

On students' challenges and motivations learning Spanish with the current curriculum in South African universities

Sobre los desafíos y motivaciones de los estudiantes para aprender español con el currículo actual en universidades sudafricanas

María Recuenco Peñalver

Universidad de Málaga, España y Universidad de Ciudad del Cabo, Sudáfrica
mariarecuenco@uma.es; maria.recuencopenalver@uct.ac.za

Arturo Mendoza Ramos

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México y Universidad de Witwatersrand, Sudáfrica
a.mendoza@enallt.unam.mx y amendoza@sudafrica.unam.mx

ABSTRACT

Spanish is one of the most widely spoken and learnt languages worldwide. Spanish teaching in Africa has been predominantly in Francophone countries and the Magreb. In the Southern region of Africa, Madagascar and South Africa are the two countries with the highest number of learners. In South Africa, although students in higher education are motivated to learn Spanish, the implementation of language policies and the current Spanish language curriculum in South African universities have affected the number of enrolments in recent years. In this paper, we examine the current situation of Spanish studies in higher education institutions in South Africa, focusing on the cases of the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand. A survey was conducted among 89 first, second and third-year students who were learning Spanish at those universities in 2019 and 2020. The results suggest that Spanish is an important language to learn in South African universities, but its implementation at the tertiary level might benefit from some revision of the current Spanish language curriculum. Finally, we would argue that the design and implementation of language policies in higher education are having a negative impact on the opportunities for students to learn Spanish.

Keywords: Spanish language, higher education, South Africa, motivation, curriculum revision

RESUMEN

El español es una de las lenguas más habladas y aprendidas en todo el mundo. La enseñanza del español en África ha sido relevante en países francófonos y en el Magreb. En la región del sur de África, Madagascar y Sudáfrica son los dos países con el mayor número de estudiantes. En Sudáfrica, concretamente, aunque existe motivación a este respecto entre los estudiantes universitarios, los números de matrículas se han visto reducidos en los últimos años debido a la puesta en marcha de ciertas políticas lingüísticas y el actual currículo de enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera. En este artículo, examinaremos la situación actual de los

estudios de español en las instituciones de educación superior sudafricanas y nos centraremos en los casos de la Universidad de Ciudad del Cabo y la Universidad de Witwatersrand, en Johannesburgo. Para ello, se llevó a cabo una encuesta entre 89 estudiantes de español en primer, segundo y tercer año en los años 2019 y 2020. Los datos recogidos sugieren que el español es una lengua importante para los estudiantes universitarios en Sudáfrica, pero su currículo podría necesitar cierta revisión y mejora. Para terminar, se hablará también del diseño y la ejecución de las políticas lingüísticas sudafricanas y su impacto en las oportunidades de los estudiantes en relación con el estudio del español como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: lengua española, educación superior, Sudáfrica, motivación, revisión curricular

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we shall give an account of the current situation of Spanish as a foreign language in South Africa, focusing on its study at tertiary level, with the intention of determining whether a curriculum revision might be necessary and/or beneficial.

Despite the importance of Spanish as a language for Africans, as we shall see, there are not many papers on this particular topic. Javier Serrano's lengthy report from 2014 titled *La enseñanza del español en África Subsahariana: documentación y propuestas* revealed both the interest in the language and its importance. Not many have pursued the subject since then. Therefore, we are hoping to contribute to reflexion on the matter within the specific context of South African studies.

We will start by presenting an overview of the state of Spanish studies in the African continent, moving on to the particular situation of South Africa and its background. We shall present the survey we conducted in order to learn about students' reasons for registering and deregistering for Spanish and we shall finish our paper by discussing the possibility of a curriculum revision, based on the survey's results and our own experiences.

1.1 Spanish in Africa

The learning of Spanish in Africa is concentrated in Northern, Western, and Central Africa, particularly in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Benin, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Angola, Cameroon, and Gabon. Kaben (2017), for example, provides a clear example on how Spanish has become an important language to learn, particularly in Algeria and Egypt. The dissemination of Spanish through language and teacher training courses in northern Africa has been promoted by Instituto Cervantes, and its growth has been extended from primary and secondary education to the university level. Another important reason for the increase of Spanish in that region is the establishment of Spanish companies in these two countries.

According to the very first large-scale study of Spanish teaching and learning in Sub-Saharan Africa coordinated by Serrano (2014), the number of Spanish learners in the region back then reached 1.5 million students. Currently, Sub-Saharan Africa —after the United States, the European Union and Brazil— represents the region with the fourth largest number of Spanish learners. The countries with the highest

numbers of enrolled students are Ivory Coast (566,178), Benin (412,515), Senegal (356,000), Cameroon (193,018) and Gabon (167,410), figures that represent almost 90 percent of all Spanish learners in Sub-Saharan Africa (Instituto Cervantes 2021: 57).

In Southern Africa, the situation shows a somewhat gloomy scenario. Of the 12 countries that constitute this geographical region, Madagascar is the country with the largest number of Spanish learners with 7,676 students (Gil Villa & Raharivola 2014), thanks to the presence of Spanish in basic, secondary, and tertiary education. The country with the second largest number of learners in this region is South Africa, with about 1,800 recorded students (Gómez & Pérez 2014), while other countries in the region either do not report data or register figures below 300 learners of Spanish. We believe that all in all, the teaching situation of Spanish on the African continent is circumscribed by the language policies of each country.

