

# Centering indigenous knowledge through multimodal approaches in English first additional language learning

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*In this article, we address findings from a study conducted with high school learners in Gauteng, South Africa. It explored the strategies used by learners when learning English as a First Additional Language (EFAL). We used a conceptualisation of Ubuntu as a lens through which to explore EFAL learning. Data collection included an open-ended questionnaire and non-participant observation. Participants were purposefully sampled from peer-tutoring organisations around Gauteng. The key findings, which include the use of indigenous poetry, dance and storytelling by learners, highlight the need to include indigenous practices in the language classroom. Learners also showed a preference for cooperative learning and for using humour as a strategy for EFAL learning. We argue that the silencing of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) perpetuates epistemic violence by limiting the resources available for learning. Therefore, more should be done in the EFAL classroom to ensure the inclusion of IKS. Through the findings of this study, we propose that including Ubuntu values and IKS in the curriculum is imperative if educational outcomes are to be improved, as these systems allow learners to become more involved and engaged in their own learning. This will re-centre African voices and valorise indigenous epistemologies.*

**Keywords:** indigenous knowledge systems, Ubuntu, English first additional language, humour, multimodal approaches, social connectedness

## 1 Introduction

The hegemonic system of colonisation and apartheid has long been abolished in South Africa, yet its negative legacy in education is still being felt. During both the colonial and apartheid era, education was used to entrench social inequalities, which imbedded the perpetual poverty of the black majority and the negation of African indigenous epistemologies (Higgs, 2016; Spaull, 2013). For example, the Bantu Education Act (Act 47 of 1953) prioritised the education of white learners to the detriment of black learners. This act subjugated the black learner by offering substandard education that impeded intellectual stimulation, and only focused on manual skills (Masemula, 2013; Ndimande, 2016). Under colonialism and

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apartheid, the values and knowledge systems of the dominant white racial group were elevated, which resulted in the marginalisation and suppression of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and the languages of indigenous peoples (Gumbo, 2012; Ned, 2019). IKS are an approach that affirms, values and draws from local or indigenous content and epistemologies. IKS provide learners with the opportunity to draw from their embedded oral traditions and to make meaning through music, poetry and images instead of solely privileging the written text for meaning-making (Msila, 2012; Odora Hoppers, 2001; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013; Shava & Manyike, 2018).

In redressing the ills of colonial and apartheid education and to prepare all South African learners to be globally competitive, radical educational reforms were implemented by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). These reforms were intended to decolonise the curriculum by recognising and valuing IKS (DBE, 2011; Higgs, 2016). Although the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) with its Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) aims to value IKS, social justice, human rights and inclusivity (DBE, 2011), it has been criticised for its failure to centralise IKS and to Africanise education (Gumbo, 2016; Msila, 2012). The omission to centralise IKS is in contrast to global trends in education, which have highlighted the need for the integration of IKS into existing education systems in various teaching and learning disciplines (Gumbo, 2012; Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa, 2014). Odora Hoppers (2015) argues that in a world which faces the biggest challenges in human history (injustice, inequality, climate change and social exclusion), greater priority should be given to IKS. She contends that the inclusion of IKS in education systems would provide an antidote to the denigration of indigenous people's knowledges by Western knowledge systems, thereby facilitating a process of re-centring IKS. This would address the problem experienced by the majority of learners on the African continent, who experience education as alien to their context and culture (Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa, 2014; Odora Hoppers, 2015).

Odora Hoppers (2015) further suggests that the poor performance of African learners on the continent is related to the pedagogic practice which subjugates their indigenous values and knowledge systems. Pedagogic methods are conducted mechanistically, without linking them to the learners' prior knowledge and home literacies. This leads to a dissociation between learners' lived experiences and the knowledge learnt at school, resulting in epistemological disenfranchisement. Therefore, we argue that there is a need to Africanise the curriculum by valorising learners' values and knowledge systems to ensure that they are not alienated from the learning environment. In the current article, we argue for the Africanisation of the English First Additional Language (EFAL) curriculum. Africanising the EFAL curriculum would require a shift in the power balance between the learner and the teacher whereby pedagogical practices become learner-centred. By so doing, learners take more responsibility for their own learning and bring all their home and community knowledges into the learning environment. Accordingly, the aim of this article is to explore the strategies used by learners in learning EFAL within the IKS context. We begin this article by defining IKS, which is followed by a discussion of IKS in language learning. We then highlight some of the studies conducted in South African schools on how IKS can be implemented in the EFAL curriculum.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 *Defining indigenous knowledge systems*

