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Translanguaging in Mathematics and Life Skills classrooms in the Foundation Phase schools in Mopani District: A case study of Khelovedu dialect

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Background: The usage of dialects in South African classrooms is prohibited, and this puts dialectal learners at a disadvantage. To address challenges faced by dialectal learners, this article explores the use of Khelovedu as a dialect through the translingual approach.

Aim: The article aims to explore the instances of translanguaging in the Foundation Phase (FP) classrooms during Mathematics and Life Skills lessons.

Setting: This study was carried out at a rural primary school in Mopani district, Limpopo province, South Africa.

Methods: This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, utilising a purposive sample of four FP teachers and 129 learners for data collection. The data were collected through classroom observations and analysed using content analysis.

Results: The findings revealed that FP teachers used the Khelovedu dialect through the translingual approach to teach Mathematics and Life Skills. The findings suggest that incorporating dialects in the classroom provides more advantages than disadvantages.

Conclusion: This article concludes that the usage of dialects in the classroom benefits learners optimally. It is therefore recommended that teachers and the Department of Basic Education adopt the translingual approach as a tool to accomplish communicative goals and to enhance learners' understanding.

Contribution: Using the translanguaging theory, this article framed dialects such as Khelovedu as a valuable resource rather than an interference in learning. This article therefore contributes towards the formulation of policies that permit the usage of dialects in education.

Keywords: dialects; translanguaging; Khelovedu; Northern Sotho; Foundation Phase; monolingualism; bilingualism; multilingualism.

Introduction

The usage of dialects in the classroom is perceived differently throughout the world. For example, in countries such as Switzerland, Italy and Germany, dialects are used for classroom instruction (Tegegne 2015). The global consensus is that dialects enhance learning because learners are already familiar to them, making the educational experience more accessible and effective. Contrary to the global perspective, dialects are restricted in South African classrooms as shown by the studies conducted by Probyn (2019), Majola and Cekiso (2023), and Ramothwala (2024). It was some 17 years ago that Probyn (2009:123) made this observation about the usage of dialects in the classroom in South Africa: '… dialects are prohibited in the classroom and the only time they are used is when they are smuggled into the classroom'. The status quo has not changed as shown by the studies conducted by Gxilishe (2013), Maqam (2015), Majola and Cekiso (2023), and Ramothwala (2024). In South Africa, classroom discourses are dominated by official languages, even though most learners are non-standard dialects speakers. The use of official languages is associated with high academic achievement and high social status, while dialects are associated with low status (Labov 1972). This is the reason why official and standard languages are used as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT), while dialects are excluded from formal instruction. Gxilishe (2013) observed that 'many South Africans are too firmly entrenched in the factor of standard language to allow dialect as a language of instruction'. Gxilishe further adds that:

> [W]hile some teachers strongly support the usage of dialects in the classroom, the majority of parents strongly disagree, claiming that their children would suffer in society if they do not acquire a standard variety. (p. 1)

The prohibition of dialects in the classroom therefore disadvantages dialectal learners by preventing them from fully utilising their linguistic abilities to express ideas and understand concepts effectively. As such, learners may not be able to accomplish communicative goals. This is a situation facing all dialectal learners across various language groups in South Africa.

For example, isiMpondo learners in the Nguni cluster, Tshimanda in the Tshivenḓa cluster and Sepulana learners in the Sotho cluster are in a similar predicament. The above-described situation, where dialects are prohibited and only official languages are used for learning and teaching, promotes monolingual classrooms. Monolingual classrooms in the context of this study are classrooms where only one language is used for learning and teaching. For this reason, a better approach is needed, instead of monolingual language practices, given the multilingual realities of South Africa. Many researchers identified the translingual approach as the ideal educational tool that can be used to accomplish communicative goals and to enhance learners' understanding of the content (García 2012; Khairunnisa & Lukmana 2020; Makalela 2015; Maseko 2022; Nhongo & Tshotsho 2019; Probyn 2019; Rodríguez, Musanti & Cavazos 2021). This study argues that the translingual approach is a viable means to teaching and learning, as it is concomitant with most learners' linguistic repertoires.

