

ADVANCING THE EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON TRILINGUALISM IN GRADE 11 DRAMATIC ARTS

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Abstract

Trilingualism needs to be advanced to achieve effective teaching in dramatic arts. The qualitative case study investigated the educational perspective on trilingualism (using isiXhosa, isiZulu and English) in Grade 11 Dramatic Arts at a selected school. Using purposive sampling, 25 learners were chosen to provide rich, relevant insights into their experiences with trilingual teaching. The study was framed by the Translanguaging Theory, which emphasised the dynamic and fluid use of multiple languages to enhance cognitive and cultural learning. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and were analysed thematically. Findings indicated that trilingualism in Dramatic Arts fosters greater student engagement and a deeper connection to cultural expression. Findings show that using three languages enriched their understanding of dramatic texts. It also improved communication skills. However, one challenge from the findings was that language switching was difficult. The findings support the benefits of embracing a multilingual approach. It highlights the need for balanced integration of language. The study recommends strengthening of multilingual teacher ongoing professional development. A classroom environment with a diversified creative language support is also recommended. The study concludes that advancing trilingual education in Grade 11 Dramatic Arts could enhance learners' educational and cultural experiences. A contribution from the current study is its inclusivity. It also has a positive effect on the implementation and academic promotion of multilingual pedagogies and cultural affirmation.

Keywords: *Advancing, educational perspective, trilingualism, student engagement.*

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving technological space, advancing educational practices, particularly in trilingual instruction in dramatic arts, has become increasingly crucial (Sivakumar & Vanitha, 2024). The mobility of individuals, driven by the pursuit of better opportunities and other factors, brings out the importance of effective communication across multiple languages, including isiXhosa, isiZulu, and English. This necessitates a shift in teaching methodologies to promote greater flexibility and inclusivity of diverse linguistic experiences. As people migrate across borders or within their own countries, they often encounter varied linguistic environments that require adaptability in communication (Kusumaningputri, 2024). Consequently, families frequently relocate with their school-age children, underscoring the need for educational frameworks that support multilingual education (Festman, 2021). The approach not only enriches the learning experience but also prepares students to thrive in a multicultural and multilingual society. Learning dramatic arts could be more effective and yield better academic results when students are taught using a trilingual approach (Fernández, 2024). If a concept is presented in only one language, some learners may struggle to grasp it. However, if the same concept is repeated in two or more languages, such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, and English, it can accommodate even those who learn at a slower pace (D'Souza et al., 2020). Teachers often lack frameworks for scaffolding multilingual performances, for negotiating code-switching as a resource, and for assessing dramatic competencies equitably across languages (Fernández, 2024).

Dramatic arts could serve as a flexible subject that offers students a unique learning environment to engage with multiple languages (Hu & Shu, 2025). There is a critical need to enhance the educational perspective on trilingualism (isiXhosa, isiZulu, and English) in Grade 11 Dramatic Arts, which may serve as a tool for socialisation and as a core subject (Chiblow & Meighan, 2022).

The following research guided the study:

How can trilingual perspectives influence teaching practices and learner engagement in the education of grade 11 dramatic arts?

2. Literature review

Human beings possess a unique capability within the natural world, the ability to utilise language as a powerful communicative tool. The capacity enables them to navigate and enhance the educational space effectively, ultimately fostering positive academic outcomes (Chiblow & Meighan, 2022). Conversely, when teaching spans more than two languages, it can facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter, leading to improved academic results (Festman, 2021). Furthermore, learners exposed to instruction in multiple languages are likely to engage their critical thinking skills more effectively, enhancing their cognitive abilities and academic success (Nykporets et al., 2024).

Recent research indicated that more varied and less predictable language environments encourage bilingual infants to explore more actively, as they tend to seek out new information (Festman, 2021). In an eye-tracking study conducted by (D'Souza et al., 2020), 51 monolingual and 51 bilingual infants participated in several experiments. The findings highlighted that bilingual infants displayed heightened exploratory behaviour. They disengaged from familiar visual stimuli more quickly, focused on new ones, and switched their attention between them more frequently. As society progresses, so too may be the languages and methods used for teaching and learning of dramatic arts.

2.1. Language use, code-switching and identity in performing arts classrooms

Dramatic arts are a highly recognised subject that involves practical performance. In these performances, language plays a key role. The use of code-switching and elements of cultural natural performance might be enhanced by incorporating more than two languages, effectively conveying the intended message (Troxler et al., 2022). One study found that code-switching—alternating between languages such as English, Spanish, and Mandarin—serves as a performative tool that mirrors dramatic techniques, such as voice modulation and character shifts (Grutman, 2024). The findings indicated that practices in multilingual performing arts help students cultivate empathy and inclusivity (Hird et al., 2025). Understanding how trilingual language skills influence creative processes, classroom interactions, and curriculum outcomes can reveal both the opportunities and challenges specific to arts education.

