
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Paradox of Teaching English as "Home Language" in South Africa : A Decolonial take

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| ABSTRACT

The South African national curriculum mandates that all learners study at least one home language, selected from the country's 11 official languages. The policy is intended to promote linguistic equity and affirm cultural identity in the post-apartheid era by supporting a language that learners speak regularly at home. However, in practice, some students opt to study English as their home language, even though it is not the primary language spoken in their homes. This creates a paradoxical situation where the label "home language" inaccurately represents their actual linguistic environment culminating in students being taught and assessed at a level intended for first-language speakers, despite having only limited proficiency in English. Therefore, in this paper I reflect on the pedagogical difficulties and successes that I have encountered as an educator for English Home language in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. This I do by employing a decolonial framework underpinned by decolonial love as decoloniality, and a living theory methodology with action-reflection cycles. One key finding is the difficulty of reconciling the demands of a standardised curriculum with the linguistic diversity of South African students. Ultimately, the paper advocates for a shift away from uncritically imposed Western models toward more adaptive, context-sensitive practices to improve educational outcomes in South Africa's heterogeneous classrooms. The argument challenges the continued dominance of Eurocentric methodologies which were developed for monolingual Western contexts and often prove mismatched with South Africa's complex multilingual classrooms.

| KEYWORDS

Action-reflection, English Home Language, Decolonial love, South Africa, Teaching Practices, Linguistic Diversity

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Introduction

The colonial history of South Africa left behind a linguistic hierarchy that privileged English and Afrikaans while suppressing African languages. As such some parents feel that the best pathway for their children to succeed is by enrolling their children for English Home language. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) defines Home Language as the language that a learner acquires first (Department of Basic Education, 2011), also referred to as the "native language," "mother tongue," or "L1." However a considerable proportion of children studying English Home language in South African schools are actually second or third English language speakers (Kinzler et al., 2012). This prompts one to question the reasons for the preference of English Home Language instead of the actual mother tongue.

According to Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, (2018, p. 121–122) the preference for English as a home language can be understood in the context of Linguistic imperialism which favours;

one language over others in ways that parallel societal structuring through racism, sexism and class . . . [and] privilege[s] users of the standard forms of the dominant language, which represent[s] convertible linguistic capital.

In affirmation, Meighan (2023) attests that linguistic imperialism reinforces a racialised linguistic hierarchy and promotes a deficit-based view that frames English as a neutral and practical sociocultural tool, while marginalising speakers of other, less dominant languages. Therefore, linguistic imperialism operates through political, economic and cultural mechanisms that reinforce the hegemony of English, positioning it as a prerequisite for social mobility, education and global participation (Chaka & Ndlangamandla, 2022). I extend the notion of linguistic imperialism by arguing that this form of imperialism has a psychological impact whereby individuals internalise the superiority of English and develop negative attitudes toward their mother tongues. Thus, they opt to study English Home language despite the challenges they face with the subject evident in poor learner performance in both language and literacy.

South Africa's education system has long grappled with the challenge of poor learner performance in language and literacy, as evidenced by both national and international assessments (PIRLS, 2011). Thus various recommendations have been made to improve language teaching and learning. As an illustration, the CAPS document (DBE, 2011a) advocates for English language teaching methodologies such as communicative language teaching and text-based approaches, which are often imported from better-resourced, Western contexts. The importation of such methodologies without consideration of local linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic realities risks reinforcing educational inequalities by ignoring the specific needs of South African learners, many of whom navigate multilingual environments and systemic resource disparities. For instance, Grosfoguel (2010), when discussing coloniality, claims that:

By breaking the link between the subject of enunciation and the ethnic/racial/sexual/gender/epistemic place, Western philosophy and science manage to create a myth about a real universal knowledge that masks, that is, conceals not only the speaker but also the epistemic, geo and body-political place of the structures of colonial power/knowledge from which the subject speaks. (p. 387)

Such a separation has adopted a homogeneous epistemology on language teaching and learning (Ubaque-Casallas, 2021) that has even reached the research-based dimension. The teaching methods consequent of this separation are not suited to the realities of South African classrooms, where resource constraints, linguistic diversity, and socio-economic challenges are prevalent. This misalignment between policy and practice raises critical questions about the effectiveness of current language teaching strategies in achieving the desired outcomes.