Given that dialect usage in the classroom is a contentious topic, this study investigates the use of a dialect, Khelovedu, through the translingual approach in Foundation Phase (FP) classrooms in Bolovedu South region, Limpopo province. The main question is whether dialects are detrimental to teaching and learning, which would warrant their exclusion in the classroom. This article argues in the favour of the usage of dialects in the classroom. Specifically, this study investigates the effects of Khelovedu translanguaging in Mathematics and Life Skills classrooms in Bolovedu South region. To the researchers' knowledge, there are few, if any, studies in South African Basic Education that have examined the aims of translanguaging in Mathematics and Life Skills classes. As we believe that in this multilingual region, characterised by the presence of three languages (Khelovedu, Xitsonga, Sepedi), a multilingual approach towards teaching and learning is required. The current study sought to explore the functions of FP (Grade R-3) learners and teachers' episodes in Bolovedu South region in Mathematics and Life Skills to determine the effects of utilising Khelovedu. This article seeks to challenge the status quo regarding the use of dialects in the classroom. It advocates for viewing dialects not through a lens of language deficiency, but as valuable resources that can enhance learners' comprehension and support their ability to achieve communication goals. This article can inform the Department of Basic Education (DBE) about the use and impact of dialects in the classroom. It contributes towards the appreciation of dialects, which in turn contributes to the promotion of multilingualism as one of the goals stipulated in the Constitution of South Africa. Consequently, the following questions served as the foundation for this article:

- *What are the effects of Khelovedu translanguaging in teaching the FP content*?
- *What are the effects of Khelovedu translanguaging in Mathematics classrooms*?
- *What are the effects of Khelovedu translanguaging in Life Skills classrooms*?

Theoretical framework

This study locates itself within the translanguaging theory as its objective is to assess the functions of translanguaging in bilingual classrooms. The primary reason for using this theory is the diglossia situation that exists around the school where the study was conducted. The term diglossia is used by sociolinguists to refer to 'a situation where two distinct varieties of a language are used by a single language community in different contexts' (Ferguson 1959; Kyriakou 2019). The learners in the selected school are Khelovedu first language (L1) speakers, who receive education in a second language (L2) in which they lack competency and proficiency as established by Ramothwala et al. (2021). If teaching and learning occurs solely in the L2, learners may be deprived of epistemic access, potentially resulting in underachievement. In addition, the learners could feel pressured to apply the monolingual approach in order to understand the world and themselves. In light of these conditions, this study aimed to fulfil Duarte's (2019) proposal that 'translanguaging could be utilised as a pedagogical framework to recognise other languages and reduce language separation in order to improve learners' comprehension of the content'.

In brief, the translanguaging theory:

> [F]osters a holistic view of one's linguistic repertoires as resources valuable in learning and identity expression as well as a pluriversal worldview that recognises the porous nature of languages, cultures, and knowledge. (Li & García 2022:213)

In the context of this study, the translanguaging theory frames dialects such as Khelovedu as a valuable resource rather than an interference in learning. From a pragmatic perspective, translanguaging promotes a multilingual teaching approach that embraces all of the linguistic and semiotic resources that teachers and learners possess in every situation. Translanguaging stances 'allow teachers and learners to use or hear languages other than the target language in the classroom without feeling guilty' (Wang 2022:3). If the DBE legitimises or sanctions translanguaging in teacher training, teachers would not have to 'smuggle dialects into the classroom' as observed by Probyn (2019), but would be at ease to use and accept other dialects in their classrooms. This will not only enhance learners' understanding, but will also contribute towards the recognition of other cultures, and knowledge.

Literature review

This section briefly reviews the literature in relation to classroom translanguaging from global and local perspectives. Further, it emphasises the beneficial impacts of

translanguaging as an instructional approach in bilingual and multilingual learning environments.