The term indigenous knowledge (IK) has been conceptualised in various ways. Shava and Manyike (2018, p. 36) define it as “the knowledges of indigenous peoples across the globe”. This suggests that IK is a global concept that is practiced and promoted in various countries, such as New Zealand, Canada, Brazil, China, Japan, India and South Korea, by indigenous peoples. Odora Hoppers (2001, p. 76) opines that IK is characterised by “its embeddedness in the cultural web and history of a people, including their civilization, and forms the backbone of the social, economic, scientific and technological identity of such a people”. These knowledge systems are associated with cultural products, including art and literature, and values embedded in the societies they emanate from as opposed to imported values and products. Owusu-Ansah and Mji (2013) contend that IKS are rooted in a relational worldview and culture. This relational worldview is observed in the various ways in which IKS are transmitted. Shava and Manyike (2018, p. 36) note that IKS can be transmitted from one generation to the next through the oral tradition, which includes “narratives, stories/folklore, songs and poetry”. When transmitted visually, IKS take on the form of “arts, such as bushmen [San] paintings, writings, craft, cultural rituals and dance” (Shava & Manyike, 2018, p. 36). IKS can also be transmitted practically “through doing and the artefacts associated with practice”. Finally, IKS can be transmitted spiritually “through dreams and visions from the ancestors” (Shava & Manyike, 2018, p. 36). All of these ways of transmitting IKS are rooted in a relational worldview. Msila (2012), asserts that IKS provides a pathway and method for expressing the insights of local communities while actively engaging them in the generation of knowledge necessary for fostering development. Incorporating indigenous people in the process of knowledge generation acknowledges and appreciates the unique contributions they bring to the academic realm.

### 2.2 *IKS in the South African language curriculum*

The NCS-CAPS contains a number of principles which were adopted to improve the quality of education in line with the precepts of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). A key principle relating to IKS states that the NCS-CAPS aims to “valuing indigenous knowledge systems: acknowledging the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution” (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011, p. 5). Despite this acknowledgement of the value of IKS by the DBE, the reality in South Africa is that the education system continues to privilege Western-derived education at the expense of IKS (Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa, 2014; Msila, 2012; Shava & Manyike, 2018). The conceptualisation of IKS that is included in the NCS-CAPS curriculum is superficial, with little clarity as to how IKS could be incorporated in the curriculum. This has resulted in the failure to integrate IKS into the curriculum. Moreover, teachers are not provided with adequate training to implement IKS in the curriculum (Manyau et al., 2018; Ned, 2019). This points to the lack of commitment to centre IKS in the formal curriculum. Importantly, several studies have indicated that there are major benefits attached to the inclusion of IKS in the classroom such as improved academic performance

(Malebese, 2017; Mavhiza, 2019; Newfield & d'Abdon, 2015) and greater appreciation of learner identity (Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa, 2014; Tondi, 2018).

Incorporating IKS in the EFAL classroom can have a positive effect on learners' academic performance generally and EFAL learning specifically (Malebese, 2017; Mavhiza, 2019; Newfield & d'Abdon, 2015). The findings of a study by Mavhiza (2019) that included Grade 11 EFAL learners in Gauteng province, South Africa, indicate that the inclusion of indigenous poetry in the EFAL classroom can result in positive learning gains as it creates greater appreciation for prescribed classroom poetry. Another important finding in this study is that EFAL learners experienced the prescribed Western-oriented classroom poetry as alien, as they could not relate to its content and contexts. The language was also considered difficult and learners felt that it did not resonate with their lived experiences. In contrast, learners experienced indigenous poetry as therapeutic, as it engaged their social realities and acknowledged their lived experiences. Furthermore, reading indigenous poetry led to EFAL learners' greater appreciation of their identities. This is an important finding as language and identity are intertwined (Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa, 2014; Tondi, 2018). These findings highlight the need to valorise EFAL learners' identities through acknowledging the IKS that they bring to the classroom. Moreover, the findings emphasise the benefits of utilising multiple indigenous modalities in the EFAL classroom, namely poetry, performance and drama, dance, and song, which access EFAL learners' full language repertoires. When learners engage with language material that speaks to their identity and reality, they become innovative, engaged and motivated during the learning process. Therefore, they invest in the EFAL and are more willing to try out various strategies that help them succeed in the EFAL classroom (Mavhiza, 2019).

The findings by Mavhiza (2019) are similar to those obtained by Newfield and Maungedzo (2006) at a high school in Soweto, South Africa, where they also investigated the viability of poetry as a pedagogical tool in the EFAL classroom. Newfield and Maungedzo (2006) found that using a multimodal approach and incorporating learners' full language repertoires assisted these learners to enhance their EFAL skills. Learners in this study were given an opportunity to perform poems, and to write their own poems on paper as well as on a piece of cloth that they named *Thebuwa*, which means "to speak". The term "*Thebuwa*" was coined by the learners, by merging elements from three South African indigenous languages: isiXhosa, Sepedi and xiTsonga (Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006, p. 78). This study revealed that EFAL learning was improved through the inclusion of indigenous oral poetry, and by using multiple modalities (linguistic, visual, tactile, and spatial) and languages (Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006). A crucial observation by these researchers is that when learners were encouraged to engage in praise poetry in their home languages (one of the nine indigenous languages of South Africa), they became more interested in composing their own poems in English. Praise poetry is recited or sung in honour of important people and narrates the ancestry of the person being honoured. By using their own languages, learner identity was valorised, which prompted a positive change in how poetry was perceived (Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006). This highlights the value and the need to include IKS practices in the EFAL classroom to assist learners in making learning more meaningful and enjoyable. Furthermore, as observed by Newfield and d'Abdon (2015), it is vital that the teaching of EFAL

includes contemporary writing by younger indigenous writers to allow learners to identify with its content on a generational level. Younger South African poetic voices include Phillippa Yaa de Villiers, Sisonke Papu and Katleho Shoro, who address themes of post-apartheid identity that are relevant to the younger generation (Genis, 2019). Importantly, introducing IKS in the learning environment encourages the inclusion of multimodalities of learning, which foster active participation and create an environment in which learners are invested in their learning through their various senses.