3. Theoretical framework

The current study adopted the translanguaging theory to enhance the pedagogical approach and the multiple curriculum design in teaching dramatic arts (Liu & Fang, 2022). Translanguaging pedagogies, as outlined, encourage the use of fluent language in teaching dramatic arts activities such as tableau and forum theatre (Stavrou et al., 2021).

4. Method

The study utilised a qualitative research design (Akotia et al., 2024) to enhance understanding of trilingualism in the dramatic arts, emphasising participants' experiences of creatively managing more than two languages. It aimed to explore how this trilingualism could improve pedagogy in teaching and learning the subject (Stavrou et al., 2021). The qualitative approach focused on answering the critical questions of "why" and "how" trilingualism pedagogy needs to be advanced. The case study enabled an in-depth understanding of trilingualism, capturing data that highlighted the descriptive factors of language practicality in Grade 11 dramatic arts learning.

4.1. Population and sampling

The study focused on students enrolled in dramatic arts in Grades 10 to 12 at the district's only school that offered the subject. A purposive sample of 25 participants was selected for their relevance to advancing trilingualism in a Grade 11 context. The sample comprised students who were proficient in isiXhosa, isiZulu, and English. The approach not only embraced the linguistic diversity of the participants but also encouraged creativity within dramatic arts (Creswell & Inoue, 2025). Utilising a qualitative research framework, the chosen sample size emphasised depth over breadth, facilitating effective data coding and analysis. The purposive sample was strategic, aiming to yield rich insights and diverse perspectives on trilingualism (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The method proved advantageous, offering valuable pedagogical insights to enhance inclusivity in teaching dramatic arts. By concentrating on Grade 11, the research maintained its focus on addressing the relevant research questions effectively while bolstering the credibility and significance of the findings (Poth, 2023).

4.2. Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations were critically important in this current trilingualism study, and the study adhered to principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice per institutional review board standards (Creswell & Inoue, 2025). Informed consent was obtained from all 25 Grade 11 students and their guardians, detailing voluntary participation, that there were no risks or emotional exposure in drama reflections, and that there were no benefits whatsoever, but only for academic purposes. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage if needed (Poth, 2023).

4.3. Data collection

The data collection method for the current study involved semi-structured interviews, incorporating both open and closed questions. This approach was chosen to gain a thorough understanding of the trilingual pedagogies applied in teaching drama to grade 11 students. The insights gathered from these interviews facilitated the identification of coded themes and patterns. While the qualitative data from open-ended questions provided rich narratives, the closed questions enabled the creation of graphs summarising quantifiable insights. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in person, enabling a more interactive and engaging data collection process (Creswell & Inoue, 2025).

4.4. Data treatment and analysis

The data collected from semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis to explore the educational perspectives on trilingualism in Grade 11 dramatic arts at a specific school. By utilising open-ended questions, qualitative data were thematically mapped, yielding clear visual interpretations that illuminate the complexities of this pedagogical approach (Poth, 2023). The analytical framework revealed a deeper understanding of the necessity to enhance trilingual pedagogy in the context of teaching dramatic arts. Initial coding emphasised the identification of recurring ideas and concepts that reflect the perspectives driven by trilingualism among Grade 11 students engaged in dramatic arts. Following Creswell & Inoue's (2025) guidance on development and opportunity creation, thematic maps were crafted.

5. Findings and discussions

Figure 1. Demographic Data.

Criteria	Students	Frequency
Gender	Male	9
	Females	16
Age	15 Years to 17 Years	18
	18 Years and Above	7
Pseudonyms for interview participants	YY1, YY2, YY3, YY4, YY5, YY6, YY7, YY8, YY9, YY10, YY11, YY12, YY13, YY14, YY15, YY16, YY17, YY18, YY19, YY20, YY21, YY22, YY23, YY24, YY25	25

The case study employed purposive sampling, selecting 25 grade 11 dramatic arts students from one school who had enrolled in the subject from grades 10 to 12. There were 9 males and 16 females aged 15 to 17 years, while those aged 18 years and above were 7. They were given pseudonyms from YY1 to YY25. The study was from three schools offering dramatic arts from Grades 10 to 12.

