The Rural Educator

Volume 45
Number 4 *Special Topics Issue on Rural Multilingual Education*

Article 7

Fall 2024

Rural Undergraduate Students' Narratives of English Language Learning Within Multilingual Classroom Contexts: A Namibian Perspective

Annaly M. Strauss
University of Namibia, astrauss@unam.na

Joanne M. Marshall
Iowa State University, jmars@iastate.edu

Recommended Citation

Strauss, A. M., & Marshall, J. M. (2024). Rural Undergraduate Students' Narratives of English Language Learning Within Multilingual Classroom Contexts: A Namibian Perspective. *The Rural Educator, 45*(4), 77-86. https://doi.org/10.55533/2643-9662.1517

Research Article

Rural Undergraduate Students' Narratives of English Language Learning Within Multilingual Classroom Contexts: A Namibian Perspective

Annaly M. Strauss
Joanne M. Marshall

This article presents findings on how preservice teachers navigate teaching and learning in a multilingual rural environment as English learners (ELs) during their teacher preparation program. The study used a qualitative research design to collect and analyze data. The conceptual framework of the study was based on culturally responsive pedagogy and place-based education theory. In this study, preservice teachers from multilingual rural backgrounds who wished to teach in multilingual rural settings illustrated their coping strategies for rural realities and how the rural context affected their commitment to their studies. The findings revealed preservice teachers' narratives under the categories of culturally responsive strategies for English language learning, strengths and weaknesses of English language use, rural experiences and commitment to studies, and teacher educators' perspectives. The rural location of studies presented some challenges, such as living far away from home; lack of amenities, including an inadequate library facility; no internet; and having to adjust without families. The rural context also offered some benefits for studies, including low-cost accommodation, feeling safe, and peer learning opportunities. Further research is recommended on a larger scale across university campuses to find out how teacher educators may address the needs of preservice teachers through a revised curriculum for English language learning within multilingual contexts.

Namibia is a postcolonial country on the southwest coast of Africa. The //Karas[1] region is the rural southernmost region of Namibia, extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the west and South Africa to the east and south. This region is largely rural in nature, as it includes large swaths of the Namib and Kalahari deserts, as well as a plateau, limited arable land, and a history of nomadic people groups before and after colonization. It is Namibia's largest region geographically, but it is sparsely populated, with nearly 86,000 people (Namibian Statistics Agency [NSA], 2017) spread across 161,325 sq km (62,287 sq mi), larger than the U.S. state of Georgia, with a population density average of one person for every 2 sq km (or .77 sq mi).

//Karas, like the rest of Namibia, is a multilingual region. In former colonial settings such as //Karas, language plays a critical role in the power dynamics and hegemonic nature of schools. People grow up speaking their ethnic group's language at home, then add at least one more language at school. Namibia has 14 school languages: English, Afrikaans, German, Khoekhoegowab, Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga, Otjiherero, Rukwangali, Rumanyo, Setswana, Silozi, Ju'hoansi, Thimbukushu, and Sign Language. School instruction in the junior primary phase (grades 1–3) is determined by the language spoken by most learners, but parents who prefer English as the mode of instruction (MoI) for their children's education in this phase may apply for this option. From grade 4 onward, the MoI for all students is English, as decreed by the Ministry of Education (2013). According to the NSA (2017), only 2.3% of the population speaks English as their first language.

Namibia was administered by South Africa from 1919 to 1990. In //Karas, the four most common languages spoken at home are Oshiwambo (44%); Afrikaans (19%); Nama/Damara, also known as Khoekhoegowab (18%); and Otjiherero (8%) (NSA, 2017). All these languages are associated with Namibia's ethnic groups, although Afrikaans was the lingua franca from 1920 to 1990 and is still spoken widely after independence because of South Africa's regional proximity and people's postcolonial identity.