The studies reported above highlight two important practices that can be used as a resource when implementing IKS in the EFAL classroom. These practices are (1) the use of indigenous languages for scaffolding the learning of the L1, and (2) the use of multimodalities in facilitating EFAL learning. With regard to the first observation, Tondi (2018) argues that IKS is closely linked to indigenous languages, culture, creativity and innovation and should therefore be introduced in order to assist indigenous learners to claim confidently their rightful place in the world of work. IKS shape the identity of indigenous learners, which in turn guides and shapes how they navigate through life (Ned, 2019). Failure to include indigenous languages in educational systems is considered by Sepulveda, Pena and Merino (2015) as an act of curricular violence that can cause alienation as learners battle with identity formation. Thus, the inclusion of IKS in the learning environment is key to reclaiming the cognitive and ontological status of indigenous knowledges, by allowing for more varied cognitive construction of new knowledge.

The inclusion of IKS in education necessitates the use of multimodal approaches in the classroom to scaffold learning. These approaches ensure that learners use the full range of meaning-making resources they have at their disposal in and outside the classroom, and accommodate diverse cultural and linguistic societies (Newfield & d'Abdon, 2015). These multimodal resources include spoken and written language, gestures (dancing), sounds (singing), shapes and textures (Newfield & d'Abdon, 2015). The educational value of orally performing indigenous poetry in engaging learners (Mavhiza, 2019) and using various materials and modes to represent poetry (Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006) attests to the benefits of multimodal approaches in the classroom. A study by Malebese (2017) found that a multimodal approach, which incorporated EFAL learners' indigenous languages, customs and lived experiences, facilitated the transition of Grade 4 learners to a learning environment with English as the language of teaching and learning. The use of a socially inclusive approach heightened achievement and encouraged learners to draw on existing knowledge. As argued by Higgs (2016), the South African language curriculum makes provision for a rich integrated text-based approach which includes visual, audio, audio-visual and multimedia texts. However, he also noted that the conceptual and pedagogical link between these multimodalities and incorporating IKS is generally not made in the classroom.

In the context of the current study, IKS are embedded in a communal and multimodal approach to meaning making and cognition as the learners used cooperative and multimodal cognitive strategies to learn EFAL. Cognitive strategies assist EFAL learners to understand and produce new language (Oxford, 1990). They do this through direct manipulation or transformation of incoming information through identification, retention, storage or retrieval (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Cognitive strategies consist of the

following sets of strategies: practicing, receiving and sending messages, analysing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output. A common function among the various cognitive strategies is manipulation or transformation of the target language by the EFAL learner (Oxford, 1990). Another important cognitive strategy that learners use in the learning environment is humour.

### *2.3 Humour in language learning*

Polimeni and Reiss (2006) define humour as a complex cognitive function, which leads to laughter. While humour is understood as operating at a psychological level, laughter is considered as a physical response to this psychological behaviour. Bilokcuoglu and Bebreli (2018) aver that the use of humour encourages critical thinking as learners experiment with words and phrases in various creative ways and in multiple contexts. Moreover, Bilokcuoglu and Bebreli (2018) posit that humour can be used for teaching complex linguistic elements at lexical, phonological, syntactic and pragmatic levels. Incorporating humour in teaching complex linguistic elements contextualises learning, and raises the level of learner interest, engagement and enjoyment in the EFAL classroom. Humour heightens learner involvement in the EFAL classroom as it encourages them to take ownership of their learning. Humour has also been found to be an effective strategy in positively triggering EFAL writing (Lialikhova, 2019; Murphy & Roca de Larios, 2010; Simeon, 2016). Cho and Kim (2018) assert that the use of humour creates an environment that allows learners to learn from their mistakes in exploring EFAL. This strengthens the argument that humour creates a safe space for EFAL learners to explore learning without raising their anxiety about making mistakes. Therefore, the incorporation of humour as a strategy for EFAL learning may support and further enhance the use of affective strategies.

## **3 Theoretical framework: the language learner through the Ubuntu lens**

There are an ongoing debates regarding whether Ubuntu is exclusive to Africa or if its values can be found in other cultures. Kamwangamalu (1999) argues that Ubuntu is indeed distinctive to Africa while acknowledging that certain Ubuntu values, like human dignity, may also exist in other global societies in a form of Western humanism. Maphalala (2017) also echoes this sentiment, emphasising that while Ubuntu has predominantly been recognised as a Southern African worldview and value system, it has gained global acceptance as a way of life. Despite the multiple ongoing debates and divergent perspectives regarding the concept of Ubuntu, Ubuntu serves as the theoretical lens through which the findings of this study were interpreted. This decision is motivated by our recognition of the significance of Ubuntu in providing a fitting and culturally relevant lens through which to examine EFAL learning in this study. Furthermore, Gumbo (2016) notes that IKS encompasses and embodies the fundamental principle of Ubuntu. The convergence of IKS and Ubuntu underscores the connection between these two concepts thereby highlighting how these concepts inform and reinforce one another.

