instruction views writing as the production of standardised text in a single target language (Kubota 2022). By contrast, Kaufhold (2018:1) found that 'students' linguistic ideologies and their experiences can enable or restrict their capacity to draw on their varied repertoires'. Multilingual approaches therefore conceptualise writing as repertoire assembly, in which learners draw on whatever linguistic and semiotic resources they possess to construct meaning. In practice, this may involve bilingual journals in which learners initially draft entries in Sena or Portuguese before co-constructing versions in the language of assessment (e.g. English) with teacher support. It may also involve multilingual, multimodal compositions that combine written text, drawings, and oral recordings. This approach is supported by multiliteracy research, which emphasises the value of diverse semiotic resources in literacy learning (see Pennycook 2017). Such activities validate learners' linguistic identities while supporting the development of critical literacy that attends to how and why meaning is constructed across linguistic repertoires.

Multilingual pedagogy should not be left to spontaneity. Rather, it should be intentionally structured through pedagogical design (Faltis 2020). Depending on the context, this may involve a combination of multilingual strategies. Such an approach can be organised around three interconnected principles: recognising multilingualism as the norm in schooling contexts by creating classroom environments in which learners feel safe and empowered to use their full linguistic repertoires for learning; strategically

drawing on learners' languages to enhance literacy through translanguaging, code-switching, translation, and other pedagogical strategies that facilitate epistemic exchange; and promoting dialogue among multiple knowledge systems, thereby enabling transknowledging. This requires teacher modelling, explicit negotiation of which languages are available for use, and the establishment of classroom norms that position all languages as accepted resources for learning (Tai 2022). The Languaging for Learning (L4L) approach supports teachers in designing learning sequences in which translanguaging promotes simultaneous access to content, literacy skills, engagement, and comprehension (Hendricks & Xeketwana 2024). Such an approach can also be used to build teachers' capacity to work effectively in multilingual environments.

Of course, when discussing spontaneous and pedagogical translanguaging, it is important to acknowledge the intellectual lineage of these concepts. While we draw on Faltis's (2020) important distinction between spontaneous multilingual language practices and intentionally designed pedagogical translanguaging, similar ideas were articulated earlier by Cenoz and Gorter (2017), who drew on Bernstein's (1999) distinction between horizontal and vertical discourse. As they (Cenoz & Gorter 2017) explain:

> Pedagogical translanguaging can also be referred to as intentional translanguaging or classroom translanguaging because it embraces instructional strategies that integrate two or more languages. In its origin, it was a planned alternation of the languages for input and output, but it has expanded to include other pedagogical strategies that go across languages. Spontaneous translanguaging is considered the more universal form of translanguaging because it can take place inside and outside the classroom. It refers to the reality of bi/multilingual usage in naturally occurring contexts where boundaries between languages are fluid and constantly shifting. (p. 904)

This concern is echoed by Jaspers (2018), who argues that powerful languages tend to remain powerful while minority languages remain marginalised, even when translanguaging occurs. This suggests that spontaneous multilingual practices alone are insufficient; they must be accompanied by deliberate policy, institutional structures, and cultural affirmation that actively support minority and cross-border languages.

This perspective is particularly relevant to our argument because it cautions against assuming that the spontaneous or horizontal use of multilingual repertoires in everyday communication is, on its own, sufficient to support curriculum learning or equitable educational outcomes. As Faltis (2020) and Heugh (2021) both emphasised, multilingual practices need to be systematically incorporated into pedagogical design so that learners can access disciplinary knowledge, develop academic literacies, and succeed in high-stakes assessments. In the context of borderland multilingualism, this means that recognising learners' fluid linguistic repertoires is a necessary starting point, but educational inclusion ultimately requires deliberate pedagogical structures that transform these repertoires into resources for sustained learning, transknowledging and academic achievement.

Assessment in monolingual regimes usually penalises multilingual learners whose written or oral responses do not conform to strict language norms (Gorter & Cenoz 2017). A multilingualism-informed approach to assessment reframes assessment tasks as meaningful communicative performances that may draw on multiple languages. In the context of this study, possible approaches could include portfolio assessment, in which learners compile multilingual texts (such as diaries, translations, and collaborative compositions) over time to demonstrate literacy development across modes and languages. It could also include performance-based assessment, whereby learners present on a topic (e.g. community life in Nsanje and neighbouring Mozambican villages) using a combination of languages, visuals, and oral explanations, with assessment focusing on comprehension and communicative effectiveness rather than strict linguistic conformity. Bailey et al. (2025) observed that such equity-oriented practices can help reveal linguistic competencies that monolingual assessments often obscure.