Namibia faces similar challenges to those found in the US and other countries in which rural public school students grow up speaking a language other

[1] The forward slashes (//) indicate a lateral clicking sound from the Khoekhoegowab language, spoken by the Nama and Damara ethnic groups indigenous to the //Karas region.

than English at home. The limited resources of rural schools (Coady, 2020; Showalter et al., 2023) create implications for teachers' instructional practices as they attempt to address their students' academic, linguistic, and literacy needs (Ankeny et al., 2019). This study explored how preservice teachers in Namibia navigated teaching and learning in a multilingual rural environment as ELs during their teacher preparation program.

Conceptual Framework

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is defined as the use of cultural knowledge, values, and personal experiences of students with diverse ethnic backgrounds to create effective, relevant, and meaningful learning experiences (Chou et al., 2018; Gay, 2010). In this asset-based approach to teaching, teachers build a bridge between students' experiences at home and their learning experiences in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Dunham et al. (2022) list four tenets of culturally sustaining teachers in multilingual literacy classrooms: build cultural competence, maintain high expectations, foster critical consciousness, and sustain pluralism.

The inclusive education policy of Namibia, encoded in Article 20(1) of its Constitution, encourages educators to adjust the curriculum to include content that reflects the cultural background of students. Despite this policy provision, work remains to be done in higher education institutions to provide explicit learning experiences and inclusive education during teacher training. When teacher educators are unaware of culturally responsive pedagogies in inclusive classrooms, they cannot enact responsive behaviors and teaching strategies to prepare preservice teachers with useful pedagogical strategies for their future teaching practice. One such strategy is explicit modeling, which is defined as intentionally displaying teaching strategies and the underlying thought processes (Lunenberg et al., 2007) by explicitly stating the strategies and choices made through "thinking aloud" (Loughran & Berry, 2005, p. 194). In today's multilingual global context, it is not adequate for English language training to focus on decontextualized and discrete traditional aspects of language teaching and learning (Strauss, 2018). Rural educators must seek ways to meet the EL needs of their students, so teacher training in rural contexts needs to prepare preservice teachers to use teaching and learning strategies that meet the demands of ELs in their communities.

Because so few Namibian students speak English as a first language, Namibian classrooms at the primary, secondary, and higher education levels serve as places where speakers with limited English proficiency code-switch to their first language. Lin (2013) defines code-switching as the use of two languages by either teachers or students in the classroom setting. Code-switching leverages the learner's first language with English and thus resembles CRT in that it is a process through which learners and their teachers build new knowledge upon their existing knowledge.

Teachers are challenged to transform their teaching performance to cope with students' language complexity (Wilder et al., 2016). The lack of congruence between classroom practice and the strategies essential for effective CRT and student success in multilingual contexts necessitates the training of educators in this area before and after they enter the profession.

Rural Place-Based Teaching

Another important element of CRT in the rural classroom is awareness and inclusion of the rural context. Place-based education is learning that is rooted in the local—the unique history, environment, culture, economy, literature, and art of a particular place. Gruenewald (2003a) points out that students and their teachers are too often isolated from the places outside the classroom, leading to limiting students' experiences and perceptions, stunting development, and a lack of connection to and appreciation of the place in which they are located. If the teacher training curriculum does not provide explicitly for consideration of the place of rural teaching, educators will not factor rurality into their teaching and learning process. Place-conscious pedagogy calls on teachers to expand the school experience to foster "connection, exploration, and action" in socioecological places outside the classroom (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 9). Greenwood (2019) also contends that a place-focused approach to teaching and learning must be contextualized and culturally responsive to the needs of educators and all students in a particular school. Coady (2020) and Slavin et al. (2011) set a research agenda for rural EL education, identifying teacher quality and the preparation of teachers for EL students as one of the most important factors affecting learning.

Rural education comes with an array of challenges for teacher educators, preservice educators, and their future students. Smith (2002) argues that "the primary value of place-based education lies in the way that it serves to strengthen children's connections to each other and to the regions in which they live" (p. 594). The preservice teachers who study in the //Karas region have left their homes in rural places to attend university in a different rural place. If they are provided with culturally relevant support and pedagogical modeling, they can build upon their prior experiences in rural areas for the benefit of their future learners.