To answer the first research question, first theme and first sub-theme, some of the participants responded by saying:

Participant YY2: *“When we do our dramatic arts rehearsals, we use isiXhosa, isiZulu and English, and it feels good and easier”.*

Participant YY4: *“When our teacher allowed us to use our home language rather than English, is the day I was able to express my roles with meaning, and it felt so true.”*

Participant YY7: *“In the use of my isiXhosa rather than English was that I could express my cultural role play in a clear and meaningful way as if it were real real-life expression.”*

Participant YY12: *“When I learn a concept in more than two languages, it makes me understand the concept better than when only one teaching language is used”.*

Participant YY15: *“I wish the trilingual teaching could be enhanced, as our teacher*

explained clearly in the languages he used”.

Participant YY20: *“It felt so easy, and I was comfortable even learn other languages with more ease.”*

Participant YY22: *“I wish to continue using more than two languages even if we are writing Examinations.”*

The findings from the current study, which highlighted the need for trilingualism as expressed by participants (YY2, YY4, YY12, YY15, YY20 and YY22), highlight the positive aspects of rehearsals, the use of home language, and learning a concept in more than two languages. The meaningful approach provided by using the home language enhanced the comfort level of learning. This is supported by research conducted by Hu et al. (2025), Nykyporets (2024), Chiblow et al. (2022), and Festman et al. (2021).

To answer the second theme and the second sub-theme

Figure 2. Trilingual Needs in Teaching Grade 11 Dramatic Arts.

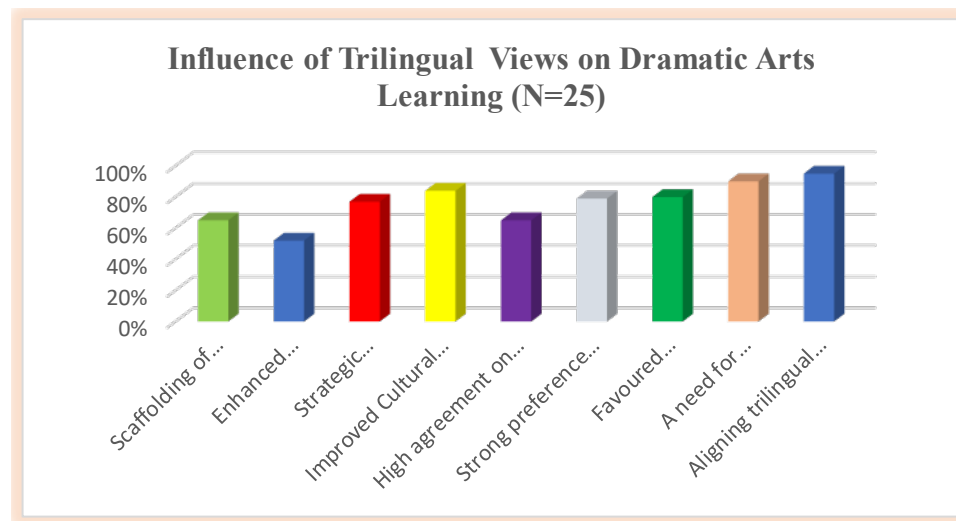


Figure 2: Presents data collected (N=25) participants reporting, Scaffolding of Multilingual Techniques 65%, Enhanced Participation & Motivation 52%, Strategic Integrating Relevant Resources 77%, Improved Cultural Expression 84%, High agreement on code-switching benefits during rehearsals 65%, Strong preference for trilingual methods 79%, Favoured multilingual enjoyment in arts 80%, A need for curriculum and resource integration 90%, Aligning trilingual methods with grade 11 syllabi, despite challenges 95%. The research findings align with the theoretical framework, which argues that translanguaging theory enhances the pedagogical approach and the multiple curriculum design in teaching (Liu & Fang, 2022). The findings are in agreement that code switching has benefits in learning, as was expressed by (Grutman, 2024). Additionally, cultural benefits were reported, including scaffolding of multilingual teaching, in line with the findings of D’Souza et al. (2020), Youdel et al. (2020), Susiawati et al. (2025), and Hird et al. (2025).

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The current study concluded that there is a significant need to promote trilingualism in the teaching of Grade 11 dramatic arts, as it enhances conceptual understanding when utilised effectively. The study observed trilingual practices in isiXhosa, isiZulu, and English during rehearsals. In conclusion, trilingualism fosters meaningful learning, motivation, and cultural relevance, connecting home languages with academic performance.

The study recommends integrating scaffolding and enhancing code-switching within the dramatic arts syllabus, prioritising teaching resources structured in a multilingual format. Additionally, it suggests advanced pedagogical training for teachers, including resources aligned with cultural material, and emphasises the importance of informed recommendations for the use of trilingual strategies. Furthermore, the study calls for a longitudinal investigation to develop a comprehensive tool for evaluating trilingual resources, their application in assessments and examinations, and to inform curricular policies based on trilingual pedagogy.

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