Furthermore, the definition of *Home Language* (HL) within the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) adds another layer of complexity. The NCS defines HL as "the language that a learner acquires first" (Department of Basic Education, 2011), also referred to as the "native language," "mother tongue," or "L1." However, in many South African schools, the HL subject offered may not align with the learner's actual first language due to the country's linguistic diversity and multilingualism. This discrepancy between policy definitions and classroom realities further complicates the implementation of language education strategies.

Given this backdrop, this study seeks to provide a reflective and critical account of teaching EHL in South Africa in such a unique context. I will draw on personal teaching experiences in order to highlight effective practices, challenges and the strategies employed to navigate systemic issues. This exploration will also highlight the importance of contextually responsive teaching approaches to enhance learner outcomes.

Literature Review

Historicising Language Teaching in South Africa

Historically, the imposition of the English language can be traced to the legacy of language discrimination rooted in apartheid-era policies, particularly the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Ramoupi, 2014). This legislation mandated that black learners receive instruction in their mother tongues only during the early grades, transitioning to English or Afrikaans as they progressed through their education (Chaka & Ndlangamandla, 2022). This transitional approach undermined the educational potential of students who were familiar with indigenous languages and perpetuated a hierarchy that privileged English and Afrikaans over African languages (Mabaso-Nkuna et al., 2024). This historical context has left a lasting impact on the perceptions of language value within the South African educational framework and broader society. Particularly, the assertion that the English language is the gateway for success.

The prioritisation of English and Afrikaans was exacerbated by language policies that sidelined African languages (Chaka & Ndlangamandla, 2022). In affirmation, Ramoupi (2014) discusses how, during apartheid, the South African government implemented language policies that favoured English and Afrikaans, systematically marginalising indigenous African languages. English came to be seen as a language of prestige and superiority due to its association with colonial powers (Mabaso-Nkuna, 2024). During and after colonisation, English was positioned as the language of authority, education, and upward mobility, while African languages were often marginalized (Ramoupi, 2014). As a result of this colonial legacy, African parents continue to prefer that their children study English as a Home Language. This preference is often rooted in the belief that English provides greater access to social and economic opportunities, even when it is not the child's first language.

Ramoupi (2014) observed that the post-apartheid era has seen a pretence of inclusivity regarding African languages in educational curricula. Although these languages are included in the official policy framework, the implementation is often poor, resulting in the perception that African languages are secondary and lack real institutional support within the educational system (Ramoupi, 2014). They do not have the benefits reaped by English and Afrikaans. Mabaso-Nkuna (2024) highlights for example how English and Afrikaans speaking learners in South Africa are currently able to complete their entire schooling in their mother tongue, while speakers of African languages are less fortunate.

Despite the challenges African students face with the English language, it continues to be positioned as the language with more advantages. Firstly, English serves as a lingua franca in many urban settings but is often a second or third language for the majority of learners, which poses significant challenges in educational settings (Singh, 2024). Mabaso-Nkuna (2024) bemoans how English in South Africa is the dominant medium of instruction in education, despite being the mother tongue of only 8.2% of the population. This situation has resulted in some students continuing to study English as a Home Language throughout their basic education, despite not being native English speakers (Kinzler et al., 2012). In many cases, these learners speak other languages at home and within their communities.