For multilingual pedagogy to succeed, teachers' beliefs and professional preparation must also evolve. Research indicates that long-standing monolingual ideologies, particularly the belief that standardised languages are inherently superior for learning, present significant barriers to implementation (see Chang-Bacon 2021). Teacher development should therefore include critical reflection on language ideologies to support teachers in examining assumptions about language hierarchies and recognising the value of multilingual repertoires (McKinney & Guzula 2024). Capacity building should also include teacher education in bilingualism, multilingualism, and biliteracy. Within an inclusive education context, partnerships with families and communities are equally important, recognising that immigrant households possess valuable linguistic and cultural knowledge that can enrich classroom literacy practices. Such professional development and community engagement are essential components of sustainable pedagogical transformation.

Language-in-education reform: Can policies cross borders?

The pedagogical implications of multilingualism for reading and writing in borderland classrooms highlight tensions between what teachers can do in their classrooms and what existing policy requires them to do. In contexts such as Nsanje, where immigrant learners and local communities share multilingual repertoires that defy neat linguistic boundaries, the insistence on a monolingual policy framework represents a structural barrier to inclusive literacy education. Transforming this landscape requires not only classroom-level change but also language policy reform that

creates space for multilingualism as a recognised educational goal and practice.

Malawi's current language-in-education policy reflects a monoglossic conceptualisation of language, in which a single medium of instruction is designated for formal schooling (Kaphwiyo & De Souza 2025). Following the Kanyumba English-Only Policy in 2014 (which was announced orally and has never been formalised through regulations or review mechanisms), English has been designated as the language of instruction from the early years of primary schooling, with Chichewa playing a reduced role, resulting in a subtractive bilingual model. Although this policy change is justified in terms of perceived global relevance and language proficiency, criticism of it is well documented. Trudell's (2021) critique of globalised curricula is particularly relevant here, highlighting how local knowledge and languages become undervalued and marginalised. Scholars argue that the policy disadvantages learners from rural and peri-urban communities where English is not widely used as a second or additional language. As Manthalu and Ngwira (2020) observe:

> In the first sense the policy marginalises the unprivileged majority students and communities for whom English is not even a second language, but also have almost non-existent opportunities for engaging the English language outside the school domain. The second form of marginalization occasioned by this policy pertains to the ultimate devaluation and extinguishing of concrete local ways of being human that are expressed through local culture, art and literature in favour of those associated with the English language. (p. 99)

Thus, elevating English as the exclusive language of instruction excludes local epistemologies and cultural expressions. In turn, this constrains inclusive education and marginalises local identities in favour of colonial linguistic norms.

Despite the official monolingual policy, classroom practices are inherently multilingual, with teachers and learners drawing on diverse linguistic repertoires to make meaning, albeit largely informally because policy does not permit such practices. Indeed, Kaphwiyo and De Souza (2025) observed that teachers tend to adhere strictly to the Kanyumba Policy primarily during official inspections because they themselves, as members of the local linguistic ecology, often struggle to teach exclusively through English. This illustrates a policy environment that fails to recognise multilingual repertoires as pedagogical resources rather than obstacles. Given this disparity between policy and classroom realities, several high-leverage policy directions could inform a reformed language-in-education framework for Malawi, particularly in borderland districts such as Nsanje.

Official recognition of multilingual repertoires in policy

One fundamental policy reform is to move beyond rigid medium-of-instruction prescriptions towards the flexible recognition of multilingual repertoires as educational assets. Policy should frame multilingualism as a strength to be cultivated rather than merely tolerated. This would require policy documents to recognise explicitly that learners may strategically draw on multiple linguistic resources to access curriculum content. Such an approach aligns with multilingual education research (e.g. Gorter & Cenoz 2017), which advocates policies that reflect learners' lived language practices rather than imposing artificial linguistic boundaries. In Malawi, however, implementation is complicated by the fact that the current policy exists primarily as an oral directive, with fragmented circulars serving as the principal official reference points.