The study presented here was based on the assumption that teacher preparation is essential to quality education, especially in rural contexts in which learners are multilingual and have limited proficiency in their school's instructional language—in this case, English. It was additionally informed by concepts of CRT and place-based pedagogy. Our main research question was: *What are the English language learning experiences of teacher education students in a rural Namibian university?* Answers to this question expand previous research about educating teachers in and for multilingual rural environments, as well as the conceptual literature on culturally relevant and place-based pedagogies.

Methods

The study used a qualitative research design primarily because qualitative studies focus more on the "why" and "how" of issues—the very points this study was designed to investigate regarding preservice students' experiences of English language teaching and learning. Narrative analysis, an approach in which the researcher analyzes participants' stories to find the participants' voices in a particular time, place, or setting (Patton, 2005), was used. The study included preservice teachers' narratives of their academic and personal experiences of studying in a rural context.

Participants

This study used purposeful sampling to identify prospective participants at a higher education institution that prepares teachers in rural Namibia. Participants had to be preservice teachers enrolled for any level of study in the teacher training program. Sixteen students responded to the voluntary call for participation in the study, and all were eligible to participate.

In addition to the 16 student participants, the sample also included three teacher educators from the teacher preparation program. Including instructors' viewpoints on their preservice teaching students' English learning provided more context and an alternative viewpoint to the students' perspectives. All instructors were invited to participate in the study based on their field of teaching or work with students. However, only a few accepted the invitation to participate.

Site's Rural and Postcolonial Context

In addition to the rural nature of the university's location, it is important to note its historical and postcolonial context. Teacher education in Namibia has been contested since the country's independence in 1990. Teacher training was based on the colonial apartheid system of South Africa. Teacher training for non-White students was segregated for "Colored" and Black students. Afrikaans was the medium of instruction in higher education for all students. Currently, and because of //Karas region's location, most residents and students speak and highly value both Afrikaans and Khoekoegowab as spoken languages.

After independence, in addition to national calls for inclusivity and equity, there were many efforts to transition from a teacher-dominated system to learner-centered pedagogy. This shift has encountered some resistance, however, as is often the case with any change in teaching practice. The movement has also been critiqued for being influenced by Western and aid organizations, which can be perceived as being top-down and inappropriate for the context—reinforcing colonialism (O'Sullivan, 2004; Thompson, 2013; van Aswegen et al., 2022) while also failing to provide sufficient financial support or professional development (Zeichner & Ndimande, 2008).

Data Collection

We used a semi-structured interview protocol to interview individuals and a small group of two to three students. All the interviews were conducted in English. Data collection involved two researchers: one who conducted a group interview online and one who interviewed individual participants in person. We used Microsoft Word and a computer-assisted voice recognition program to transcribe the data. The primary data include a videorecorded group interview, transcriptions of one-on-one interviews,

and field notes. Voluntary teacher-participant interviews were conducted one-on-one, using an interview protocol designed for the purpose.

The interview protocol included questions about geographical information, preservice teachers' personal perspectives about their education and English language learning, and questions about their experience of place. The interviews lasted 45–60 minutes.

Data Analysis

In the analysis, we grouped the data and identified potential categories in an iterative process, comparing codes with each other. At the heart of narrative analysis is "the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The narrative data were grouped in four categories.

1. Culturally responsive strategies for ELs
2. Strengths and weaknesses of English language use
3. Rural context and commitment to studies
4. Teacher educators' perspectives

Positionality

As we approached the data analysis, we were aware of our own biases and positionality. The research team included one non-native English speaker who is part of the teacher preparation faculty and one native English speaker. One of the researchers is a Namibian and native Afrikaans speaker; this researcher has studied in the US and empathizes with students' language challenges in multilingual academic environments. The other researcher is a native English speaker from the US who was educated in a rural public school and now teaches at a university in a predominantly rural state. During the interviews, we tried not to influence students' opinions and perspectives, and during analysis, we served as peer reviewers for each other to check each other's biases.