The current South African curriculum has been criticised for prioritising the Western literary canon and perspectives while marginalising local voices and indigenous knowledge systems (Chaka & Ndlangamandla, 2022). This coloniality of language not only perpetuates historical injustices but also limits the potential for a more equitable and representative educational experience for students. I concur with Bell hooks (1995) that the issue is not the English language itself, but rather how it has been used by colonial and postcolonial systems to assert dominance. Bell hooks (1995, p. 296) elaborates, "it is not the English language that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, and colonise". Thus, in my teaching of English Home Language, I approached it from a standpoint of decolonial love, one that respects and affirms the linguistic heritage of students in South Africa rather than shaming or diminishing it. My aim was to create a learning environment where students could engage with English without feeling that their own languages and identities were inferior or irrelevant.

The Rationale Behind Enrolling Students in Home Language-Oriented Schools

The post-1994 democratically elected South African government, through its policies that focus on transformation, inclusion, recognition and redress, demands that schools become integrated (Singh, 2024). As such, all schools, including previously white-only schools, are required to comply with instituting inclusive policies and practices (Singh, 2024). The opening of whites-only schools to non-white learners led to an influx of students to schools that offer English as a home language.

English home language is associated with previously advantaged schools. As such, parents of fixate on (educational) opportunities that will allow their children to have lucrative futures. Ohikware (2013, p. 1) cited in Singh 2024 laments that:

[M]any parents of colour send their children to exclusive, predominantly white schools in an attempt to give their kids a 'ticket to upward mobility' ... but these well-resourced institutions can fall short at nurturing minority students emotionally and intellectually.

I agree with the view that the trend of parents of colour enrolling their children in well-resourced, predominantly white schools offering English as a Home Language has a dual disadvantage. Firstly, pedagogically, the Home Language curriculum assumes native-like proficiency, which many students lack, risking cognitive disengagement (Mtshali & Mashiya, 2022). Second, culturally, the marginalization of African languages and epistemologies reinforces colonial hierarchies of knowledge (wa Thiong'o, 1981). This calls into question whether these institutions truly serve African students' best interests or merely perpetuate inherited systems of exclusion under the guise of opportunity.

The preference for English Home Language can also be understood through the lens of linguistic imperialism, which involves privileging one language over others in a way that mirrors broader patterns of inequality, such as racism, sexism, and classism (Meighan, 2023). According to Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (2018), this system advantages those who speak the standard dominant language, English in this case, because it is treated as valuable and convertible linguistic capital. This means that English proficiency, particularly in its standardised forms, becomes a gateway to educational and economic opportunities, while speakers of other languages are often marginalised within the system.

In affirmation, Meighan (2023) attests that linguistic imperialism reinforces a racialised linguistic hierarchy and promotes a deficit-based view that frames English as a neutral and practical sociocultural tool, while marginalising speakers of other, less dominant languages. Accordingly, learning the difficult variant of English offered in the country is therefore often actively promoted, normalised, and internalised by learners and parents alike as the language to speak, the language of "prestige," "progress," or "civility" at the expense of alternative, "lesser" languages (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2018). In addition (Grillo, 2009, p. 174) cited in Meighan (2023) blames policies of post-colonial states for enabling dominant language groups to maintain nation-state power and hegemony at the expense of Indigenous and minoritised language communities, where "subordinate languages are despised languages".

A Decolonial Framework and Living Theory Methodology

The paper builds on a decolonial framework that considers basic education in the so-called "postcolonial situations" as one site of many to which the decolonial project can be advanced. There is an urgent need for decolonisation due to the persistent and pervasive coloniality project that continues to reproduce the varied inequalities and injustices that exist in South Africa's basic Education (Maluleka, 2021). Coloniality has facilitated a deficit-based view that frames English as the linguistic pathway to success leading to people opting to study English as a home language instead of their actual home languages.

It is important to differentiate colonialism from coloniality. McKinney and Christie (2021) make the useful conceptual distinction between colonialism and coloniality, colonialism being a political and economic relationship in which the sovereignty of a nation or people rests on the power of another nation and the latter being the long standing patterns of power that emerge as a result of colonialism. In affirmation, Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 243) emphasises that coloniality:

... survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self- image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects, we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.