Ubuntu has been described as a philosophical approach and a value system that promote the interdependence of people and communities (Gade, 2011; Kamwangamalu, 1999; Maphalala, 2017). Although much of the literature on

Ubuntu emerged during the political transition in Zimbabwe and South Africa, Gade (2011) argues that this concept has long been reflected in the writing of African leaders, which include Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda and Ahmed Sékou Touré, whose ideas focused on familyhood or harmony in the extended family (Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015). At the heart of Ubuntu lies the reclaiming of African dignity that was eroded by colonialism, which was a pernicious and pervasive system that deprived Africans of their culture, dignity and resources (Gade, 2011). Underlying the philosophy of Ubuntu is the maxim “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (Nguni languages) or “motho ke motho ka batho”, (Sesotho languages) which translates to “I am because you are” (Sefotho & Makalela, 2017, p. 43). Therefore, the Ubuntu worldview is based on the premise that individuals, including learners, are what they are because of other learners and the community from which they originate (Nwoye, 2017). Ubuntu acknowledges the genuine otherness of fellow learners and recognises their linguistic diversity as well as their values, customs and histories. This recognition of the value of community for the African is captured by Tutu (2004:25) who notes that “a person is a person through other persons. None of us come into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human”. This view is congruent with recent trends in second language learning, which reveal a greater appreciation for culture and the social context in which language learning occurs (Oxford & Gkonou, 2018, p. 403). Africans perceive reality as holistic (both-and) as opposed to the dualistic and Eurocentric (either-or) worldview. Ubuntu thus represents an intersubjective approach to identity as neither the individual nor the community is regarded as having ontological primacy, instead the collective carries ontological pre-eminence (Maphalala, 2017; Nwoye, 2017).

Although Ubuntu has received global acceptance, Maphalala (2017) argues that it has not been embraced sufficiently in education, as can be seen in the limited acknowledgement of IKS in the classroom. Maphalala (2017) thus advocates a three-strand model of Ubuntu for the South African classroom, which includes interpersonal, intrapersonal and environmental values. The interpersonal values are based on the interdependence of one learner on another and how learners should relate to each other. These include the values of respect, cooperation, generosity, inclusivity and compassion (Maphalala, 2017; Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015). Intrapersonal values refer to a learner’s ability to self-reflect and self-monitor actions, strengths and areas for development. Furthermore, intrapersonal values describe the art of being an empathetic human, and how one’s humanness is fully realised in relation to others. Environmental values relate to taking care of the environment and ensuring its sustainability and conservation as the environment is a source of knowledge (Chilisa, 2012). At the core of Maphalala’s (2017) proposed model is the idea that learners are inextricably bound to one another and their environment, of which they need to take care to ensure its conservation (Chilisa, 2012; Nwoye, 2017). Subsequently, the findings are analysed, presented and discussed through a consideration of the learners’ interpersonal, intrapersonal and environmental values, as these relate to IKS and Ubuntu.

The authors’ positionalities in this article are shaped by a conceptualisation of Ubuntu, which represents not only an ontological stance but also an epistemological approach. The authors and participants are inter-generationally

linked through IKS and memory (Genis, 2019). The first author situates herself within the context of postcolonial discourse as a black South African and a native speaker of isiZulu (one of the indigenous South African languages) with English being her first additional language (Bristol, 2012). Considering the historical suppression of indigenous languages and the systematic marginalisation of black South Africans, this self-positioning is significant. It aligns the author with an insider perspective relative to the research participants, who are also black and native speakers of one or more indigenous languages. However, the author's rural upbringing and monolingual background shifted her positionality, transitioning her from an insider to that of an outsider. This transition was due to the contrast in participants' multilingual backgrounds and their semi-urban upbringing. This illustrates the dynamic nature of positionality in research and underscores the need for continuous reflexivity throughout the research process to accommodate the evolving process of research (Holmes, 2020).

The second author's home language is Afrikaans, and his second language is English. He has taught English in multicultural contexts within semi-urban and urban milieus. Therefore, he is an outsider in relation to the indigenous languages spoken by the participants, but an insider in the context of semi-urban and urban educational spaces (Holmes, 2020).

Despite the authors' varied positionalities along the insider/outsider continuum, this diversity offered an opportunity to mitigate inherent biases and privileges linked to these positions (Bristol, 2012; Holmes, 2020). Through critical questioning and examination of our respective positions, we were able to challenge each other, thereby enabling us to represent ethically the research participants. This process created, according to Michael Rothberg (2009), a dialogical renegotiation of seemingly opposing historical and cultural memories. Reflecting on our different historical memories led to a shared experience embedded in the South African educational landscape.

## **4 Research design and methodology**

The article forms part of a larger convergent mixed methods study that explored the language-learning strategies used by EFAL learners participating in peer-tutoring programmes (Machimana, 2020). For this article, data from the qualitative component of the study was used which is concerned with gaining an understanding of the phenomenon in real-life contexts (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). In this case, the phenomenon is enhancing IKS and Ubuntu through multimodalities within the context of EFAL learning.