Ethical Considerations

The lead researcher received ethical clearance from the University of Namibia to conduct the study. Each participant gave informed consent before the interviews were conducted. Both student and faculty participant were informed that they did not have to answer questions when they were not comfortable doing so. Neither group was coerced nor compensated to participate in the study.

Findings

Language Proficiency

At the beginning of each interview, we asked each student participant to rate their English proficiency. Participants rated themselves according to four categories: limited proficiency, basic proficiency, intermediate (good) proficiency, and native speaker. Each of these categories is regularly used and understood by multilingual speakers throughout Namibia because they are employed in the Ministry of Education, Art, and Culture's syllabi and standards of assessment. Of the 16 student participants, nine (56.25%) reported basic proficiency in English, five (31.25%) good proficiency, and two (12.5%) limited proficiency (Figure 1); no student participants self-identified as native speakers.

Figure 1: English Language proficiency

Participants described linguistic challenges, such as learning parts of speech, limited vocabulary, and grammar. Some struggles, such as pronunciation, might be based on the person's native language. One participant explained, "In Oshiwambo, there is no 'r' sound. We sound out the letter 'r' as 'l' instead. It affects fluency in reading and speaking." English grammar and language rules, such as punctuation, spelling, and homophones, make the language difficult to learn and use. Colonial and global use of language also plays a role in multilingual language contexts in rural settings. For example, one participant said, "Sometimes, I do not understand words or people's accents. This makes me confused. We use both British and American English. This plays a bit with me."

We present our findings below in four main categories: culturally responsive strategies for ELs in the rural university classroom context, culturally relevant learning, current EL learning strategies, and the rural context and commitment to studies. We conclude with teacher educators' narratives.

Culturally Responsive Strategies for English Language Learning

While one student participant said, "I am happy with my lecturers. They are good," other participants expressed difficulties with their English instructors. One student shared about their English class, "I am bewildered and confused at times." Additional students explained, "Sometimes people [instructors] use complex words that impede my understanding of the language," and "It really frustrates me when an English educator constantly pronounces a word incorrectly. As English teachers, teachers ought to model and be an example."

Students offered suggestions for the university. One suggested that university faculty differentiate their instruction: "Lecturers must not only see the best students, but they must also see us as students with different abilities. There must be extra classes for students struggling with different aspects of English." Currently, the university does not offer extra English classes for struggling students. Students also offered some suggestions to lecturers to enhance their English language learning, such as extra classes, oral quizzes, word lists, and group discussions.

Some student participants found help through social interaction with their peers and lecturers. As one student stated, "I learn and gain competence through my engagements with other students and lecturers."

Culturally Relevant Learning

While participants did not specifically mention ways in which their instructors used culturally relevant instruction, they did describe strategies they used in their own learning. We identify these strategies as culturally relevant in that they build on participants' prior knowledge in culturally specific ways. Linguistic capital includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication and experiences in more than one language and/or style (Faulstich Orellana, 2003). For example, one participant talked explicitly and evocatively about connecting a new word to their cultural practices. Relying on local knowledge enabled him to learn a new English concept.

> I like to relate new words to my cultural context. For example, I do not understand the word "sustainable." When I relate this word to my culture, I think of the trees in my village. We are not allowed to cut certain trees for firewood. As the elders believe, it will give you bad luck when you cut. The point is, if we cut trees, they will become extinct. For me to understand this term, I turned to what I believe in my culture to understand the concept better.

Another participant talked about using art as a tool to mediate their language learning:

> I am artistic. I make up my songs and reinforce my passion when I draw on art to give expression to my academic work. To me, it is an unconventional way to relate to content. Recently, we had to make a book. I chose the topic "African Princes" and made a crown for my book. I read the story to my peers, who were interested and enjoyed the story.

Again, participants did not offer examples of their instructors' use of such strategies to engage them as learners, but they have these experiences on which to draw when teaching their own learners.

English Language Learners' Strategies

Student participants revealed how they interact socially, code-switch, and are encouraged to use strategies for ELs within the rural classroom context.

