English-Medium Instruction AndCultural Identity: A Study Of Black South African University Students

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ABSTRACT

Education typically involves students learning from the perspective of his or her own culture. However, learning in a non-primary language, the student is faced with the task of learning new information and acquiring the symbolic elements of a different ethnolinguistic community. In the South African university context, Black students are challenged to maintain their heritage cultural identity without the support of their community, giving rise to cultural conflict with the receiving culture. Such cultural conflict can be a source of stress and lead to greater feelings of marginalization and a lower sense of academic self-efficacy. This study provides insight into how Black South African university students negotiate cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context and how these findings influence the student's academic self-efficacy.

Keywords: *English-medium instruction, cultural identity, self-efficacy, Africa, university students*

I.   Introduction

As globalization and the prominence of English as the lingua franca of international commerce increases, English-medium instruction (EMI) at the university level has responded to demands from businesses and governments to remain competitive (Adamchik et al., 2019; Aizawa& Rose, 2019; Blattès, 2018; Jiang et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018). However, the question of how the cultural identity of university students is influenced by learning in a non-primary language and how cultural identity conflict affects academic self-efficacy and achievement is an area that is under-researched (Boussebaa& Brown, 2017; Sa'd, 2017). Students instructed in non-primary languages often encounter difficulties including hindered ability to explore abstract concepts (Airey et al., 2017; Cankaya, 2017; Chun et al., 2017), lack of academic self-efficacy and motivation (Cankaya, 2017; Chun et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2017), culture loss (Cankaya, 2017), and conflict with national or cultural identity (Sung, 2016; Trofimovich&Turuseva, 2015). Non-cognitive factors related to language of instruction, including academic self-efficacy, motivation, and cultural identity are cited as significant predictors of academic performance and retention in university students (Bandura, 1977; Chang, 2015; Farruggia et al., 2018; Whannell&Whannell, 2015). By examining the experiences of Black South African university students, this study provides insight into how Black South African university students negotiate cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context. Further, this study explores how cultural identity negotiation influences the student's academic self-efficacy and success.

II.   Theoretical Foundation and Research Questions

Cultural Identity Theory

Examining the social context of one's culture as a key factor of identity formation, Collier and colleagues asserted that cultural identity is best described as an emergent, contextual process in which there is a system of shared symbols, norms, and meanings in a particular context (Collier & Powell, 1990; Collier & Thomas, 1988). In this sense, cultural identity refers to identification with, or sense of belonging to, a group based on cultural or subcultural categories including nationality, ethnicity, race, language, age, gender, or religion (Collier & Thomas, 1988). As a communicative process, cultural identities are negotiated within a social context and may be affected by historical events, political conditions, by others, and the situation or site of interaction (Collier, 2005, 2009).

Collier and Thomas (1988) suggested that some aspects of culture are more robust while others are more tenuous and susceptible to change. Changeable features tend to be those that have become irrelevant to the group or that are necessary for the group to adapt due to social, political, economic, and contextual factors. The degree to which the individual's cultural identity negotiation is affected by dissimilar cultural expectations is, in part, influenced by the intensity and salience of the individual's belief in his or her heritage culture (Meca et al., 2018). Within a social context, social, cultural, and political dissimilarities between social groups lead to substantial social inequalities drawn on the distinction between linguistic or cultural behavior (Aristova, 2016).

The distinctions between two or more coexisting cultures may be relatively minor. However, they are vital factors in negotiating one's cultural identity as the degree of convergence to the existing cultural or linguistic norms within a community affects the person's degree of sameness. Commonality of language is a central component of cultural identity formation and negotiation as it connects people within the history, values, and beliefs of the community (Aristova, 2016).

For the university student, identity negotiation is a dialog between achieving interactional goals and satisfying identity-related goals (Adegbola et al., 2018). Students engage in the dual acts of authenticating their self-concepts and adjusting their self-concepts to accommodate others because of the inherent need for interaction. The need for interaction is further motivated by social and economic advantage (Aristova, 2016). Within the EMI context, the student is presented with the challenge of learning in a non-primary language as a requirement to participate in the learning process. Learning in English represents to the student the ascribed beliefs, traits, and values that the language embodies. The secondary culture is reinforced when English language materials, emphasizing Western literature and culture, are preferred, emphasizing the dominance of Western culture and ideology by linking them with English as the language of instruction (Haidar& Fang, 2019). The acquisition of and learning in a non-primary language challenges the student to assess his or her avowed cultural identity beliefs relative to the identity beliefs associated with learning in English and internally negotiate new identity beliefs. The student is presented with a choice to either accept the new identity, reject the new identity, or incorporate the new identity beliefs into an expanded worldview (Collier & Powell, 1990).

Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura's (1978) concept of reciprocal determinism suggests that the way in which individuals interpret the results of their performance informs and alters their environments and self-beliefs, which in turn informs and alters future performance. Pajeres (1996) elaborated, adding that individuals possess a self system comprised of one's cognitive and affective structures. This self system provides a set of subfunctions for perceiving, regulating, and evaluating behavior that result from interplay between the self system and external environmental sources of influence (Pajares, 1996).

The degree to which individuals hold their sense of self-efficacy influences their functioning in the cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional domains (Bandura, 2000, 2006, 2008). In the cognitive realm, Bandura (2008) observed that efficacy beliefs influence the way in which people think and those thoughts influence what actions they choose to pursue, their goals and commitments, and how much effort they are willing to put forth. Thinking in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways influence the individual's efficacy expectation which then has a positive or negative affect on outcome. The individual's awareness of opportunities and obstacles affect motivation. If one sees obstacles as permanent, then one is inclined to give up. On the other hand, if one sees obstacles as challenges to be overcome or opportunities to be embraced, then one is inclined to seek out and employ the necessary skills to meet the challenge. In the emotional domain, a strong sense of self-efficacy means that in the face of setbacks there is the underlying belief in one's ability to rebound. Finally, self-efficacy implies that one has a choice in how a situation is experienced. The individual executes personal agency in the environments he or she chooses and the approach to situations (Bandura, 2008).

In the context of an EMI classroom, internal and external conflicts of identity negotiation combine to influence the student's sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation (Bandura, 1977, 2008). Such cultural conflict can be a source of stress and lead to greater feelings of marginalization and a lower sense of academic self-efficacy. Titzmann and Jugert (2017) examined language use as an acculturation-specific predictor for academic self-efficacy because it required not only linguistic competence in the receiving language, but also sociocultural competence in using language effectively with others. Titzmann and Jugert (2017) concluded that there is a high positive correlation between language mastery and academic self-efficacy. Positive self-efficacy beliefs were reinforced as language mastery improved and the students gained sociocultural knowledge. Similarly, Wang et al. (2018) noted that international students with lower levels of English language skills tend to exhibit higher levels of feelings of discrimination, higher levels of homesickness, and higher levels of anxiety. Additionally, English-language proficiency strongly contributed to international students' social and academic adjustment. The students' adjustment level then influenced their level of academic self-efficacy.

Extant research supports the conclusion that one's identity with a social group is indicative of one's perceived social support from that group (Ahn et al., 2017, Guan & So, 2016). In turn, the support from that social group provides self-efficacy information to the individual in the form of vicarious experience and social persuasion. The potential loss of social support systems, which are central to the sense of identity, or implicit pressure to alter the student's own cultural worldview to fit the receiving culture, often result in heightened stress, lowered self-esteem, and increased tendencies toward depression (Adegbola et al., 2018).

Research Questions

The interpretive cultural approaches of Collier and Thomas' (1988) cultural identity theory and Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory provide the foundation for understanding the communicative process guiding the central research question for this study: How do Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context? Considering the findings, this study explores the secondary question: To what extent does the student's cultural identity negotiation influence academic self-efficacy.

III. Background

Language of Education Policy

Africa's language policy in education has been greatly influenced by its response to apartheid policies and colonialism. In South Africa, the apartheid government implemented measures limiting educational opportunity for the marginalized majority. Segregation and discrimination were achieved through the apportionment of land with strictly enforced mobility laws, and the restriction of education and employment opportunities for the majority non-White population. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 directed the segregation of all educational facilities according to ethnic lines (Bonner et al., 2012; Mekoa, 2018). Indigenous South African languages were considered as mother-tongues or vernaculars, and as such they were deemed unacceptable for teaching and learning in educational institutions (Kola, 2018). Isaac BonganiTabata of the Non-European Unity Movement described Bantu Education as education for barbarism because it was not intended to be intellectual but was deliberately invented as industrial (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). The Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974 dictated that all non-White South African schools would use Afrikaans and English in equal measure as the language of instruction, restricting autochthonous languages to religious instruction, music, and physical education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017).