### *4.1 Sampling of participants and research setting*

The participants of this study comprised 137, Grade 8 and Grade 9 EFAL learners, who were purposefully sampled. These learners were enrolled in after-school peer-tutoring programmes in seven peri-urban townships in the Gauteng province of South Africa. These peer-tutoring programmes are designed and offered by various non-profit organisations (NPOs) that support learners in overcoming their educational challenges. They provide much needed after-school support to learners who do not have sufficient support at school or at home. The NPOs employ community volunteers who offer their skills to tutor learners in

various school subjects, including English. The learners in this study were all African and spoke at least one of the nine indigenous South African languages (isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sepedi, Setswana, Sesotho, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele and siSwati) (Ned, 2019; Statistics South Africa, 2012). Over 50% of these learners spoke two or more indigenous South African home languages, which indicates the multilingual diversity of participants in this study. Most of the participants spoke Sepedi, IsiZulu, Xitsonga and IsiXhosa. Importantly, none of these learners took English as a home language at school.

#### *4.2 Data generation and analysis*

We collected data using an open-ended questionnaire designed specifically for this study and conducted non-participant observations of learners during the peer-tutoring sessions. The open-ended questionnaire was piloted with a representative sample with similar characteristics (age, language, Grade, setting and location) as those who participated in the study to ensure that they understood the questions. The use of the open-ended questionnaire in the current study was appropriate as it provided learners with an opportunity to provide details of the strategies they used in their own words without the constraint of predetermined responses (Jackson, 2012). As such, we asked learners the following questions: “What steps or actions do you take to make English language-learning more enjoyable in the classroom? What assistance do you received in the classroom that helps you learn English better? Observation data were collected using non-participatory observation notes that were taken during the peer-tutoring sessions. A total of 12 observations were conducted for this study and each lasted approximately 45 minutes. Using observational data in the current study allowed for a triangulated perspective (Kawulich, 2012) of participants’ reported use of language strategies and what we observed during the peer-tutoring sessions.

A constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach (Charmaz, 2006) was used to analyse data from the open-ended questionnaire and observational data. The grounded theory approach to data analysis involves the use of initial coding, which entails an iterative process of reading and labelling large portions of data into codes, as suggested by Kawulich and Holland (2012), and Yin (2016). The initial coding process was followed by focused coding, resulting in the development of categories through thematic or conceptual similarities (Saldaña, 2016). During this process, the data from the initial coding process were synthesised, integrated and organised into categories and subcategories (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2016). The third level of data analysis involved grouping all the similar categories into a core category or theme, through a process known as theoretical coding (Saldaña, 2016). The section that follows details the results of this process.

## **5 Findings**

### *5.1 Social connectedness as a pathway for EFAL learning*

A key theme that emerged with regard to cognitive strategies was the collective manner in which various strategies were used. Although it was evident that

learners could use these strategies on their own, there was a preference for the collective use of strategies. Strategies such as practicing to speak and read were commonly reported to be done in groups. Learners reported that they created opportunities to use EFAL on their own: “... practice English every day when we speak” (OEQ); and “I like learning new things by myself, so I sit alone for a while, just practicing” (OEQ). These opportunities were also created in small groups: “I practice with my group so they can help me do better” (OEQ); “talking English in a group” (OEQ); “I try to take part and debate with other learners on something we disagree on and try to make everyone welcome by competing on what we are debating on” (OEQ); and “Me and my friends, we encourage each other to speak English every time” (OEQ). By engaging in these self-created debating opportunities learners were able to use the EFAL, and at the same time listened to their peers using the language. The active engagement was a resource that learners used for EFAL learning and for obtaining feedback, as encapsulated in the following excerpt: “... to challenge the teacher during teaching and to debate with the teacher. In order to make her/him to correct you if you are wrong” (OEQ). This suggests that learners did not engage mindlessly in debates, merely for the sake of arguing, but that this engagement facilitated opportunities for further EFAL learning.

Reading was also conducted individually: “I always try to learn new words and read books for pleasure” (OEQ); and “I go to the library and take a book and read” (OEQ); or with friends in small groups: “I read with my friends” (OEQ); “we do reading ... in groups, then we read” (OEQ); and “I sit with friends in a group of six and read some stories for each other. And we help each other to pronounce words correctly” (OEQ). These examples suggest that in creating reading opportunities, learners preferred collective reading to individual reading.

Participating learners indicated that they used listening as a strategy for EFAL learning, as illustrated in the following excerpts: “I listen carefully to the teacher and learners during the English period” (OEQ); “I like to listen to people all the time” (OEQ); and “I make sure that I pay attention of what is being said by the teacher” (OEQ). Paying attention was closely linked to listening, which may be further associated with the oral tradition prevalent in indigenous communities (Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 2014). As learners engaged in active listening, they learnt how to pronounce words and learnt new words.

## 5.2 Humanising learning through respect for self, others and the environment

Respect for self and others emerged as a key value that helps learners with EFAL learning in this study. Respect was associated with being loving and caring, being generous, offering help, being considerate and appreciating the richness of different languages. Learners reported the following: “I love to learn and I love to respect” (OEQ); and “we respect each other” (OEQ). Learners expressed respect not only towards their teachers but also towards anyone who imparts knowledge to them: “I respect all the people who will give us the knowledge” (OEQ); “my classroom is filled with joy and love also with a lot of posters about caring for others”; (OEQ) and “I need to make sure they respect me and also me respect and always to make a place to be clean and ourselves and love each other” (OEQ). Additionally, respect was demonstrated by the learner’s consideration for one another: “We are a lot(s) but respectful; we do not bother each other and make noise” (OEQ). In these extracts respect seems to supersede the challenges experienced in the classroom such as overcrowding and diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Respect extended beyond the boundaries of self and others and encompassed the manner in which learners conscientiously maintained the classroom environment. This demonstrates their commitment to upholding a sense of order and respect not only in their interpersonal interactions but also in the physical space where they engaged in learning. In this regard, learners reported the following: *"We clean our classroom every day"* (OEQ), *"... always clean because we always clean it. Our class is very clean and I love my class. The environment is very clean"* (OEQ), *"We make sure that our class is so clean ..."* (OEQ) and *"... classroom environment is good and clean because we take care of everything"* (OEQ). What emerges from these excerpts is that the learners collectively took ownership of the learning environment and prioritised communal classroom care.