Translanguaging practices

From an educational perspective, translanguaging generally refers to the use of two or more languages in one lesson in the classroom, whereas translanguaging practices refer to how multilingual speakers (teachers and learners) shift between languages in the classroom. Translanguaging is said to have started in Wales in the early 1980's as a teaching strategy to strengthen students' proficiency in both Welsh and English. Baker (2011) defines 'trawsieithu' (translanguaging) as a:

> [P]edagogical practice in which input is received in one language and output is produced in another, aimed at enhancing learning, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the subject, and aiding the development of the less proficient language. (p. 288)

> This practice has increasingly captivated educational linguists on the potential of employing two or more languages inside a single class, so departing from the detrimental 20th-century notion that studying or utilising several languages induces cognitive confusion. (p. 288)

There have been many studies across the world investigating translanguaging practices in multilingual classroom settings. Some of these studies include those of García (2009, 2012), Creese and Blackledge (2010), Mokgwathi (2011), Khairunnisa and Lukmana (2020), Zhang, Lin and Osborne (2022), and Wang (2022). The above-cited studies have described translanguaging as the best practice and the most effective pedagogical tool in multilingual classroom contexts. According to García (2012:3), translanguaging 'supports bilingual students' ability to have multiple identities that are not exactly like those constructed in monolingual contexts or in other contexts'. García further adds that translanguaging buttresses bilingual students' multiple and fluid identities. In accordance with García (2012), Makalela (2015) asserts that translanguaging 'permits linguistic practices to be flexible, allowing both teachers and learners to exhibit creativity and agency that would be impossible in monolingual educational settings'.

Despite the fact that this practice is not common in South African basic education settings, research has been done on the subject, mostly in higher education but more recently in basic education. These studies include well-known studies conducted by researchers such as Msimanga and Lelliott (2014), Makalela (2015), Charamba and Zano (2019), Nhongo and Tshotsho (2019), Omidire and Ayob (2020), to mention but a few. These researchers promoted translanguaging as a systematic and successful educational approach to connecting learners' native tongues with the medium of instruction (MoI). The previously cited studies maintain that this practice, particularly in multilingual settings, may be empowering and could lead to more successful learning.

Benefits of translanguaging

Zhang et al. (2022) used 'a think-aloud method to investigate how Chinese learners use the entirety of their semiotic resources to learn and remember Chinese characters'. They contend that in order to help students learn the Chinese script more successfully, strategic planning elements for translanguaging must be included in Chinese language programmes. Similarly, Wang (2022) 'surveyed 155 university students enrolled in a beginning-level Chinese language course' to find out how they felt about incorporating Māori epistemologies and employing Māori terminology into the Chinese curriculum and evaluation system. Wang's study revealed that when translanguaging was allowed in the course, students showed a high degree of endorsement of pluriversal epistemology.

Mokgwathi (2011) investigated the use of Setswana in English-medium classrooms in Zimbabwe. He observed 197 lessons to determine instances of Setswana usage in English classrooms and to establish its pedagogical effects. The data from the classroom revealed that the teachers used both English and Setswana in their respective classrooms, irrespective of the subject taught. The findings also showed that the use of Setswana enhanced an understanding of the content among the learners and increased participation. The primary cause of this practice was the lack of English ability among the learners. In this sense, Setswana was employed as a communication aid in situations when English was ineffective. Similarly, Khelovedu can be used as a translanguaging strategy to facilitate and enhance understanding among Khelovedu-L1 learners as they have not acquired proficiency in Sepedi.

Makalela (2015) conducted a study in South Africa that demonstrated 'cognitive advantages in literacy and language classes at the University of the Witwatersrand'. In two case studies, one at university and the other in primary school, Makalela (2015) examined the effectiveness of translanguaging as a teachable approach in South African elementary schools and higher education. In the first case, 24 students who spoke isiZulu and isiXhosa as their mother tongues had never been exposed to reading or writing any of the three Sotho languages: Setswana, Sepedi or Sesotho. The second case involved 60 Grade 6 learners. According to this study, translanguaging strategies improve bilingual and multilingual learners' epistemic access in the two cases that were studied. The study further revealed that translanguaging strategies were:

> [E]ffective in fostering positive language learning experiences, investing in linguistic identities, naturalising multilingualism as a classroom norm, and enhancing their view of African languages as social goods deserving of study. (p. 20)