The post-apartheid constitution declared South Africa a multicultural multilingual society (Constitutional Assembly, 1996). While higher education institutions (HEIs) have been at liberty to apply their own language of instruction policies, African languages have been used minimally in the public universities (Mzangwa&Dede, 2019). Critics argue that this policy prejudices the education system toward Whites who benefited from apartheid as opposed to the disadvantaged Black majority for whom Afrikaans or English may be a third language (Mzangwa&Dede, 2019). As South Africa seeks to expand access to quality education and promote economic growth, language of instruction continues to be a key subject of deliberation (Coyne, 2015; Kaiper, 2018; Kamwangamalu&Tovares, 2016; Mzangwa&Dede, 2019). In response, the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (2020) issued a directive to the nation's public universities reasserting its recognition that "language continues to be a barrier to access and success for many students at South African higher education institutions" (p. 11). HEIs were directed to develop strategies, policies, and implementation plans for promoting multilingualism that include at least two official languages other than the medium of instruction, for development for scholarly discourse as well as official communication. The policy recognizes the de facto status of English as the medium of instruction but encourages the universities to provide a flexible approach in its implementation and to provide necessary support to students for whom English is not his or her primary language (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020).

Born Free Generation

The generation of South Africans born since the fall of apartheid in 1994 have been called the Born Free generation (Kusá, 2018; Maseti, 2018). The Born Frees have grown up in a qualitatively different environment from that of their parents and grandparents who were part of the struggle against apartheid (Maseti, 2018). The phrase was coined to describe the generation marked by the transition from the apartheid system of governance to that of a democratic government who would reap the benefits of the struggle (Maseti, 2018). However, the term seems to be more aspirational than real. With the lack of economic progress, the tensions prevalent in the eras of colonialism and apartheid have been reinvigorated as recently as 2015 with the #RhodesMustFall movement in South Africa's HEIs (Kusá, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Southall, 2019). The outward symbol of the movement was the removal of a statue of John Cecil Rhodes from the campus of the University of Cape Town. However, the movement sought to address deeper challenges than the removal of a statue, including widening socioeconomic inequalities, the expansion of access to higher education, throughput and retention of students, and increased alignment of university offerings with labor market demands (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Southall, 2019).

Religious Background

Unlike Christianity, traditional South African religion has more concern for the reality of the spiritual in this world than the ideal of an afterlife (Grillo et al., 2019). Traditional religion provides ethical guidance to the individual and community, but the greatest goals are "health and long life; prosperity and proper social standing; fertility and offspring" (Grillo et al., 2019, p. 19). Where practiced, the traditional religious practices

of South Africa guide every aspect of community life and form a powerful connection to one's heritage cultural identity. While the religious practices vary from tribe to tribe and sometimes from family to family, the rites and rituals of traditional South African religion are essential to the social structure of the people (Grillo et al., 2019). At the heart of traditional religion in South Africa, is the recognition of the ancestors as the founders and keepers of moral order (Grillo et al., 2019; Sundkler, 2018). Extending beyond remembering or honoring the deceased, ancestor worship in South Africa is the belief that the ancestors continue to be active members of the community. The dead maintain a spiritual connection to living family members and are active in the world of the living, performing the vital functions of guiding, protecting, and chastising their descendants; reinforcing the authority of elders; and representing a spiritual reality beyond death (Chidester, 2012).

When the first Wesleyan missionary, William Shaw, arrived in South Africa in 1823, he planned to build a series of mission stations from Salem, near Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape province to present-day Durban in Kwa Zulu Natal province (Sundkler, 2018). Since that time, the growth of the Christian church in South Africa has placed Christianity in conflict with traditional South African religion. Chidester (2012) goes so far as to suggest that the concept of religion did not exist in pre-colonial South Africa. Rather, it was created as a response to the Christian missionary who declared the African belief system as superstition.

Methods

This research followed a transcendental phenomenological approach to understanding how Black South African university students experience cultural identity in a setting where English is the medium instruction. The first-hand narrative of the participants in their unique context provides a perspective of cultural identity negotiation from which conjoint and recurring themes were drawn.

Setting

To maximize the diversity of participants and the range of information, the setting for this study was all South African HEIs that have had at least one English-medium degree program spanning the previous four years. Ten participants representing eight different disciplines were selected from eight universities, seven public and one private.