### 5.3 Using humour as a strategy for EFAL learning

The findings from the current study suggest that learners used humour as a strategy for EFAL learning as expressed in the following excerpts: *"I make jokes when learning English and ask unnecessary questions regarding English which makes our English teacher smile and laugh"* (OEQ); and *"playing with words to make funny sentences"* (OEQ). These excerpts illustrate that learners employed humour to create a conducive environment that maximised EFAL learning.

Humour not only affected EFAL learning by allowing learners to engage in the language humorously, it also assisted learners to overcome language challenges. The findings of the current study suggest that humour allowed learners to incorporate English into their existing linguistic repertoires without the stigma associated with 'standard' English correctness. This is illustrated by the following extracts: *"I make jokes in English and try to speak broken English just for fun"* (OEQ); and *"by making little jokes so that I can easily understand my SL [second language]"* (OEQ). In our observations, we noticed that learners would at times deliberately break grammatical rules when expressing themselves in English. At other times they would invent phrases such as *"running out of English data"* (Obs). This expression indicated that learners had reached the limit of their English language capabilities and were more comfortable at using their home language(s) or a combination of home language(s) and English to effectively communicate and express themselves. Moreover, learners would often make use of colloquial pronunciation of English words thereby indigenising the English language. Learners also made use of their home languages which underscores their multilingual identities and highlights their adaptability and resourcefulness in employing language as a tool for effective communication. As learners humorously engaged in what they termed "broken English", they created a safe space for themselves to develop their language skills without subjecting themselves to perceived purist standards of English. The use of humour built learners' confidence, and thus addressed the affective feelings that hinder EFAL learning.

Not only did learners utilise humour as a strategy for EFAL learning but they also expected teachers to use humour to maximise learning: *"Your teacher must not be teaching while sitting; she must make actions or examples so that we can understand and she must make some jokes so that we can enjoy"* (OEQ). Learners recognised the value of humour and how it could help them improve their EFAL learning. A learner indicated: *"I wish they could manage to come up with fun activities which accommodate learning at the same time"* (OEQ).

#### 5.4 Incorporating indigenised art forms and word games in the EFAL classroom

In this study, dance, music, poetry and drama are classified as indigenous strategies because they were expressed in a uniquely African way and context. From our observations, dances and songs that learners used to learn EFAL included gum-boot dancing, *ukugiyi* (a Zulu dance), *setapa* (a Tswana dance) and *xibelani* (a Tsonga dance), which are uniquely African. The diverse traditional dances and songs served as a valuable lesson for participants demonstrating that elements from their cultures can be integrated into mainstream formal education. Most of these songs and dances conveyed instructive messages passed down through generations. Drama included unique African storytelling narratives and praise poetry performed by learners in their effort to contextualise the stories they were learning in the classroom. Learners indicated that the incorporation of these multimodal methods in the classroom helped them to enjoy EFAL learning: “... by doing monologue, speeches, poems, dramas, etc. Because it [helps] us to enjoy more” (OEQ); “We do debate, poems and unprepared speech and if someone said something wrong, we do not laugh, we correct him/her” (OEQ); and “the poems and speech that helps me to learn English better [in] lessons and gain more language towards the lessons” (OEQ). Learners not only performed poetry as a strategy for language-learning, as suggested by the aforementioned extracts, but they also read and wrote poetry. This is indicated in these extracts: “... by reading books, poems, short stories, novels and dialogues” (OEQ); and “I communicate in English with everyone around me and write poems” (OEQ); and “... by doing monologue, speeches, poems, (and) etc. Because it keeps [helps] us to enjoy more” (OEQ).

Learners also reported the use of word games as an effective strategy for EFAL learning. This is shown in the following extracts: “Things that I do to make the English learning more enjoyable for learning I simply: make more twisters and memes, make tongue twisters, make more puzzles or games, play spelling bees” (OEQ); and “maybe we could play games in English” (OEQ). In our observation of some of the lessons, learners would play around with words, using synonyms, antonyms and colloquial understanding of the words in helping each other read or spell words. When reading, learners would often compete with each other to see who could pronounce a difficult word better or who could correctly spell a difficult word during a spelling test. As learners played word games collectively they were able to improve their vocabulary and their pronunciation, as expressed in the following excerpt: “I play around with word[s] and try to think of funny way I could pronounce them, that way I [am] able to remember the words easily and can improve my vocabulary, somehow. Most of the time I write speeches (for pleasure) using the words” (OEQ). This indicated initiative on the part of the learners and demonstrated that they used indigenised strategies to plan and manage their EFAL learning.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Social connectedness and Ubuntu as a pathways for EFAL learning