The above-stated findings are consistent with those of the research of Omidire and Ayob (2020) who investigated 'the efficacy of translanguaging for learning and teaching in multilingual primary classrooms in South Africa'. Participants comprised both English teachers and learners in Grades 5 and 6 using their first languages alongside English. The research revealed that translanguaging played a key role in facilitating both teaching and learning, while also offering essential support to foster academic growth in

multilingual educational settings. The educational benefits of translanguaging were also reported in studies conducted by Msimanga and Lelliott (2014), Probyn (2015) and Charamba and Zano (2019). Charamba and Zano (2019) researched translanguaging in a multilingual class at one high school in South Africa. Their study involved 28 Grade 8 Sesotho-L1 learners in a Natural Sciences classroom. The learners were taught in both English and Sesotho, and were given tutorial materials written in their home language. The results demonstrated that learning materials written in the learners' first language (L1) and the usage of many languages during classes improved learners' comprehension of the topics compared to the usual monolingual interactions they were constantly exposed to. The results of the study by Charamba and Zano (2019) demonstrate the importance of the home language of learners in a science classroom and how translanguaging in a science classroom serves as a tool for multilingual learners to collaboratively engage with scientific concepts and their associated terminology. Charamba and Zano's findings are comparable to those of Msimanga and Lelliott (2014), who noted how Grade 10 learners in a Chemistry class utilised their first languages to facilitate communication and create meaning in small group conversations. Msimanga and Lelliott's study emphasises how home languages 'may be a legitimate resource for science teachers to create opportunities for learner conceptual understanding and how they may be used to interact with challenging ideas'. Similar findings were also reported in a study conducted by Probyn (2015) in Physical Sciences classrooms, in South Africa. The findings of Probyn's study showed that:

> [T]ranslanguaging provided learners with what appeared to be improved opportunities to learn science as opposed to brief and reactive code-switching or complete avoidance of the learners' home language evident in the other classrooms. (p. 218)

The above-cited studies bolster claims made by the authors in this article that translanguaging to a dialect or the learners' L1 is educationally beneficial. These studies demonstrate that translanguaging may be utilised to dispel the myth of monolingual bias, eliminate the disadvantages it causes for multilingual learners and give them excellent learning chances and improved conceptual understanding.

Research methods and design
Approach and design

In this study, a qualitative case study design was adopted in order to assess the effects of using Khelovedu in the FP. Bazeley (2007:2) argues that the qualitative approach is 'the method of choice in situations where an in-depth or detailed understanding of information, process or experience is sought to ascertain the exact nature of the phenomena under investigation'. Strefkerk (2019) adds that the essence of qualitative research is the interpretation of natural occurrences through the collection, transcription, interpretation, and description of data from the natural environment. Cherry (2021:59) defines a case study as 'an in-depth study of one

person, group, or event and it seeks patterns and causes of behaviour'. The current study employed a case study to find instances of teachers' translanguaging when using Sepedi as a teaching medium in FP classes.

Participants and sampling procedure

The study's sample included both FP teachers and their learners. There were four teachers in all, and all of them were women. These teachers were given code names according to a sequence: T1 stands for teacher 1, and so forth. Their teaching experience spanned from 15 years to 33 years, while their ages ranged from 40 years to 59 years. In terms of L1, they were all Khelovedu L1 speakers.

The researchers utilised purposive sampling to select the school and the participants in this study. According to Nikolopoulou (2022), purposive sampling refers to 'a group of non-probability sampling techniques in which units are selected because they have characteristics the researcher needs in their sample'. Nikolopoulou further declares that the 'purposive sampling method relies on the researcher's judgement when identifying and selecting the individuals, cases, or events that can provide the best information to achieve the study's objectives'.

The learners in the selected school were all Khelovedu-L1 learners in the FP, as opposed to other schools that had learners of different L1. The study comprised 4 FP teachers and 129 learners, resulting in a total number of all the FP learners spread across the phase. Some teachers shared with the primary researcher that their learners' performance was unsatisfactory because the learners were not exposed to Sepedi. This is why the school was purposefully sampled for the study. Because of learners' low academic achievement and limited proficiency in the language of instruction, the study aimed to determine whether translanguaging to Khelovedu would affect their academic performance.