Institutional support for multilingual pedagogies

Language policy should extend beyond statements about language use to include provisions for instructional design, learning materials and teacher preparation that actively support multilingualism in practice. This includes teacher education programmes that provide coursework on multilingual strategies, literacy, and inclusive education; curriculum frameworks that accommodate multilingual text sets, glossaries and cross-linguistic scaffolding; and assessment models that recognise multilingual performance as valid evidence of literacy development. These recommendations resonate with educational reforms elsewhere in southern Africa, where multilingual pedagogies and translanguaging have been advocated as tools for inclusive and socially just education (eds. Erling et al. 2022).

Resources and materials development

Policy should commit to developing and distributing multilingual instructional materials that reflect local and cross-border languages. Initiatives such as the African Storybook[1] demonstrate how multilingual storybooks and culturally relevant texts can provide beginner readers with accessible reading materials in familiar languages. Such resources can strengthen literacy engagement and success through familiar linguistic and cultural contexts. The frequently cited argument that African languages lack the written infrastructure necessary to support literacy teaching does not withstand scrutiny. Obanya (1999, cited in Alidou et al. 2006) noted that, by the close of the 20th century, more than 200 African languages were already used in written communication, with the potential to reach nearly half the continent's population, provided that people were educated through them. The challenge, therefore, is not that these languages cannot support written literacy, but that education systems have largely failed to teach learners to read and write in them. This creates a circular pattern in which the exclusion of African languages from literacy instruction is justified by the very illiteracy that such exclusion produces. For a cross-border language such as Sena, the practical challenge is therefore not one of invention but of coordination, possibly through the harmonisation of orthographic conventions across the Malawi–Mozambique border. This is precisely the kind of initiative envisaged by the African Academy of Languages and one for which projects such as the African Storybook already provide a practical model of low-cost, openly licensed materials development.

1.https://www.africanstorybook.org

Mechanisms for local policy adaptation

National policy should enable flexible and context-responsive implementation at district and school levels, particularly in borderland regions where linguistic ecologies differ from national norms. Instead of prescribing a one-size-fits-all language model, policy should create flexibility for local language planning that enables communities and educators to determine language-of-instruction arrangements based on local linguistic repertoires. Such an approach should also prioritise the participation of parents, learners, and community leaders in shaping language policy at the local level. Although challenging, similar forms of local flexibility have been recognised as an important dimension of epistemic justice within South African basic education (see Plüddemann 2017).

Transforming language-in-education policy in Malawi therefore requires reforms that validate multilingual repertoires, institutionalise multilingual pedagogies, and provide support for inclusive literacy practices. Such policy reform is not only pedagogically sound but also socially just. It recognises the right of all learners to access education in ways that respect their identities, histories, and linguistic capital.

Conclusion

This article examined reading and writing among immigrant learners in southern Malawi, focusing on the border district of Nsanje, where cyclical displacement from Mozambique has created multilingual communities. It argued that Malawi's monolingual language-in-education policy is detached from learners' linguistic realities, where multiple languages circulate fluidly across borders. The article conceptualised literacy as a mobile and relational practice. Using the metaphor of the braided river, the article illustrated how Sena, Portuguese-influenced registers, Chichewa, and English intertwine in learners' meaning-making despite policy attempts to keep them separate. Building on this, the article proposed the BMF, which positions mobility, displacement, and political geography as central to literacy learning. From this perspective, literacy becomes a border practice through which learners negotiate knowledge, participation, and belonging, thereby linking linguistic inclusion to epistemic justice. Pedagogically, the article demonstrated that multilingualism-informed practices enhance access, engagement and learner agency without compromising educational standards. At the policy level, it called for multilingual and flexible language-in-education frameworks that accept local linguistic realities. Ultimately, borderlands expose the limitations of monolingual education models and call for an onto-epistemological shift towards literacy education that is responsive to mobility and multilingualism.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

CRediT authorship contribution

Ben de Souza: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Visualisation, Project administration, Software, Data curation, Resources, Writing – review & editing. Sisonke Mawonga: Writing – review & editing. Alipo Kaphwiyo: Writing – review & editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article and its listed references.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

References

Abdi, K., 2025, 'The role of language ideologies in community literacy spaces: A scoping review for new times', *Urban Review* 57, 1026–1049. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-025-00773-5

Alexander, N., 2003, *Language education policy, national and sub-national identities in South Africa*, pp. 17–18, Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

Alexander, N., 2009, 'Mother tongue based bilingual education in Africa: A cultural and intellectual imperative', in I. Gogolin & U. Neumann (eds.), *Streitfall Zweisprachigkeit – The bilingualism controversy*, pp. 199–214, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden.