In affirmation, Viswanathan (1988) observes that colonisers have realised that colonising the mind is better than colonising the body and by so doing, colonial education became a key mechanism for perpetuating the objectives of colonialism. It is noteworthy that coloniality and linguistic imperialism are salient in schools as they are a means to colonise the mind. Althusser (1971) speaks about schools as ideological apparatuses of the state where these institutions can subvert the subaltern. The implications of this are damaging to indigenous language, culture and heritage as wa Thiong'o (1981, p.3) astutely notes that:

Colonialism detonated a 'cultural bomb' that almost annihilated people's belief in their language, heritage and environment and made them regard their own cultural background as a wasteland of non-achievement that had to be left behind as quickly as possible.

The above quote by wa Thiong'o (1981) speaks to the deep psychological and social impact of linguistic and cultural marginalisation. It reflects how individuals, particularly learners in post-colonial contexts, are often led to believe that their own heritage, especially their home language and cultural practices are inferior, outdated or even shameful. This mindset does not emerge naturally; it is the result of systemic privileging of English and other colonial languages in education, media and economic opportunities.

The research method that informs this paper is the Living Theory methodology with "action-reflection cycles" (Whitehead 2008, p. 107). At the heart of Whitehead (2008) 's approach is the question: "How do I improve what I am doing?". This inquiry initiated a cycle where I first identified a concern by recognising areas where my current approach did not align with my values or desired outcomes. Next, I imagined possible improvements by envisioning strategies or changes that could address these concerns (Whitehead, 2008). Once I conceptualised potential solutions, I acted by implementing these strategies in my teaching practices. Whitehead (2008) recommends that after acting, it is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes by assessing their

impact and gathering evidence. Finally, based on this evaluation, I modified and refined my strategies to better align with my decolonial values and goals, ensuring continuous growth and improvement. This method enabled me to question and evaluate my teaching methods to align my practices more closely with my values and as a decolonial researcher.

I concur with (Maluleka, 2021, p. 7) in asserting that such a disciplined process or activity needs to be informed by decolonial love which requires a complete change in our way of seeing and interacting with the self, each other, and the world around us. One way of doing so is by decolonising the self. Matahela and Rensburg (2023) concur that decolonization begins with individual awareness and acknowledgment of internalised colonial mindsets. Self-reflection is critical to this exercise as it allows one to identify aspects beliefs, behaviours and attitudes influenced by colonial narratives (Matahela & Rensburg, 2023). In this reflection, It occurred to me that my choice to choose to teach English language over other subjects was also shaped by the belief on the superiority associated with the English language. Moreover, the process of reflection made it clear to me that I could be complicit in utilising western pedagogies in teaching English language. This critical scholarly exercise informed by compassion, love, care, solidarity and never-ending self-reflection and self-critique enabled me to rethink my pedagogical practices.

Reflections of my Pedagogical Practices

Before reflecting on the pedagogical difficulties and successes, it is worth stating that this paper emerges from my lived experiences as an English Home Language educator in Mthatha, South Africa. Mthatha is the administrative centre of the King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality (KSDM). KSDM is part of the OR Tambo District Municipality (ORTDM) in the Eastern Cape Province (EC). Pemunta and Tabenyang (2020) add that based on poverty measures, ORTDM, where Mthatha is located, is the poorest district in EC with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.45 and the largest share of the provincial poverty gap. The high poverty levels in ORTDM often translate to limited exposure to English outside the classroom. In communities where English is not used in everyday interactions, learners are unlikely to develop the language proficiency needed to excel in EHL.

The classroom I occupy daily is shaped not only by curriculum demands and assessment policies, but by complex histories of language, identity and power. English, as a subject and medium of instruction remains deeply tied to colonial legacies (Grillo, 2009; Meighan, 2023; wa Thiong'o, 1981). As a scholar, I have written and debated against coloniality in post-independence African countries. Therefore, my teaching practice as an English Home language educator has always been situated at a difficult intersection. The difficult intersection comes from delivering a language that carries cultural prestige and symbolic capital (Ntombela, 2020), while simultaneously challenging the erasure of indigenous languages and epistemologies.