Social Interaction

Student participants described how, in social settings, a more knowledgeable peer facilitates and mediates knowledge from the native language to English while others still have not realized how to find ways to foster understanding through social interaction. A participant explained, "My peers are a source of inspiration to speak English." They added, "I am also more confident when teachers do not correct me when I speak." Another participant discussed how their friends helped them translate ideas from Afrikaans to English: "Interaction with my friends also helps me to understand. I ask a friend to explain in Afrikaans so that I can understand better in English."

Isolation is a challenge of the university's rural location and is showcased in this student participant's comment: "Being the only person that does not speak Afrikaans, I feel excluded in classroom conversations. My friends can talk to each other, but I don't have anybody to talk to." In place-based pedagogy, preservice teachers become aware of the possibility of connecting the curriculum to their local culture and knowledge, and their firsthand experience of being included or not can inform their own efforts in including their own students.

Code-Switching

An example of code-switching provided by student participants involved a native Afrikaans-speaking student's request to Afrikaans-speaking friends to explain concepts so that they could then be applied to what they were learning in English. One respondent specifically mentioned code-switching as a strategy they used: "When I do not understand, I code-switch." That respondent continued,

> I am not giving up on my native language. I code-switch when I do not understand. I use my native language to understand English. If I do not understand something, I ask my friends. We speak Afrikaans. There are not a lot of friends who speak Oshiwambo compared to the ones who speak Afrikaans. I was taught Afrikaans in school from grades 1–12. Afrikaans was taught as a subject in school.

One respondent also suggested that university faculty should also use code-switching in their instruction: "Maybe try to code-switch. Sometimes I find it easier to understand when a lecturer code-switches to a local language [Afrikaans or Khoekhoegowab]." While participants often used social engagement and code-switching in their language learning, they also talked about employing more traditional language-learning strategies. Mastery of more languages is important and beneficial in a multilingual context.

Traditional Language Strategies

Student participants shared diverse perspectives on what works best for them to increase their English language proficiency. One student suggested that presentations were particularly helpful for increasing spoken English fluency: "We must do lots of presentations. It has an advantage for presentation skills. When you are not well-spoken, presentations are a platform to practice speaking skills, and it gives confidence." However, another student talked about preferring reading to speaking:

> We were told in school to read books to improve the use of English. I improve my English after the lessons by reading. Reading expands my vocabulary and fluency in speaking English. Sometimes I find it difficult to speak English to the extent that I stutter. Then I cannot speak freely in front of others in class.

Another student talked about preferring writing for their own learning but also suggested that faculty use strategies to increase class participation:

> I prefer to write things. When I do not participate in class, I feel the lecturer can ask questions or provide time for those who do not understand. Even though the lecturers ask questions, sometimes I do not respond because I do not have proficiency.

Another participant echoed the helpfulness of class participation and the strategies that lecturers use, making suggestions for more strategies to be used based on earlier experiences. In addition to saying that faculty "must allow for more participation in the classroom," they added, "Lecturers use PowerPoint presentations. The presentations practically teach the use of language." Another participant recommended more group discussions and shared that in their precollege classes they would "play out readings through drama."

Some student participants talked about using a dictionary to look up words they do not understand—a strategy some had used before college and have continued, with the encouragement of their faculty. Another student used the dictionary for translation: "Sometimes I use my dictionary or put the word in my language and then I understand better. I write in Afrikaans and then I understand in English better."

These instructional and learning strategies for increasing college success and English proficiency are not used in isolation, of course, but in conjunction with each other. Participants talked in some detail about ways in which they process information using the cultural and linguistic tools with which they are familiar, or what we would identify as culturally relevant pedagogy.

Rural Experiences and Commitment to Studies

In addition to students' teaching and learning experiences with English proficiency, participants discussed their reactions to attending a rural university and their willingness to teach in rural contexts. Such awareness of the context is another way to employ learners' previous knowledge to build new knowledge.