Alidou, H., Boly, A., Brock-Utne, B., Diallo, Y.S., Heugh, K. & 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', Working document prepared for the ADEA 2006 Biennial Meeting, Libreville, Gabon, 27–31 March 2006.

Aroge, M.G. & Makalela, L., 2024, 'Effects of language policies of Nigeria and South Africa on linguistic diversity and classification of indigenous languages', *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 5(13), 2113–2122. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20245138

Bailey, A.L., Abraham, M.E., Dong, J.Y., Torres, I.M., Wang, Y.P., Zamora, E. et al., 2025, 'Translanguaging: Conceptual underpinnings of equity-oriented instructional and assessment practices with adolescent multilingual learners', *Linguistics and Education* 87, 101418. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2025.101418

Bernstein, B., 1999, 'Vertical and horizontal discourse: An essay', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 20(2), 157–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425699995380

Carrim, A. & Nkomo, S.A., 2023, 'A systematic literature review of the feasibility of a translanguaging pedagogy in the foundation phase', *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching* 11(2), 195–210. https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v11i2.7158

Cenoz, J. & Gorter, D., 2017, 'Minority languages and sustainable translanguaging: Threat or opportunity?', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 38(10), 901–912. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2017.1284855

Chang-Bacon, C.K., 2021, 'Monolingual language ideologies and the idealized speaker: The "new bilingualism" meets the "old" educational inequities', *Teachers College Record* 123(1), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812112300106

Chaudhary, A.A., 2018, 'Enhancing academic achievement and language proficiency through bilingual education: A comprehensive study of elementary school students', *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice* 24(4), 803–812, viewed 12 January 2026, from https://kuey.net/index.php/kuey/article/view/7268.

Chimpololo, A., 2010, 'Assessing pupils' language proficiency in a bilingual education programme: Insights from two primary schools in Malawi', *Buckingham Journal of Language and Linguistics* 3, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.5750/bjll.v3i0.20

Chiuye, G. & Moyo, T., 2008, 'Mother-tongue education in primary schools in Malawi: From policy to implementation', *South African Journal of African Languages* 28(2), 133–144. https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.2008.10587309

Cooper, R.L., 1989, *Language planning and social change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Curtis, G., Reid, D., Kelley, M., Martindell, P.T. & Craig, C.J., 2013, 'Braided lives: Multiple ways of knowing, flowing in and out of knowledge communities', *Studying Teacher Education* 9(2), 175–186. https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2013.808062

Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Malawi, 2026, *European Union allocates €200,000 to alleviate flood impacts in Malawi*, viewed 16 July 2026, from https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/malawi/european-union-allocates-%E2%82%AC200000-alleviate-flood-impacts-malawi_en.

Ehret, C. & Rowsell, J., 2021, 'Literacy, affect, and uncontrollability', *Reading Research Quarterly* 56(2), 201–206. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.387

Eisenchlas, S.A., Schalley, A.C. & Guillemin, D., 2015, 'Multilingualism and literacy: Attitudes and policies', *International Journal of Multilingualism* 12(2), 151–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2015.1009371

Erling, E.J., Clegg, J., Rubagumya, C.M. & Reilly, C. (eds.), 2022, 'Introduction: Multilingual learning and language supportive pedagogies in sub-Saharan Africa', in *Multilingual learning and language supportive pedagogies in Sub-Saharan Africa*, pp. 1–30, Routledge, London.

Faltis, C.J., 2020, 'Pedagogical codeswitching and translanguaging in bilingual schooling contexts: Critical practices for bilingual teacher education', in J. MacSwan & C.J. Faltis (eds.), *Codeswitching in the classroom*, pp. 39–62, Routledge, New York, NY.

Gobodwana, A., 2023, 'The use of translanguaging in assisting educators to teach African languages: A case study of Tshwane South Education District, Pretoria, PhD thesis', University of Cape Town, viewed 12 January 2026, from http://hdl.handle.net/11427/38479.

Gorter, D. & Cenoz, J., 2017, 'Language education policy and multilingual assessment', *Language and Education* 31(3), 231–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2016.1261892

Government of Malawi, 2012, *Nsanje disaster impact assessment & transitional recoveryframework report*, Author, viewed 17 December 2025, from https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/pda-2012-malawi-nsanje.pdf.