I balance this intersection by teaching from a place of love, the love that in as much as I am teaching a colonial language, I do it without undermining the diverse cultural heritage that students bring to the classroom. This is where the concept of decolonial love becomes vital. Teaching from a place of decolonial love means recognising and validating the full humanity, histories, and knowledges of students who have been shaped by colonial violence (Maluleka, 2021). It means approaching the classroom not simply as a site of instruction, but as a space of care, repair and resistance. In practical terms, this has involved shifting from a deficit mindset to an asset-based one encouraging students to draw on their lived experiences to interpret texts.

Working through these tensions has required ongoing cycles of **action and reflection**. I have found that traditional lesson planning is insufficient for this work. Instead, I have had to become a reflective practitioner, constantly revisiting my assumptions, methods, and goals. For instance, after noticing that learners were struggling to understand rhetorical devices in prescribed texts, I introduced figures of speech utilising poems by South African poets such as Nontsizi Mgqwetho. As an illustration, in teaching metaphors, symbolism and allusion, I utilised Mgqwetho (2007, p. 103)'s poem

You wear red blankets in God's very house,
you're Christians by day, hyenas by night;
the pastor, the shepherd of God's own flock,
scurries past you without a nod.

The metaphor "Hyenas by night" appeals to traditional African belief systems in which animals often symbolise human traits and moral lessons. This made it easy for students to understand the metaphoric resemblance of hypocrites to predators who hide behind piety. Most of the students studying English home language in my class are of Xhosa descent. Thus, I introduced the concept of symbolism utilising a poem referring blanket commonly linked to "**ulwaluko**" (traditional male initiation) ceremony

which is a significant aspect of isixhosa culture. I noticed more participation and engagement from students as a consequence of that.

The action-reflection cycles are deeply aligned with decolonial thinking. They reject fixed models of knowledge delivery and instead emphasise learning as a dynamic, relational, and context-bound process.

In addition, I believe that my work as an English Home Language educator in Mthatha has become a site of both tension and possibility. My engagement with ideas like coloniallingualism, decolonial love, and reflective practice, enabled me to reframe my classroom as a space where healing and critical consciousness can emerge. This work is unfinished, often messy and at times overwhelming yet necessary because if education is to be truly transformative, it must be rooted not only in knowledge but in justice and love.

I have also noticed from years of teaching English Home Language (EHL) in Mthatha that most of the students in my classes have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. The majority of students I taught over the years admitted that English is not spoken at home and Mthatha being a rural town, it is not used in the communities either. Thus, the engagement the students I teach is often restricted to formal school settings, where they are expected to perform at the level of English first language speakers. This creates a disconnect between learners' lived linguistic realities and the expectations embedded in the EHL curriculum, which often assumes a high degree of fluency and background exposure.

Thus, the challenges I encountered teaching English Home Language in Mthatha from **decolonial perspective** are not only practical problems but also relational. I observed that teaching English in such a context requires "**decolonial love**" which is a practice of care, humility, and commitment to seeing the full humanity and intelligence of learners who are navigating an education system not built for them. Accordingly, in line with the tenets of Decolonial love I appreciated the need to honour the cultural knowledge students already hold. In this view, I understood that students are not empty vessels to be filled with English without recognising the linguistic resources they already have.

Moreover, while teaching English Home Language (EHL) in Mthatha, I also came to understand that not all of our students are of South African descent. Some are immigrants or children of immigrants who are placed in the English Home Language stream in South African schools. This is often due to policy options that mandate students to study two languages. In most schools English is offered as both Home language and First Additional language. Thus students either choose another official language in South Africa and then English as either first additional language or home language. So immigrants find it difficult to choose a language not English because their actual home languages are not formally supported in the educational system. Thus they choose English home language. As a result, the term "home language" becomes a technical label rather than a reflection of actual linguistic background.