Participants

Maximum variation sampling was employed based on age and primary language group in order to produce a diversity of perspectives, providing an understanding of the essence of the experience. All participants were South African citizens and were enrolled in a degree program at a public South African university in which English is the medium of instruction at the time of their participation. Participants included seven male and three female participants between the ages of 20 and 30 years old. Three participants were Northern Sotho, three were Swazi, two were Zulu, and two were Xhosa. Three of the languages represented in this study, isiXhosa, isiZulu, and siSwati, are part of the Nguni family of languages, a subgroup of the Bantu language group. Sepedi and its various dialects are in the Sotho-Tswana subgroup of the Bantu language group. These two language groups are the primary language of 90.86% of the Black South African population (Statistics South Africa, n.d.). Participants came from various backgrounds, each with a unique family and socioeconomic history, and worldviews that provide the contextual factors formative to the students' diverse insights into the phenomenon. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. Table 1 describes the demographic data for each participant.

Data Collection

The data for this research was based on 10 in-depth individual interviews conducted by the author using a semi-structured interview guide with extemporaneous follow-up and probing questions. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. In the 45-to-90-minute interviews the participants were asked to describe their experience of learning in an English-medium instruction context. The questions were designed to establish how the participant experienced cultural identity in general, whether their identity is socially contingent, and how they have negotiated their cultural identity within the English-medium instruction context. Additional questions explored how the participants experienced the influence of EMI learning on their close social relationships, the student's perception of personal, and the challenges that have been encountered studying in an EMI.

A single focus group was conducted in which seven of the 10 participants contributed. The 10 focus group questions were intended to elicit the participants' experience of cultural identity, its relevance, and the degree to which they held their cultural identity to be personally important. Additionally, the questions examined the participants' response to the policy versus reality of cultural change in South Africa, probed the participants' motivation for selecting an English-medium program and their learning experience after having done so.

Finally, participants were asked to consider a hypothetical scenario and write a letter that might be delivered to a prospective student. The hypothetical scenario and self-reflection writing exercise allowed the participant time to recall his or her experience with cultural identity throughout his or her studies at the university in a manner that would provide guidance to a prospective student. Follow-up interviews based on the self-reflection writing were conducted via email, as required to fill gaps or add depth to the narrative.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) research method. An initial reflexive assessment was performed to identify known biases, experiences, preconceptions. Any related biases identified throughout the data collection and analysis phases were bracketed to promote the participants as the prominent voice in the research. All data elements that were not directly within the conscious experience of the participant were eliminated, reducing the data of experiences to its horizons (Moustakas, 1994). Transcripts from of the in-depth individual interviews, focus groups, and self-reflection writing exercise were read, identifying significant words and statements which were coded using Nvivo 12. Coded statements were sorted into categories where they were analyzed for relations, similarities and dissimilarities and filed in categories that were used to develop broader themes and subthemes. Significant statements from each source were compared for areas of agreement and divergence. The research question and three supporting questions were addressed through five primary themes, including cultural identity negotiation, the university's understanding and treatment of cultural diversity, social relations between ingroup and outgroups, factors influencing academic self-efficacy, and challenges faced in the learning experience.

IV. Findings

When the participants were asked to describe their cultural identity experience, they shared a common perspective that the cultural identity of the Born Free generation is essentially different than the ones before, and therefore, the way in which cultural identity is experienced and the cultural categories on which cultural identity is founded, is equally different. As Gabadeli phrased it, "It is inevitable. Change has to come."

Black South African student's cultural identity negotiation is influenced by a complex and intense interaction of multiple cultures. The participants' descriptions emphasized the often-conflicting factors of their heritage and national cultures as they negotiate their cultural identity. On the one hand, the participants professed respect for the mores and values of the tribal culture of their ancestors and agreed that the languages of their tribes must be preserved. The participants' heritage culture promoted monoculturalism, which in its extreme has led to tribalism and tribal conflict, but which also fostered cohesion and perpetuation of the tribe's values and customs within the community. Reverence for their elders, the historical traditions of past generations, and a strong sense of community pulled the students toward their heritage culture. At the same time, the participants identified a call toward the more expansive culture of national identity in which the participant must adapt to a multicultural society. The national culture to which the participants feel called emphasizes cultural diversity with the intent to eliminate uneven power relations between cultural groups and provide equal socioeconomical opportunity to each. The political and socioeconomical environment that unified their ancestors as a community have drastically changed. New opportunities are available to Black students that were not possible in their parents' and grandparents' era. The descriptions of the students' lived experience are pictures of young men and women who are reconciling these cultures and negotiating their identity. Seven of the 10 participants self-identified primarily by their national or racial identity, while two regarded themselves by their tribal culture first. The last said that she was not a cultural person. The participants understood national and racial identity to be interconnected and a reference to the greater Black African community. Mthobeli described his view of the African identity, "my view of Africa is not within our differences in terms of languages and tribes. But my view is a sense of our unified state as a Black nation."