It is evident from this study that social connectedness is key to EFAL learning as it creates an environment which allows learners to co-create EFAL knowledge. Social connectedness highlights the need to understand EFAL learning from an

indigenous perspective, which is based on relational realities (Chilisa, 2012). As noted by Wilson (2008), the concept of social connectedness is not unique to African people, thus, an understanding of strategies from this perspective can be expanded beyond indigenous African learners. However, in this study we have framed social connectedness within an African cosmology of togetherness and sense of belonging. We hold the view that social connectedness goes deeper than social interaction and involves a sense of belonging, recognition and understanding the interconnectivity of the self with others and the environment. According to Nwoye (2017), the concept of self in the African context is embedded in the interconnectedness with others. This interconnectedness serves as a driving force for African children to embrace a lifestyle marked by respect, reciprocity, mutual assistance and collective accountability. This way of life involves not only personal advancement but also commitment to the progress of others. It reflects the values of Ubuntu which underscore the belief that within a community, an individuals' successes and failures affect not only the individual concerned but the community as a whole. This is substantiated by Kincheloe and Steinberg (2014) who argue that IK facilitates social connectedness because it focuses on how human beings relate to each other and to their ecosystem. As such, social connectedness connects the learner to the cultural environment and aids cognitive development (Chilisa, 2012; Nwoye, 2017; Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015). This is associated with good academic performance and the display of positive prosocial behaviours (Allen et al., 2018). Without this connectedness, learners become alienated to the learning environment and this alienation is detrimental to learning generally and EFAL learning specifically.

Conversely, when learners experience a sense of belonging from those in the school environment such as peers and teachers, they feel respected, included and supported (Allen et al., 2018). Maphalala (2017) argues that in the classroom context this feeling of belonging can aid in building a sense of collective responsibility and awareness that learning occurs through interaction with others. Furthermore, it can create a platform for learners to be nurtured and fostered, enabling them to generate knowledge and acquire skills with peers while also taking responsibility for each other's achievements. We therefore contend that an educational system that upholds and affirms the dignity of each learner serves as fertile ground for nurturing the seeds of respect, not only for oneself and others but also for the environment. Consequently, cultivating a sense of belonging is critical in enabling learners to feel genuinely at home within the school environment thereby fostering an environment conducive for EFAL learning.

## *6.2 Use of humour as a strategy for EFAL learning*

In the current study, humour was used in various ways by EFAL learners. Learners employed humour to downplay their EFAL mistakes and to create a safe space in which to use English without being stifled by the linguistic rules that govern it. Humour is an effective resource for managing learners' emotions, thereby scaffolding EFAL learning (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014; Simeon, 2016). Humour plays a vital role in African literature and has been used by Africa's leading literary scholars (Adjei, 2015). According to Adjei (2015), African literary scholars such as Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah and Ola Rotimi often use humour to downplay the gravity of the issues they write about, such as politics and colonial misfortune. This is further affirmed

by Kincheloe and Steinberg (2014), who contend that humour is a form of art used for managing oppressive systems. The intentional use of “broken English” by learners could be seen as a way for learners to employ humour as a coping mechanism within an education system that prioritises Western ideologies over the celebration of IKS. Furthermore, the incorporation of African linguistic elements such as modifying pronunciation in an African manner and using their own indigenous languages can be regarded as a strategy employed by learners to navigate the monolingual ideology enforced in South African schools, where English is employed as the primary language for instruction from Grade 4 (Madiba, 2012; DBE, 2011). As demonstrated by García and Lin (2016), the adoption of a monolingual ideology is based on the Western idea that treats languages as distinct entities and the hegemonic position given to the English language for academic purposes. This approach disregards the rich linguistic diversity of multilingual learners and devalues indigenous languages which are essential for scaffolding EFAL learning (Madiba, 2012; Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2022). Humour, therefore, cannot be divorced from the fabric of African life, hence the classification as an indigenous strategy. When humour is used for downplaying mistakes, it allows the learner to diffuse embarrassing situations they encounter when using the language. Accordingly, humour also regulates emotions by lowering anxiety and tension (Adjei, 2015; Bilokcuoglu & Bebreli, 2018). This creates a safe environment that allows EFAL learners to cope with the complexities of L2 learning.

### *6.3 Indigenous art forms as a strategy for EFAL learning*

The incorporation of cultural resources in EFAL learning valorises IKS and creates an environment where learners are able to experience education in a familiar context and culture (Odora Hoppers, 2015). This is supported by Msila (2012) who asserts that the inclusion of IKS such as dance, songs and storytelling helps broaden learner’s perspectives and greatly expand their knowledge. The inclusion of IKS allows learners to reclaim the cognitive and ontological status of indigenous knowledge, which leads to a greater cognitive construction of knowledge (Ned, 2019; Tondi, 2018). A key characteristic of indigenous resources, which include dance, oral poetry and drama, is their multimodal nature, which encourages learners to use all their senses in the learning environment. This is crucial as research has found that when learners engage with language material that speaks to their identity, reality and senses, they become more innovative, engaged and motivated to learn (Mavhiza, 2019). According to Brouillette et al., (2014), dance and drama are important resources in developing learners’ oral language skills, as they afford learners an opportunity to become actively engaged in the learning process, initially by copying movements and later by effectively integrating kinaesthetic skills with the target language. This is supported in studies by Samuelson et al., (2018), and Newfield and d’Abdon (2015), who give evidence that incorporating cultural resources from the learner’s home, such as storytelling, oral poetry, dance and drama, provides effective opportunities for teaching EFAL.