One student respondent talked about both the positive and negative aspects of studying at a rural teacher education institution. Positively, they observed, "This is a safe or peaceful town to study. The housing is low-cost." However, negatively, they noted,

> The library is small and far from the hostel. It is far from the hostel to the campus. Most of the time, classes start at 7:30 a.m. or end late, then

> transport is a problem. The transport is expensive. I must walk to campus and back to the hostel where I stay.

One participant felt excluded because Afrikaans is spoken frequently in the university's region: "It is a small place, if you cannot speak Afrikaans, you're a bit of an outcast. People make you feel excluded."

Many participants had experience growing up in rural areas. One spoke passionately about the difficulty of that background and the importance of upward mobility: "We are struggling financially and the lack of finances in the rural areas forces one to work hard to escape or break the cycle of poverty." Another student explained, "I come from a poor background and must stay committed for the sake of my child and my parents."

Student participants spoke about their motivation and purpose at university because they come from and study in a rural place. For example, one said:

> Being from a rural area motivates me to work hard. I would like to study hard so that I can graduate to become an English teacher. I want to teach the children of my village. Students struggle with mathematics because they cannot read or do not have a good command of English.

Another participant talked about the privilege of being at a rural university, even though it is far away from home:

> I am coming from a region where there is not a university. I want to take back to my community. I realize my purpose of being here. It is also a privilege to be here. I am 3,500 km away from where I live. Therefore, I make the most of my study experiences here.

Participants concurred that qualified teachers are needed in rural areas. In support of rural teaching, a participating student said, "You may find very good learners in schools. They may benefit from well-trained teachers in rural areas." This participant felt that learners in urban schools are undisciplined and disrespectful. However, another participant, saying they would choose to teach in an urban school, asserted, "There is no electricity, internet access, and a lack of resources in the rural areas." Another participant in favor of urban teaching settings believed that "when teaching students, there is nothing to show the learners to relate to during teaching." This last comment seems to indicate that the future teacher internalized the idea of culturally responsive teaching but does not see the assets of a rural place, instead saying there is "nothing to show … to relate to."

The above examples show how participants thought about their experiences in the rural areas in which they grew up and the rural areas in which they were attending university. While they acknowledged the difficulties of living and studying in a rural place, from a lack of amenities to a lack of common language, most saw a great benefit to continuing their studies and returning home to engage with their communities.

Teacher Educators' Perspectives

We also asked our university instructor participants about their experiences of teaching in the university's rural setting. One teacher educator spoke about the "hierarchy" of languages. As a native Oshiwambo speaker, they talked about "the inferiority to speak Oshiwambo" because "students are more attuned to speaking Afrikaans." They continued with an eloquent description of Namibia's colonial history and its relation to language:

> There is still a colonial element in the use of language. They [preservice students] have developed the perception that Afrikaans is their first language. Students do not want to associate as Oshiwambo speakers. Afrikaans has become a generational ideology. The hegemony is that they remain attached to the colonial language to get a job or to be relevant in the community. In the south, even though English is the medium of instruction, and has a higher rating, Afrikaans has more value.

This Oshiwambo-speaking instructor seemed to feel more isolated because of the dominance of Afrikaans in the university and region, as well as the resistance of students to learning or engaging with Oshiwambo. This instructor also identified some complexities of the language policy for teaching and learning within a postcolonial context. The university or ministry may mandate English instruction, but the history of and economic power associated with Afrikaans still makes it, perhaps, more valuable in this region. This undercurrent of hierarchy may influence how preservice teachers participate in the English classroom, making it less important to them, especially if they intend to return to teaching in the village where speaking their mother tongue is required in schools.

Discussion

Many preservice teachers felt they were not sufficiently proficient in English, a situation that may

impact mastery of academic work and success in their chosen profession. The participating preservice teachers suggested that more opportunities be afforded to them, such as class presentations to practice speaking English and support for ELs to practice speaking English. The preservice teachers offered specific examples of ways in which they enhanced their learning, such as by code-switching, social interactions, and using culturally responsive strategies in English classrooms.