Data collection

The data for this article came from a larger study conducted in the Mopani district at two selected primary schools, located in Bolovedu South region. The main study utilised multiple sources of data. In this article, we focused only on the data gathered through classroom observations. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), classroom observation is 'a method of collecting data by observing behaviour events or noting physical characteristics in their natural environment'. By utilising this method, the primary researcher was able to watch what was taking place in the classroom during classes and capture the participants' statements exactly.

The principal researcher took notes for data coding while watching classroom interactions as a non-participant observer. In order to document the occurrences and purposes of translanguaging in Mathematics and Life Skills classrooms, the principal researcher watched both

learners and their teachers. Teachers were observed for three specific roles that are crucial to teaching: asking questions, demonstrating activities and explaining the content. The primary researcher observed four lessons, two for Mathematics and two for Life Skills. Furthermore, two lessons in Grade R and two in Grade 1 were observed. The duration of lesson observations ranged from 30 to 40 min, which in Maree's (2016) view, is sufficient, as participants will start behaving naturally. In Mathematics, the lessons observed were on numbers and calculations, while in Life Skills, lessons were taught on environmental awareness and different occupations, as evident from the examples presented in the findings section.

The researchers ensured reliability through member checking. Member checks, also known as 'participant validation', refers to 'the method of returning an interview or analysed data to a participant to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences' (Birt et al. 2016:1802). In accordance with Birt et al., the researchers 'shared the findings with the participants to verify the accuracy of the interpretations'. This was to ensure that the themes resonated with their experiences.

Data analysis

Content analysis was employed as the method of analysis, which Busch et al. (2005:2) define as a 'research method for identifying the existence of certain terms, themes, or concepts in a particular qualitative data set'. According to Luo (2019), content analysis can be 'qualitative (with an emphasis on interpretation and comprehension) or quantitative (with an emphasis on counting and statistics)'. The quantitative part of the current study involved calculating the frequency of each aspect of teachers' translanguaging as well as its functions. The qualitative component involved analysing and comprehending the data, frequently by discussing particular instances.

Ethical considerations

The study was granted ethical approval by the Faculty Committee for Research Ethics–Humanities, at Tshwane University of Technology (reference no: FCRE/APL/STD/2020/08). Prior to data collection, participants were provided with informational leaflets and consent forms that explained the study, their rights and their responsibilities in the data gathering process.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study, in order to provide answers to research questions outlined in the introduction section.

The primary purpose of observing the classroom activities was to identify instances in which teachers used Khelovedu translanguaging. The aim was to check if translanguaging to Khelovedu is effective in the teaching of Mathematics and Life Skills contents. The study found that teachers employed Khelovedu translanguaging in Mathematics and Life Skills classrooms for purposes of asking questions, demonstrating activities and explaining the content. Explaining content was the most frequently used function, followed by demonstrating activities and asking questions, as shown in Table 1.

The translanguaging extracts are presented in the following subsection. The examples of Khelovedu are bolded, so they stand out from Sepedi equivalence. Both Khelovedu and Sepedi examples are given in italics as there were none in English, and translations to English were given in normal font.

Explaining content extracts

T2:   '*O doubler ke ho oketša nomoro gha mokhwa wo ebego gha wona*' (Khelovedu).

'*Ge o oketša o šomiša nomoro yona yeo*' (Sepedi).

'When you add, you increase the number' (English).

On the above-stated extract, the teacher was teaching the learners on the addition of numbers. The teacher initially explained the activity in Sepedi, but soon switched to Khelovedu to enhance learners' understanding.

Furthermore, the teacher gave an example in Khelovedu about building a house which related to what she was teaching. In addition to the above-stated extract, the teacher said, '*o tswana le he o khe aya ndho, o zamaisa double hore ndho e khwathe*', which translates to 'when you build a house, you use two lines of bricks so to make the house strong'. After the example, the learners were able to give the correct answer.

T2:   '*O adder ke o thakantša*' (Khelovedu).

'*O tlaleletša ke go oketša*' (Sepedi).

'To add is to increase' (English).

Similar to the previous example, this incident took place in a Mathematics classroom where learners were taught on how to add. T2 switched to Khelovedu to explain to the learners how addition works and thus translanguaging was useful in explaining this Mathematical concept. T2 then used the word '*thakantša*' which is a Khelovedu equivalent for 'add'.