Guérois, R., 2024, 'Ideophones in Sena (Bantu, Mozambique)', *Linguistic Typology at the Crossroads* 4(1), 244–288, viewed 03 January 2026, from https://hal.science/hal-04363781v1.

Guissemo, M., 2018, 'Manufacturing multilingualisms of marginality in Mozambique: Exploring the orders of visibility of local African languages', PhD thesis, Stockholm University, Stockholm, viewed 03 January 2026, from https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-153564.

Hendricks, M. & Xeketwana, S., 2024, 'Translanguaging for learning in selected English First Additional Language secondary school classrooms', *Reading & Writing* 15(1), a502. https://doi.org/10.4102/RW.v15i1.502

Heugh, K. & Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (eds.), 2010, 'Multilingual education works when "peripheries" take the centre stage', in *Multilingual education works: From the periphery to the centre*, pp. 316–342, Orient BlackSwan, Hyderabad.

Heugh, K., 2006, *An evaluation of language education models in Africa: Findings & recommendations from the UNESCO Institute for Education-ADEA stocktaking report on Lingua,* paper presented at the International Conference on Bilingual Education in Mozambique, Maputo, 7–9th March.

Heugh, K., 2021, 'Southern multilingualisms, translanguaging and transknowledging in inclusive and sustainable education', in M. Motinyane, L. Mletshe & X. Tshongolo (eds.), *African languages in classrooms and academia: Intellectualisation and empowerment through formal education*, pp. 37–47, African Sun Media, Stellenbosch.

Jaakkola, E., 2020, 'Designing conceptual articles: Four approaches', *AMS Review* 10, 18–26. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0

Jaspers, J., 2018, 'The transformative limits of translanguaging', *Language & Communication* 58, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2017.12.001

Johnston, K.C., 2025, 'Reconfiguring the sanctions of schooled literacy through living literacies', *Reading Research Quarterly* 60(1), e582. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.582

Kaphwiyo, A. & De Souza, B., 2025, 'Language-in-education policy of Malawi: Planning gaps and implementation challenges for primary education', *Journal of Linguistics and Language in Education*, 19(2), 67–74, viewed 03 January 2026, from https://journals.udsm.ac.tz/index.php/jlle/article/view/9419.

Kaufhold, K., 2018, 'Creating translanguaging spaces in students' academic writing practices', *Linguistics and Education* 45, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2018.02.001

Kayambazinthu, E., 2004, 'The language planning situation in Malawi', in R.B. Baldauf & R.B. Kaplan (eds.), *Language planning and policy in Africa*, pp. 79–85, Multilingual Matters, Toronto, viewed 12 January 2026, from https://www.academia.edu/111439213/The_Language_Planning_Situation_in_Malawi

Keyes, D., Ross, V. & Chan, E., 2012, 'Introducing braided rivers', in E. Chan, D. Keyes & V. Ross (eds.), *Narrative inquirers in the midst of meaning-making: Interpretive acts of teacher educators*, pp. xvii–xxvii, Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley.

Kretzer, M.H. & Kaschula, R.H. (eds.), 2022, 'A comparative analysis of language policy and planning in the SADC-region', in *Handbook of language policy and education in countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)*, pp. 11–40, Brill.

Kubota, R., 2022, 'Decolonizing second language writing: Possibilities and challenges', *Journal of Second Language Writing* 58, 100946. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2022.100946

Lepheana, J., 2021, 'Creating spaces for multilingual education in South African classrooms in the 21st century and beyond', in M. Motinyane, L. Mletshe & X. Tshongolo (eds.), *African languages in classrooms and academia: Intellectualisation and empowerment through formal education*, pp. 20–34, African Sun Media, Stellenbosch.

Maalim, H.A., 2014, 'Exploring the relationship between an "English-only" language-in education policy and bilingual practices in secondary schools in Zanzibar', PhD thesis, Rhodes University, Makhanda, viewed 03 January 2026, from http://hdl.handle.net/10962/d1017891.

Manthalu, C.H. & Ngwira, E.N., 2020, 'Educating for marginalization: Normative implications of the Malawian medium of instruction policy', *Multilingual Margins* 7(3), 99–113, viewed 03 January 2026, from https://www.epubs.ac.za/index.php/mm/article/view/1426.