While educators in the higher education institutions of Namibia realize the need for preservice teachers to improve their English language proficiency, little is done to support preservice teachers. According to Turner et al. (2017), effective differentiation requires a considerable amount of time, effort, and dedication from the instructor. Preparing for a course that engages differentiated content, processes, and products is more intensive. However, these authors and others (such as Tomlinson, 2017), also found that differentiated instruction allows each student to acquire knowledge and understanding of course content and activities based on their individual readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Preservice teachers suggested that universities differentiate their instruction to allow them to learn better. Ling (2012) states that traditional language teaching mainly cultivates language knowledge (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) and basic language abilities (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) separately. Modeling alternative language learning strategies is needed to enhance English language learning.

The rural context of this teacher training institution matters for preservice teachers. “Place” is central in the work of educators (Coady et al., 2023). The university’s rural setting presented some challenges, such as living far away from home, lack of amenities such as inadequate library facilities, no internet, and having to adjust to being away from family. A teacher educator revealed that “lack of resources and the price of resources influence commitment to work.” However, students also identified the benefits of studying in a rural context, including low-cost accommodation, feeling safe, and learning from their friends. Fundamental to a sociocultural approach to learning is the assumption that “learning and development occur as people participate in the sociocultural activities of their community” (Rogoff 1994, p. 209). The smaller size of a rural place can offer greater opportunities for this kind of social engagement and learning.

Greenwood (2019) proffers that a critical pedagogy of place could be “a meeting ground for diverse people to inspire one another” (p. 358). The rural context shapes preservice teachers’ experiences and identity when allowing them to engage in higher education in the absence of similar facilities in the rural towns elsewhere in the country and where they are from. However, identification of effective teaching and learning strategies is needed to determine students’ needs in pursuit of social justice and to provide rural teachers with effective support to work with ELs in practice.

Conclusion

This study revealed preservice teachers’ narratives of English language learning within multilingual classroom contexts. The rural context cultivated a sense of purpose and commitment for students, despite the challenges, such as distance away from home, no common language, and the cost of transportation. Given the complexity of multilingualism, teacher education programs in Namibia must do more to address the needs of preservice teachers enrolled in teacher preparation programs to impact English language learning in schools. Coady et al. (2023) concur that EL students face persistent disparities in academic learning outcomes because all learning and assessment practices are mediated by language, and this process differs for students who speak and use multiple languages. The results of this study show preservice teachers and teacher educators’ linguistic challenges. Therefore, further research is recommended on a larger scale across university campuses to identify the teacher educators’ needs for professional development to address preservice teachers’ needs through a revised curriculum for English language learning within multilingual contexts.

References

Ankeny, R., Marichal, N., & Coady, M. (2019). Emerging teacher-leaders for English learners: A professional development model in rural Florida. *School Leadership Review, 14*(2), Article 4. https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/slr/vol14/iss2/4

Chou, P.-I., Su, M.-H., & Wang, Y.-T. (2018). Transforming teacher preparation for culturally responsive teaching in Taiwan. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 75*, 116–127. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.06.013

Coady, M. R. (2020). Rural English learner education: A review of research and call for a national agenda. *Educational Researcher*, *49*(7), 524–532. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20931505

Coady, M. R., Marichal, N., Olszewska, A., Ankeny, R., Long, A., Shafiei, H., & Chakraborty, R. (2023). "It's like fuel": Igniting rural English learner education through place-conscious professional development. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 39*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.26209/JRRE3901

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 9(5), 2–14. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019005002

Const. of the Republic of Namibia, art. 20, § 1.

Dunham, H., Murdter-Atkinson, J., Nash, B., & Wetzel, M. M. (2022). Building on linguistic strengths: Tenets of a culturally sustaining teacher. *The Reading Teacher*, *75*(6), 677–684. https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2094

Faulstich Orellana, M. (2003). *In other words: En otras palabras: Learning from bilingual kids' translating/interpreting experiences.* School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). Teachers College.