T3:   '*Doctor e khona o ngwalela zwa hore le zwa hore*' (Khelovedu).

'*Ngaka e kgona go o ngwalela tsa gore le gore*' (Sepedi).

'A doctor is able to give you a prescription' (English).

TABLE 1: Incidents and functions of translanguaging.

Teacher	Function			Total
	Asking questions	Demonstrating activities	Explaining content	
T1	0	1	2	3
T2	1	0	2	3
T3	0	0	3	3
T4	1	1	1	3
Total	**2**	**2**	**8**	**12**

The preceding instance took place in a Life Skills classroom where learners were taught on different career paths. The learners were instructed to open on a specific page in their workbooks where they would find pictures representing occupations, namely; doctor, policeman and teacher. In this instance, the teacher explained what a doctor does, so learners know about this career path. Further in the above-stated excerpt, the teacher explained to the learners that a doctor also deals with prescriptions and in so doing, translanguaging was used.

T3:   '*Doctor e tjia nthwe ye ngwe ye o kare ke thate ya re athama*' (Khelovedu).

'*Ngaka e tšea sedirišwa se itšego ya re ahlama*' (Sepedi).

'The doctor takes a *Spatula* and ask you to open your mouth wide' (English).

In the preceding instance, learners were taught on different career paths in a Life Skills classroom. The teacher asked the learners what career path they would like to pursue in the near future and some answered 'doctor', referring from their workbooks. The teacher then explained to the learners what doctors do through translanguaging.

T3:   '*Mmereko wa lepodisa khe o dia hore o khebe le botsinyi naheni ya borena*' (Khelovedu).

'*Mošomo wa lepodisa ke o dira gore o se be le bosenyi nageng ya borena*' (Sepedi).

'A policeman's job is to prevent crime in the country' (English).

The above-stated translanguaging instance took place in a Life Skills classroom where learners were asked what they wanted to be when they grew up. One learner (L27) answered that he would want to be a policeman. The teacher explained to the learners what the police do through translanguaging.

T1:   '*He o ngwala šupa o wa thaba wa ya letsowoni la go ja wa ya gha dhase*' (Khelovedu).

'*Ge o ngwala šupa o wa hlaba, wa ya letsogong la go ja, wa ya tlase*' (Sepedi).

'When you write seven, you stick, move to the right, then down' (English).

This incident happened in a Mathematics period where learners were taught how to write numbers. The teacher used Khelovedu to explain how the number seven is written. The learners subsequently wrote the number as a result of having understood the teacher.

T4:   '*Batho ba bjala dienywa ka gobane he ba ka se bjale re dho bolaya ke dhala*' (Khelovedu).

'*Batho ba bjala dienywa ka gobane ge ba ka se bjale re tilie go bolawa ke tlala*' (Sepedi).

'People plant so that we do not run out of food' (English).

This incident took place during a Life Skills lesson where learners were being taught about farming. T4 explained to the learners in their L1 to enhance their understanding, as evident from the words '*dho*' and '*dhala*'.

T4:   '*Re tswanedhe o thwekisa lefelo la bo rena*' (Khelovedu).

'*Re swanetši o hlwekiša lefelo la bo rena*' (Sepedi).

'We have to keep our environment clean' (English).

This incident happened in a Life Skills classroom where learners were taught on how to keep the environment clean. T4 then *translanguaged* to Khelovedu as per the above example for the purpose of giving a further explanation. In addition to the above example, FT4 further said '*he re ka se thwekise lefelo re dho lwala*', which translates to 'if we do not clean our environment, we may contract sicknesses'.

Demonstrating activity extracts

T1:   '*He o ngwala šupa o wa thaba wa ya ledzowoni la go ja wa ya gha dhase*' (Khelovedu).

'*Ge o ngwala šupa o wa hlaba, wa ya letsogong la go ja, wa ya tlase*' (Sepedi).

'When you write seven, you stick, move to right, then down' (English).

This instance happened in a Mathematics period where learners were taught to draw the number 7. In demonstrating how the number should be drawn, the teacher used translanguaging. The learners subsequently drew the number because they had understood the teacher.

T4:   '*Wa dia dzebe*' (Khelovedu).