Additionally, the religious profile of the participants exhibited a departure from the traditional religious culture of their ancestors. It is significant that the participants' religious beliefs were the most frequently cited factor influencing their cultural identity negotiation. Seven of the participants described balancing the religious customs of their tribal heritage with their Christian faith. As described, the practice of worshiping ancestors is inconsistent with monotheistic Christianity. African traditional religion in South Africa espouses the belief that deceased ancestors continue to be active members of the community (Grillo et al., 2019). The dead maintain a spiritual connection to living family members and are active in the world of the living. Christianity, and its doctrine of fidelity to one God, represents a culture that strongly conflicts with the beliefs and practices of traditional African religions. The participants described them as mutually exclusive. Although the participants expressed a strong appreciation for the values and morals that were passed down through the generations, they have eschewed the traditional practices that formed their foundation in the tribal society. Seven of the participants specifically noted that they did not participate in their tribe's traditional practices and rituals

because of their Christian faith. Of the men, the most often cited custom that they declined to participate in was the manhood ritual, a rite of passage in which the young man is taught by the elders of his tribe what it means to be a man in the tribal community.

V. Cultural Identity Negotiation and the Role of Peer-initiated Cultural Socialization Groups

One aspect of tribal identity that the participants could not relinquish was their language. While many of the religious and traditional practices were considered irrelevant or impractical in the Born Free cultural identity, each of the participants expressed a need to maintain a connection to the history and values of his or her community through a strong commitment to preserve their primary language. Each participant asserted that, even if all the customs and practices of their tribe were forgotten, their language must remain as a connection to their heritage. Malusi encapsulated part of this idea when he wrote, "I believe language is the base that cultural identity is built therefore even if traditions wither away after many years, I believe the individual languages is what will keep cultural identity intact."

The intensity with which the participants and their families hold their heritage culture was indicated in their willingness to sublimate the expression of their heritage culture in favor of economic and academic advantage. To provide greater opportunities for their children, many Black South African families have placed their children in EMI schools. All 10 of the participants were schooled with English as the primary medium of instruction from primary school through university. Letago explained, "for you to have what they think is a good future or a bright future and a good amount of education you are ultimately forced to go to an either English or Afrikaans-medium school." The students were immersed in an English-language environment where they learned the subject content and language together. Phegello shared his frustration with the cultural implications of learning in an English-medium school system,

I got to a certain area and started asking myself who am I as a person. Because I find myself in a mostly European sense of way, knowing English, knowing about European things. . . . That gives you a sense of not belonging in the world.

This study presents a unique dynamic in which the popular majority has been placed in a socially minoritized position based on the language of instruction. Within the university context, the participants were challenged to maintain the essence of their cultural identity where English is the medium of instruction. Connection to the family and community are essential in shaping and developing the young South African's cultural identity. Gabadeli described his pre-university years as a time when going to school he would be confronted with dissimilar and sometimes hostile cultures. However, at the end of the day he could go home where there was a "strong and steadfast cultural experience." In transitioning from home life to university life there is a "sort of a neutral culture that everybody adapts to." This neutral, melded culture challenged the participants to adapt and seek out ways of belonging that were previously provided through their families and community.

While public universities are constitutionally mandated to be multicultural and multilingual, the way in which this mandate has manifested in the life of the student was not uniformly perceived or appreciated by the participants in this study. The perceptions shared by the participants of their university's understanding of their culture were predominantly negative. Seven of ten participants believed that their university has little or no understanding of their culture, describing it as minimal, disregarded, or neutral. When asked how he felt about that, Siphosethu said, "I feel like I've become very angry. Yeah, all my modules are taught by White people." Two of the participants described overt hostility toward their culture by university faculty members expressed by instructors who excluded the majority of the class by engaging Afrikaans-speaking students directly in their primary language, or who falsely equated race and tribe with intelligence, adversely affecting their teaching and evaluation of the Black students.