Greenwood, D. A. (2019). Place, land, and the decolonization of the settler soul. *Journal of Environmental Education, 50*(4–6), 358–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2019.1687412

Gruenewald, D. (2003a). Foundations of place: A multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education. *American Educational Research Journal, 40*(3), 619–654. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312040003619

Gruenewald, D. A. (2003b). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. *Educational Researcher, 32*(4), 3–12. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X032004003

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Lin, A. (2013). Classroom code-switching: Three decades of research. *Applied Linguistics Review, 4*(1), 195–218. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2013-0009

Ling, P. (2012). The "whole language" theory and its application to the teaching of English reading. *English Language Teaching, 5*(3), 147–152. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n3p147

Loughran, J., & Berry, A. (2005) Modelling by teacher educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(2), 193–203. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.12.005

Lunenberg, M., Korthagen, F., & Swennen, A. (2007). The teacher educator as a role model, *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*(5), 586–601. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.11.001

Ministry of Education. (2013). *Sector policy on inclusive education*. https://www.npc.gov.na/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Sector-policy-on-Inclusive-Education-2013.pdf

Namibia Statistics Agency. (2017). *Namibia inter-censal demographic survey 2016 Report*. https://cms.my.na/assets/documents/NIDS_2016.pdf

O'Sullivan, M. (2004). The reconceptualization of learner-centered approaches: A Namibian case study. *International Journal of Educational Development, 24*(6), 585–602. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0738-0593(03)00018-x

Patton, M. Q. (2005). Qualitative research. In B. S. Everitt & D. C. Howell (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Statistics in Behavioral Science*. https://doi.org/10.1002/0470013192.bsa514

Rogoff, B. (1994). Developing understanding of the idea of communities of learners. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 1*(4), 209–229.

Showalter, D., Hartman, S. L., Eppley, K., Johnson, J., & Klein, R. (2023). *Why rural matters 2023: Centering equity and opportunity*: National Rural Education Association. https://www.nrea.net/why-rural-matters

Slavin, R. E., Madden, N., Calderón, M., Chamberlain, A., & Hennessy, M. (2011). Reading and language outcomes of a multiyear

randomized evaluation of transitional bilingual education. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *33*(1), 47–58. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373711398127

Smith, G. A. (2002). Place-based education: Learning to be where we are. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *83*(8), 584–594. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172170208300806

Strauss, A. M. (2018). The efficacy of a whole language approach to ESL teaching in an undergraduate classroom. *Journal for Language Teaching*, *52*(1), 46–60. https://doi.org/10.4314/jlt.v52i1.3

Tomlinson, C. A. (2017). *How to differentiate instruction in academically diverse classrooms* (3rd ed.). ASCD.

Thompson, P. (2013). Learner-centred education and "cultural translation." *International Journal of Educational Development*, *33*(1), 48–58. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2012.02.009

Turner, W. D., Solis, O. J., & Kincade, D. H. (2017). Differentiating instruction for large classes in higher education. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *29*(3), 490–500. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1151047

van Aswegen, R., Elmore, J., & Youngs, P. (2022). Issues related to teacher preparation in southern Africa. In I. Menter (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of teacher education research* (pp. 1–26). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59533-3_68-1

Wilder, L. K., Vázquez-Montilla, E., & Greene, J. (2016). Unmasking the faces of diverse university students and professors through narrative ethnography. *Multicultural Learning and Teaching*, *11*(2), 151–158. https://doi.org/10.1515/mlt-2016-0007

Zeichner, K., & Ndimande, B. (2008). Contradictions and tensions in the place of teachers in educational reform: Reflections on teacher preparation in the USA and Namibia. *Teachers and Teaching*, *14*(4), 331–343. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600802037751

Authors:

Annaly M. Strauss is a Lecturer in Early Childhood Education in the School of Education at the University of Namibia. Contact: astrauss@unam.na

Joanne M. Marshall is a Professor of Educational Leadership, Organizations, and Policy in the School of Education at Iowa State University. Contact: jmars@iastate.edu

Suggested Citation:

Strauss, A. M., & Marshall, J. M. (2024). Rural undergraduate students' narratives of English language learning within multilingual classroom contexts: A Namibian perspective. *The Rural Educator*, *45*(4), 77–86.