This misalignment can be incredibly disorienting for immigrant learners. They are expected to master the complexities of English at a level meant for those who use it daily, all while adjusting to a new country, culture, and often a new schooling system. These learners may not only face language barriers but also social exclusion, xenophobia, or cultural misunderstanding, factors that can make learning even more difficult (Mabvira, 2024). When we teach with decolonial love, we slow down and take the time to understand each learner's background and story. This practice involves not only compassion but a commitment to justice (Maluleka, 2021). This is achieved by refusing to treat some learners as outsiders or as burdens, and instead actively creating classroom spaces where their experiences are acknowledged and validated.

Reflection on the method of teaching and learning

As part of my engagement with decolonial love as decoloniality and a living theory methodology with action-reflection cycles, I embarked on a critical action-reflection process to examine my own approaches to teaching and learning English Home Language in South Africa. This involved an ongoing process of questioning how my practices either reinforced or resisted colonial legacies in education, and intentionally seeking ways to honour students' linguistic and cultural identities within the classroom.

Consequently, I questioned many things such as the pedagogical order which positions children to sit while learning from a teacher who stands in the front. This is an opposite of the African style where children learn through socialisation and acculturation. I concur with Akinmolayan et al. (2024) that such a pedagogical order prepares the African child's mindset to be

a second-class citizen, listener, submissive, subjective and serve the supremacy of a certain class, culture and colour. Accordingly, I transformed my classroom's physical and epistemological architecture. The traditional front-facing rows were replaced with circular, interactive seating arrangements. This structural shift served as both metaphor and methodology: by eliminating the "front" of the classroom, I physically dismantled the hierarchy that conditions learners to be submissive second-class citizens of knowledge. The new configuration facilitated eye-level dialogue, collective knowledge construction, and constant repositioning of power.

Through my action-reflection cycles, I became more aware of the limitations I faced, both personally and systemically. These cycles helped me to pause and reflect critically, but they also revealed the uncomfortable truth that there were situations where my ability to make meaningful change was minimal. As an illustration, I noticed that there were aspects I could not change, as they were guided by institutional policy and others were rigidly stipulated by the Department of Education's policies. Therefore, the more I engaged, the more I realised that insight does not always translate into action, especially when faced with deeply rooted barriers. This was amplified as I realised my consensus with Akinmolayan et al. (2024) that the confinement of students within a classroom confines their thinking ability to be framed within the content syllabus of the Western system. I would have preferred to conduct some of my English classes outside the traditional classroom setting, in harmony with nature, following African ways of knowing and being. Teaching in natural environments aligns with indigenous pedagogies that value the land as a teacher and embrace learning as a holistic, embodied experience (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). However, the structure of the school day, fixed timetables, and assumptions about what "proper" learning looks like all stood in the way.

The assumptions about what "proper" learning looks like in South Africa, like in many other parts of the world, tend to follow a Western paradigm that emphasizes individual achievement, competition, and standardized assessment (Xulu-Gama & Hadebe, 2022). This approach often sidelines alternative ways of knowing and learning that are more collective, relational and rooted in local cultural contexts. As a result, learners and educators who seek to engage in more communal, context-responsive, or experiential learning often find themselves at odds with the system. Sometimes I found the constraints quite frustrating as they clashed with my commitment inspired by decolonial love to create education that is both meaningful and culturally affirming.

Mthimkhulu (2024) proposes traditional African educational practices, encapsulated by concepts such as "Ubuntu-gogy," which promote a learner-centered approach that values collective learning and community interaction. This pedagogical construct emphasizes relationality and interconnectedness, nurturing a sense of belonging and active participation among learners. Ubuntu-gogy holds that students thrive in environments that encourage dialogue, collaboration, and mutual support, conditions often absent in Western classroom designs (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). I concur with the view that when education is centred around socialization, students are not merely recipients of knowledge but co-creators in the learning process.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper reflected on my personal journey of teaching English Home Language in South Africa. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) defines HL as "the language that a learner acquires first" (Department of Basic Education, 2011), also referred to as the "native language," "mother tongue," or "L1." However a considerable proportion of students studying English Home language in South African schools are actually second or third English language speakers. I have traced preference for English Home language to Linguistic imperialism which favours "one language over others in ways that parallel societal structuring through racism, sexism and class (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2018 pp. 121–122).