'*Wa dira tsebe*' (Sepedi).

'You draw the ear' (English).

Here, T4 was demonstrating to the learners how to draw a human body during a Life Skills lesson. After demonstrating how to draw the head, T4 then went on to demonstrate how to draw a human ear, using Khelovedu so the learners could understand.

T4:   '*Re dzamaya gha dzitwabatwaba*' (Khelovedu).

'*Latela ditwabatwaba*' (Sepedi).

'You follow the dots' (English).

The above-stated instance took place in a Life Skills classroom where learners were given an activity, in which they were to locate a missing bicycle. The learners were required to draw a line connecting to the location of the bicycle. T4 demonstrated how to follow the route until they reached the bicycle's location. The words '*dzamaya*' and '*dzila*' embody Khelovedu phonemes, and as such, the learners understood the activity as they were familiar with words.

Asking questions extracts

T2:   '*O doubler ghe o dia ene*'? (Khelovedu).

'*O oketša ke o dira eng*'? (Sepedi).

'What is addition'? (English).

This instance took place in a Mathematics classroom where the learners were taught how to add numbers. Following the lesson, the teacher then asked the learners a question to check their understanding thereof.

T4:   *'O wa dzi bona dzitwabatwaba'*? (Khelovedu).

'Wa di bona ditwabatwaba'? (Sepedi).

'Do you see the dots'? (English).

This incident took place during a Life Skills lesson. In this incident, T4 was checking if the learners were on the same page with her and in the process, translanguaging was used. The learners then enthusiastically responded yes because of translanguaging through familiar words such as '*dzi*' and '*dzitwabatwaba*'.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that FP teachers used the Khelovedu dialect through a translingual approach to teach Mathematics and Life Skills. Specifically, translanguaging was used to explain the content to the learners, to demonstrate activities and to ask questions (Table 1). These are common functions of translanguaging, as the study done by Elmabruk and Almwber (2019) shows. The functions are the core aspects of teaching, without which learning cannot be judged to be successful. Teaching entails explaining. Demonstrating activities is important as it informs learners on how to do activities. Asking questions is also as important, as it enables teachers to engage with the learners on content matters, thus checking if learners understood the lesson. The use of translanguaging, as shown in this study, thus enabled teachers to explain and demonstrate activities to the learners in their dialect.

The findings of this study also showed that Khelovedu translanguaging does not stifle learning or disadvantage the learners. Teachers were able to teach concepts of Mathematics through Khelovedu translanguaging and this enhanced the learners' understanding. For example, learners were able to complete classroom activities, which implies that the use of Khelovedu enhanced their understanding. Furthermore, the translingual approach contributed to making lessons lively, as the learners were able to participate by answering questions. The study's findings, thus, show that translanguaging is not only limited to teaching languages, subjects such as Mathematics can also be taught through translanguaging. In support of this finding, Ouane and Glanz (2010) investigated the pedagogical effects of translanguaging in Ethiopia. The focus of their study was to analyse achievements of students who were taught Mathematics and Science in the local dialect and those taught in English. The results of their study demonstrated that student performance in Mathematics and Science was far better for those who were instructed through the standard language alongside their dialect than for those who were instructed only in the standard language. Comparable findings were observed in Mali, as demonstrated by the study conducted by Ouane and Glanz (2010). The study found that professors are using Bamana, being a local dialect, to teach Physics and Chemistry. The study showed that switching to a dialect benefit students optimally and concluded that it is technically possible for every African language to be used right through to the end of tertiary education.

The findings of this study also concur with findings from studies conducted by other researchers across the world. Rodríguez et al. (2021) investigated translanguaging 'in higher education in Texas in the United States'. The study's findings indicated that teachers used 'a translanguaging approach in their syllabi and course design'. The teachers opened translanguaging spaces by using language for instruction, utilising translanguaging pedagogies with meaning and purpose in response to the linguistic variety of their students. The use of translanguaging can result in 'positive identity formation, lesson completion, increased participation, expanded vocabulary, and learning gains in Mathematics and reading', as found by researchers such as Creese and Blackledge (2010), García, Johnson and Seltzer (2017), Dougherty (2021) and Maseko (2022). The important instructional role of translanguaging in bilingual and multilingual settings is highlighted by García et al. (2017), who say that:

> [T]ranslanguaging may foster a classroom climate in which students challenge linguistic hierarchies while also making them feel like valued members of the classroom community, allowing them to use all of their resources to fully engage in class activities. (p. 1)

Translanguaging can also:

> [A]id teachers as it can serve as a liberating approach, allowing them to shift their attention away from standardised language practices and toward creating classroom environments in which students can completely translanguage their learning experiences. (Orellana & García 2014:388)

In other words, teachers are positioned as key agents in fostering dynamic and purposeful translanguaging spaces. In so doing, teachers engage in socially just practices by ensuring marginalised multilingual learners can actively participate as literate individuals, drawing upon their entire range of communicative resources' (García & Kleifgen 2019:7).

In the South African context, Shube (2024) investigated how students cope with online learning and linguistic barriers at a writing centre in South Africa. The study found that translanguaging contributed positively towards teaching and learning, and helped students to better understand academic and research writing. The usefulness of translanguaging as an educational approach is confirmed by Nhongo and Tshotsho (2019) and Probyn (2019), who state that translanguaging aids learners' cognition 'thereby enhancing comprehension of concepts better than when only one language is used in teaching and learning'.

This study's findings are particularly significant, as translanguaging is not supported by the existing policies governing Basic Education in South Africa. In this regard, the study's findings become even more important as they can contribute towards a change in language policies. The findings of this study align with the translanguaging theory. Moreover, the findings showed that all (100%) teachers used the learners' immediate linguistic resource, as supported by the theory. Teachers used one language

to support the other in the classroom, which greatly improved learners' comprehension and engagement in the lessons. In accordance with the translanguaging theory, teachers were able to resist monolingual practices, thus responding to the needs of their learners. The translanguaging theory, therefore, frames dialects such as Khelovedu as a valuable resource rather than an interference in learning. The implication of the study's findings is that the monolingual policies governing South African classroom language practices must be challenged to make space for previously marginalised dialects such as Khelovedu, Sepulana, Sehananwa, isiBhaca, Tshironga and Tshiphani, among others. However, the implementation of the translingual approach in South African classrooms could prove to be challenging. For example, there could be resistance from policymakers or teachers. Teachers may view the translingual approach as undermining the primacy of the standard language (Sepedi), or fear it might lower language standards. Furthermore, another challenge with implementing translanguaging in the classroom could be the lack of training on the teachers' part. Without adequate training, teachers might struggle to effectively implement it.

Notwithstanding the above-stated challenges, the benefits of translanguaging, such as promoting inclusivity and improving cognitive development, make it an effective teaching strategy. Advocacy and collaboration of all stakeholders would be essential in the implementation of translanguaging in the classroom. This study therefore recommends that translanguaging should be sanctioned during teacher training or be made a compulsory subject for those undertaking teaching programmes. Not only would teachers be permitted to utilise it, but would be equipped.

Conclusion

This study investigated the use of Khelovedu dialect through a translingual approach in FP classrooms. The study aimed to assess whether the inclusion of dialects in the classroom is beneficial or restrictive. The findings support the former, revealing that the Khelovedu dialect was effectively integrated into Mathematics and Life Skills classrooms through a translingual teaching approach. The translingual approach enhanced learners' understanding of the content, as learners were able to complete classroom activities. In addition, the translingual approach bridged the communication gap between the learners and the teachers, and maximised participation in the classroom. The findings of this study are therefore in favour of the usage of dialects in the classroom. This study presents a strong argument that non-standardised dialects such as Khelovedu can function as valuable linguistic tools to support teaching and learning in multilingual areas such as Bolovedu. Although more empirical research is needed, findings from this study strongly indicate that dialects in the classroom are much more of an advantage than otherwise.

Dialects are valuable linguistic resources that teachers incorporate to support struggling learners. It is therefore recommended that the DBE of South Africa legitimise the usage of dialects in education.

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Competing interests

Authors' contributions

T.R. collected the data, wrote the original draft, and revised and finalised the manuscript. M.C. supervised and reviewed the manuscript. I.P.M. supervised and critically read the article.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, T.R., upon request.

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