The results of the current study further indicate that learners use music as a strategy for EFAL learning. In this study, learners reported using music in general; however, evidence derived from the observational data reveals that indigenous music was used to facilitate EFAL learning. The use of music for language

learning has been investigated widely, and several studies indicate the benefits of music in EFAL learning. Scholars have argued that music helps to improve both verbal and auditory memory, both of which are essential for EFAL learning (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008; Mobbs, & Cuyul, 2018; Werner, 2018). Music has also been associated with a range of language skills such as listening comprehension (Şevik, 2012), grammar (Roslim et al., 2011), writing (Lytle, 2011), vocabulary (Coyle & Gracia, 2014), and pronunciation (Farmand & Pourgharib, 2013).

Dance, drama, poetry and music help learners regulate their emotions by providing a platform for them to label, manage and communicate their emotions (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008; Brouillette, et al., 2014; Mavhiza, 2019; Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006). This suggests that dance, drama, poetry and music help learners to manage their affective strategies, which are crucial for EFAL learning. Affective strategies assist learners to regulate emotions and attitudes. They also provide motivation through relaxation activities and positive self-talk that reduce anxiety when communicating in EFAL (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 2008). Moreover, these art forms create a positive classroom experience for EFAL learners by providing a nonthreatening environment, thus providing a useful resource for EFAL learning (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008; Mobbs & Cuyul, 2018). Dance, drama, poetry and music further support learners to consider and sympathise with the feelings of others. Brouillette et al. (2014) argue that these skills are essential in developing learners' capacity for complex social interaction in order to participate effectively in various types of relationships. The ability to navigate successfully the complexities of social interaction enhances academic success as it allows learners to co-construct knowledge as they interact with others (Ganga & Maphalala, 2016).

#### *6.4 Indigenous word games*

The learners in the current study indicated the use of word games as a strategy for EFAL learning, such as tongue twisters and competitions. Using word games for EFAL learning is supported by the literature (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008). Word games are an effective strategy for practicing and internalising vocabulary, grammar and language structures. Ajibade and Ndububa (2008) contend that the element of competition provided by games enhances motivation for learning EFAL, and, consequently, promotes a joyful and enthusiastic classroom environment. In this study, learners indicated that they enjoyed playing word games, creating their own rules and competing against one another. However, the nature of competition advocated by Ajibade and Ndububa (2008) is different from that of cultures which value individualism, where learners work as individuals to achieve an individual goal (Oxford & Gkonou, 2018). Competition in the African context is collaborative and involves working in small groups to achieve a collective purpose. This is synonymous with the values of Ubuntu and the communalism of indigenous learners, because the focus is on interdependence, respect and inclusivity (Maphalala, 2017; Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015). According to Hamilton-Ekeke and Dorgu (2015), the inclusion of indigenous methods in the curriculum holds benefits for the development of a curriculum focused on critical problem-solving and life-long learning. This view is further supported by Ajibade and Ndububa (2008), who highlight that word games, songs and stories provide invaluable cooperative resources in the EFAL classroom. Learners are familiar with these resources, which they can easily access. This

opens up great possibilities for EFAL learners as games provide for an environment in which cooperative learning can occur.

## **7 Conclusion and recommendations**

Based on the findings of the current study, we argue that the inclusion of IKS, with its multimodal learning strategies, in the curriculum is imperative for the academic success of indigenous learners in South Africa. The current curriculum should reflect the values (e.g. social connection and respect) and practices (e.g. use of indigenous art forms and humour) of indigenous learners for optimal learning to occur. Incorporating IKS into the curriculum is crucial due to its mutual connection to the values of Ubuntu (Gumbo, 2016). Such integration would create a familiar educational environment for learners, enabling them to draw upon their full resource repertoires (dance, storytelling, humour, etc.) to enhance EFAL learning. Furthermore, this inclusion would serve to validate and celebrate their diverse knowledge systems thus reinforcing that their cultural heritage, languages and traditions have a rightful place in the context of formal education. It is imperative that policymakers include IKS in the curriculum to ensure that learners become actively involved in their own learning. Including IKS in the curriculum reduces the dualistic divide that is created between what and how learners learn at school and their lived experiences. This inclusion may validate and elevate the rich cultural heritage of indigenous learners. We acknowledge that the formal school system constrains teachers from including indigenous modes of learning owing to resource shortages, gaps in teacher training, and its focus on summative examinations and completing the curriculum within a specified timeframe. However, we argue that it is vital that change should be implemented at curriculum level to ensure that the indigenous knowledge that learners possess is given equal status to Western forms of knowledge. As such, training should be provided to teachers on how to implement IKS in the curriculum while encouraging and upholding the values of Ubuntu in the teaching of EFAL.

### **Ethics statement**

The authors declare that they have obtained ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education's Ethics Committee (ref no: HU 18/09/03) for conducting this study with human participants.

### **Disclosure statement**

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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