Therefore, I employed a decolonial framework grounded in the ethic of decolonial love and explored it through a living theory methodology. I used ongoing action-reflection cycles to understand my role not only as an educator of language, but also as a witness to the legacy of coloniality in the classroom, and a participant in efforts to disrupt it. This journey has involved successes, tensions and moments of discomfort. These have contributed to my evolving theory of practice.

One of the key successes in applying a decolonial approach has been creating more inclusive and affirming spaces where learners' home languages, cultural references and lived experiences are welcomed into the English classroom. Rather than treating English as a neutral or superior language, I have worked to situate it within the histories of power, while simultaneously inviting learners to reshape and claim it on their own terms. Learners responded with greater engagement when lessons reflected their social realities, and when their voices were treated as valid and valuable.

However, the process has not been without challenges. At times, I felt constrained by policy and curriculum demands that left little room for context-specific approaches or alternative knowledges. One of the major challenges is the issue of standardised

assessments. I noticed that the standardised assessments as stipulated in the programme of assessment and Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) do not cater for the pace needed and time required when teaching students studying a home language yet they are not English First language speakers. I believe the standardised assessments assume a one size fits all approach that does not take into account the linguistic diversity and difficulties experienced by students who are studying English as a home language yet they are not English first language speakers. Thus, I had to take measures to bridge the gap between my teaching practices and the realities of the students in my classes. In so doing I improved my teaching practices which evidently improved learner performance.

The living theory methodology, with its iterative cycles of action and reflection, allowed me to remain responsive to both successes and setbacks. It created space for honesty, adaptation and self-awareness. Through reflective analysis, I was able to track my growth, interrogate assumptions, and refine my practice in real time. This process itself became a form of decolonial engagement, as it disrupted fixed notions of knowledge and expertise.

One of the deeper insights that emerged was the role of decolonial love. I did not undertake this as sentimentality, but as an ethical stance that involved care, relationality and solidarity. This stance guided me to prioritise dignity over discipline, connection over control, and dialogue over correction. Teaching English from this position became less about transmitting content and more about nurturing transformation. I was nurturing transformation in both myself and my students.

In light of the above, I recommend that schools and policy makers allow more flexibility in curriculum implementation, particularly when it comes to language use and literary content. Assessments need to reflect the linguistic diversity and realities of South African classrooms, and policies must shift to value the kinds of transformation that may not be immediately measurable, but are deeply impactful over time.

A major challenge remains the deeply entrenched perception that English is the sole language of success, which continues to marginalise African languages in education. On a broader scale, decolonising English teaching demands a cultural shift in how society perceives African languages. Media, government, and corporate sectors must actively promote indigenous languages in high-status domains such as publishing, broadcasting and technology to dismantle the stigma that they are inferior to English.

Furthermore, I argue that there is an urgent need for English Home Language teachers to reimagine their pedagogical approaches to better align with the linguistic realities of their students. Traditional methods, which assume fluency and cultural familiarity with English, often fail to engage learners who struggle with comprehension and expression. Teachers must adopt strategies that bridge the gap between students' existing linguistic knowledge and the demands of the curriculum. This includes incorporating scaffolding instruction and using culturally relevant materials to make lessons more accessible and meaningful.

In conclusion, teaching English through a decolonial framework supported by a living theory methodology has been a transformative but complex process. It has required unlearning, reimagining and vulnerability. Yet, it has also brought moments of deep connection, learner empowerment and pedagogical clarity. As I continue this journey, I remain committed to grounding my teaching in care, context and critical hope, knowing that decolonial education is not a destination, but a continuous process of becoming.

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