The primary means by which the universities provided support for the students' cultural identity was through culturally themed social groups. These societies included cultural awareness activities as well as social engagement opportunities for the students. Letago spoke about these groups, "Whenever there is a sort of gathering, I tend to go to them whether it is gathering of my own culture or a different culture, as long as it is a Black African community." However, many participants preferred to engage in informal peer-initiated social groups to share and strengthen their common culture.

Once at the university, cultural socialization was maintained through peer relationships. Peer-initiated cultural socialization groups were typically formed from casual contact between students, either through a common course or living in the same dormitory. The participants each described being intrinsically drawn together based on race, language, and common goals for the purpose of mutual academic, cultural, emotional, and social support. As Gabadeli said, the students were looking for someone "like me." "Like me" groups tended to reflect two different points of cohesion. Either they were formed around common interests and a common degree plan or tribal background, language, and race. The peers in these groups formed the primary

support structure for the participants' cultural, social, academic, mental, and emotional well-being. Malusi characterized it as a relationship with others who "really have the best interest of the one next to you and we really do look after each other."

Cultural Identity Challenges of EMI and the Influence on Academic Self-Efficacy

The area in which the participants had the greatest cultural and learning frustration was the language of instruction. Even though each of them had been taught with English as the language of instruction from primary school onward, their different levels of English-language proficiency caused varying degrees of anxiety. Mthobeli discussed his academic journey as he learned English, "If I had another way of learning, had an option to choose from my primary language, my home language, I would have went for that language. It was going to give me an advantage in terms of comprehension." Mvuseselo agreed, "The difference is that when I learn in my primary language it's easy to comprehend than it is with English." Njabulu wrote in her self-reflection writing, varsity English is not the same as high school English and presents an increased challenge, particularly to the new university student. Dumisile described his initial struggle at the university "they were sort of not accommodative of the fact that not everyone is purely fluent in English. They were expecting everyone's English to be really good, and the reality is that it really isn't." Malusi provided the most colorful exposition on the university's policy of English as the language of instruction, "I definitely do understand that they want to make the playing field equal, I guess. So, you might as well just chop everyone's left leg so at least we're all one thing." The participants who were educated from primary school with English as the medium of instruction were less hampered by language proficiency in their ability to engage in the learning process than others who came from a different language of instruction background.

Notwithstanding some of the challenges of learning in English, eight of the participants noted the global value of learning in English and half of the participants said that learning in English was preferable to learning in their primary language because it would advance their career opportunities. Dumisile, who described his own early challenges with learning in English, said that he "would have preferred English because based on the fact that our country is so diverse it would be better for interacting with people." Mthobeli noted that English-language proficiency was valuable in business, ministry, and politics, his three areas of interest. Mvuseselo said that he writes his songs in English so that they might reach a wider audience. Njabulu, who was pursuing a career in media and public relations, remarked on the global career implications of learning in English.

Although the participants justified their decision to learn in English as beneficial to their economic viability, it came at some cost to their cultural heritage. Malusi stated, "I have lost some fluency in my mother tongue as a result of constantly speaking English." Letago expounded on her experience,

Having been born after the apartheid era, I was afforded the opportunity to study in English and Afrikaans medium schools because segregation had been abolished, that provided me with access to the higher standards of education in the country, which is only in these schools, however with that, because my parents wanted to provide me with the best schooling system unfortunately that meant that I'd missed out on being able to read and write in my own tribal language.

Letago further observed that by adapting to an English-language dominated society, the next generation was losing the ability to connect to family members and people in other tribes with similar languages. She said that they "only speak English and they no longer speak any sort of African language. They find it difficult to understand. And slowly becoming a habit to raise their kids with this whole 'English comes first' ahead of their cultural language." Mvuseselo encapsulated this concern when he said, "language is one of the significance of one's culture. If you lose you language, you lose your culture."