Mawonga, S., Maseko, P. & Nkomo, D., 2014, 'The centrality of translation in the development of African languages for use in South African higher education institutions: A case study of a political science English–isiXhosa glossary in a South African university', *Alternation* 13, 55–79.

Mchazime, H.S., 2001, 'Effects of English as medium of instruction on pupils' academic achievement in social studies in primary schools in Malawi', MA dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria, viewed 12 January 2026, from https://ir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/882/thesis_mchazime_hs.pdf.

McKinney, C. & Guzula, X., 2024, '(Trans)languaging-for-learning in the South: Innovating with teachers', *Reading & Writing* 15(1), a525. https://doi.org/10.4102/RW.v15i1.525

Ndhlovu, F. & Masuku, J., 2025, *Pan-African integration from below: Language, publics, culture*, Mandela University Press, Gqeberha.

Ndhlovu, F., 2013a, 'Cross-border languages in Southern African economic and political integration', *African Studies* 72(1), 19–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2013.776196

Ndhlovu, F., 2013b, 'Vehicular cross-border languages, multilingualism and the African integration debate: A decolonial epistemic perspective', *Africanus* 43(2), 13–33. https://doi.org/10.25159/0304-615X/2299

Nkomo, D. & Madiba, M., 2011, 'The compilation of multilingual concept literacy glossaries at the University of Cape Town: A lexicographical function theoretical approach', *Lexikos* 21(1), 144–168. https://doi.org/10.5788/21-1-41

Ouane, A. & Glanz, C., 2010, *Why and how Africa should invest in African languages and multilingual education*, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg.

Pennycook, A., 2017, 'Translanguaging and semiotic assemblages', *International Journal of Multilingualism* 14(3), 269–282. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2017.1315810

Plüddemann, P., 2017, 'Unlocking the grid: Language-in-education policy realisation in post-apartheid South Africa', in C. Kerfoot & A.-M. Simon-Vandenbergen (eds.), *Language in epistemic access*, pp. 10–23, Routledge, London.

Prentice, C.M., 2025, 'Education researchers who teach in schools: A braided river approach to enhancing research and practice', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 28(3), 319–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2024.2380995

Reeves, C., Heugh, K., Prinsloo, C.H., Macdonald, C., Netshitangani, T., Alidou, H. et al., 2008, *Evaluation of literacy teaching in primary schools of Limpopo Province, a report commissioned by the Limpopo Department of Education*, HSRC, Pretoria.

Reilly, C., 2019, 'Language in Malawian universities: An investigation into language use and language attitudes amongst students and staff', PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, viewed 03 January 2026, from https://theses.gla.ac.uk/41150/.

Reilly, C., ResCue, E. & Chavula, J.J., 2022, 'Language policy in Ghana and Malawi: Differing approaches to multilingualism in education', *Journal of the British Academy* 10(s4), 69–95. https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/010s4.069

Schroeder, L., Sutton Mercado, M. & Trudell, B., 2022, 'Research in multilingual learning in Africa: Assessing the effectiveness of multilingual education programming', in E.J. Erling, J. Clegg, C.M. Rubagumya & C. Reilly (eds.), *Multilingual learning and language supportive pedagogies in sub-Saharan Africa*, pp. 33–60, Routledge, London.

Tai, K.W., 2022, 'Translanguaging as inclusive pedagogical practices in English-medium instruction science and mathematics classrooms for linguistically and culturally diverse students', *Research in Science Education* 52(3), 975–1012. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-021-10018-6

Translators without Borders, 2019, *Mozambique cyclone Idai – Crisis language map*, viewed 12 January 2026, from https://clearglobal.org/resources/mozambique-cyclone-idai-crisis-language-map/

Trudell, B., 2021, **'**Globalisation and curriculum in African classrooms: Is there space for the local?', in P. Harding-Esch & H. Coleman (eds.) *Language and the sustainable development goals: Selected proceedings of the 12th language and development conference, Dakar, Senegal, 2017*, British Council, London, pp. 31–36.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2025, *Mozambique situation: Post-election violence & cyclone responses*, External Update No. 11, UNHCR, Pretoria. https://data.unhcr.org/fr/documents/download/115367

Van der Walt, C., 2013, *Multilingual higher education: Beyond English medium orientations*, Multilingual Matters, Bristol.

World Atlas, 2026, *Maps of Malawi*, viewed 16 July 2026, from https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/malawi.