The participants' expectations of the university regarding its treatment of cultural diversity were strongly tied to their perception of language as culture. Where the participants saw the university as failing to support cultural diversity was a direct reflection of how they perceive the university supporting language diversity. When asked what recommendations the participants might offer to the university regarding how language and cultural diversity should be addressed, they answered uniformly that the university should offer courses in multiple languages. While acknowledging the impracticability of the solution, Malusi wrote that universities should offer studies taught in all nationally recognized languages. Mthobeli said that he believes that the answer begins at the parliamentary level with a discussion of which languages should be the official language of instruction for the universities. Letago, recognizing that public universities are interspersed throughout the country in such a way that each university tends to be located among a dominant tribal people group, recommended that, "varsities should allow 2/3 languages per province with the main language being English since it is more widely spoken and the second, the language of the dominant tribe in the province."

VI. Discussion

Mobility from one cultural context to another challenges Black South African youth to accommodate information from within the receiving cultural context, reconstructing their identity. Because of an increase in

the physical mobility of the South African population, young people are being encouraged to pursue English as a common language in order to thrive in a multilingual society. As a result, they are losing connection with their cultural foundations. Although the participants had all been immersed in an English-language environment since primary school, their first intentional move away from home was to the university. The move away from home further strained their cultural connectedness while separating them from the source of their cultural socialization. Thus, the students were motivated to find another way to nurture the connection to preserve and strengthen their cultural identity in what the participants perceived to be a culturally inhospitable environment. The participants described the cultural, social, academic, and emotional support they received by surrounding themselves with people who had a common background, who understood their culture, and who were coparticipants in their social, academic, and emotional struggles. The need to be among people of similar culture, language, or race was described as an intrinsic process whereby the participant was supported in his or her self-concept. These social communities created a sense of belonging and safety from which the student was better able to negotiate his or her social context. These formal and informal communities were an essential element in maintaining the essence of their heritage culture and adapting to the receiving culture. The findings show that Black South African university students who cultivate cultural support networks exhibit a stronger sense of academic self-efficacy and are better able to adapt to the receiving culture.

When asked why they chose to study in English, the answers of the participants in this study included: (a) to improve their English language skills, (b) English opens economic opportunities outside of South Africa, (c) and cross-cultural communication. Although eight of the participants saw value in learning in English, they were evenly divided in their opinion of whether they would have preferred to learn in English or in their tribal language. From perspective of its impact on academic success, the participants said that comprehension of the learning materials was a significant concern. Equally important to the participants was losing connection with their heritage culture. For Black South African students with a strong bond to their heritage culture, English-medium instruction has practical value, but there is a profound effect on their cultural identity.

The findings of this study indicate that cultural adaptability and academic achievement are enhanced through increased English-language proficiency. The students in this study who were less language proficient experienced greater cultural conflict with the receiving culture and greater dissatisfaction with English as the language of instruction, as well as an increased feeling of marginalization. Participants who had a higher level of language proficiency and cultivated cultural support networks exhibited a stronger sense of academic self-efficacy and were better able to adapt to the receiving culture. The findings further indicate that the student's level of English-language proficiency and cultural socialization functionally reinforce the student's self system which proved more influential than the internal or external cultural conflict in determining the student's academic self-efficacy.

VII.   Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of this study were due to either methodological delimitations or events and circumstances that were unmanageable. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 had a significant limiting effect on the procedures of this study. In response to the pandemic, all South Africa universities were either closed or transitioned to a virtual classroom from March 2020 through completion of the data collection. As a result, participant solicitation and data collection methods that had been intended to be conducted in person were moved to an online platform. The revised data collection method limited participation to those students who were sufficiently literate in technology, had access to the necessary resources, and had a satisfactory level of English-language proficiency. Further, the inability of participants to consistently communicate due to the limited availability and reliability of online resources adversely affected the participants' ability to contribute during data collection.

The delimitations of this study did not provide parameters for gender representation. Enrollment in South African public universities by gender are distributed as 42% men, and 58% women (Council on Higher Education, 2018). Although participation was open to all university students, the participants who responded and met the eligibility qualifications for this study were 70% men and 30% women.

Future research could benefit from reproducing this study in other settings including U.S. HEIs and other former European colonies in Africa. In addition, within this study, the participants' experience of cultural conflict with the receiving culture was demonstrated to be regulated by their level of English-language proficiency and involvement in a social support group, which further influenced their sense of academic self-efficacy. As suggested by the limitations of this study, it may be beneficial to undertake a quantitative comparative study of the effects of EMI on academic self-efficacy along a spectrum of language proficiency levels.

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