Regarding the presence of Hispanic academic and cultural bodies in Africa, of the 20 Cervantes Institute's branches on the continent, 19 are in the Maghreb. The only one in Sub-Saharan Africa is in Dakar, Senegal. Inaugurated in 2010 as Aula Cervantes, it was recently converted in 2021 into the very first Instituto Cervantes in Sub-Saharan Africa (Instituto Cervantes 2021). Moreover, only a few years ago, in 2018, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) inaugurated its first Centre for Mexican Studies in Johannesburg, South Africa, to promote student mobility, academic exchange, and the teaching and certification of Spanish as a foreign language at the University of Witwatersrand (Mendoza & Ruiz 2019).

The certification of Spanish in Africa has a strong presence in the north of the continent, particularly the *Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera* (DELE), administered in the different branches of the Instituto Cervantes. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Spanish language certification is carried out through Embassies, as well as both private and public institutions. However, given the lack of oral examiners, the administration of these exams is limited. In South Africa, for example, the DELE exam takes place exclusively at the University of Cape Town. The *Servicio Internacional de Evaluación de la Lengua Española* (SIELE)—designed and implemented thanks to the collaboration between Spain, Mexico and Argentina—whose aim is to incorporate different varieties of Spanish, is also administered mainly in North Africa, but rarely in Sub-Saharan Africa (Instituto Cervantes 2021). In the case of South Africa, the first certifying centre was created in 2018 by the UNAM Centre for Mexican Studies in Johannesburg, and there is only one other certifying centre, in Durban (SIELE 2021). The advantage of this exam is that it takes place online through the certifying centres. Since the pandemic, students can take the exams remotely from home under the supervision of the certifying centre where the student enrolls. The reading and listening comprehension tests are assessed automatically by the computer and the oral and written tasks are recorded and subsequently assessed in Spain, Mexico and Argentina.

1.2 Teaching Spanish in Higher Education in Africa

In English-speaking countries in Africa, like South Africa, and specifically at university level, the way of understanding the curriculum structure and subjects' organisation follows a very similar pattern to that of the old British Higher Education system, in which students can obtain a three-year bachelor's degree, followed by Honours,

Masters and PhD studies, for which the degree is currently divided into major and minor subjects. That means that any student interested in languages can take, in their first year at university, four completely unrelated subjects, one of them being any language of their choice, provided they have no prior knowledge of it. Students can therefore register for Spanish (or any other European Modern Language) in combination with degree courses related to Law, Psychology, Mathematics, Film and Media and/or Social Development, among many others. A student interested in languages can also register exclusively in language-related topics: Spanish, French, Italian and/or Linguistics and/or English (which is not very often the case). Even though students are asked to plan properly from their first year at university, this curricular fragmentation and independence in terms of choice of subjects and freedom to customize the programme involves a significant timetable clashing component that ends up restraining some students from completing the majors of their choice.

In terms of the internal organisation of contents inside the Spanish curriculum (the way the curriculum is devised in the universities that offer Spanish in Anglophone countries in Africa as part of a major programme), there is a clear differentiation between language, culture and literature. In all three of them, there is also a gradual progression from the initial and exclusive study of the language and culture in first year, to an introduction to Hispanic literature in second year, which becomes the focus of teaching in the third year.

The lack of Spanish teaching material developed for an African audience has resulted in the use of textbooks published either in the United States or in Europe (particularly, Spain or the United Kingdom) by non-Africans, or with minimal African participation. None of the books used either at the University of Cape Town or the University of Witwatersrand have been created with the African student in mind, or for their specific characteristics or needs. The fact that there is very little material produced on the continent implies restrictions in terms of both affordability and availability for the specific South African context, as well as the suitability of learning approaches, methods and dynamics originated in the classroom. However, there are exemplary cases, particularly in African Francophone countries: for example, *Composite Course in Spanish Grammar. Translation and Stylistics* (Lamprey 2005), *Español en África* (Bena & Pujol 1987) and *Buenos días* (Manso, Rodríguez & Elá 1987) from Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. As for teaching materials at tertiary level, we can mention *Spanish for Africa* (Adra & Suárez 2010), done in Ghana in collaboration with AECID (Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development) and *Didáctica del Español*, coordinated in Cameroon by Medina and Habissou (2000) and reviewed by the University of Extremadura (Spain). The Ivory Coast collection *Horizontes* (1998–2022) is one of the best known in the whole continent. Specifically created for the teaching and learning of Spanish in Ivory Coast, it has been recently followed by *Ya estamos* (2018) coordinated by Niango.

As for the human resources involved in the teaching of Spanish in Africa, there is still an extremely high percentage of lecturers that mainly come from Spain or from Latin America. In the case of South Africa, for example, the Heads of the three Spanish departments at the University of Cape Town, the University of Pretoria and the University of the Witwatersrand are from Spanish-speaking countries.

1.3 Background of teaching and learning Spanish as a foreign language in South African universities

In South Africa, as is the case with many African universities, learning foreign languages, along with multilingualism and multiculturalism factors, is intrinsically linked to the history of colonialism and is at the core of the conversations around the need for change across universities. Dutch and English colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries in South Africa were clear examples of the imposition of English and Dutch (evolving into Afrikaans) as means of education and coveted instruments of social manipulation (Probyn 2005; Hartshorne 1995). English, however, was the lingua franca for political resistance and liberation by the educated African elite in South Africa and in other African Anglophone countries (Heugh 1995; Pennycook 1995).

In more recent years, the South African government elected in 1994 created a new Language-in-Education Policy (1997). This new LiEP aimed at the construction of a non-racial nation through the promotion of multilingualism and the use of the eleven official South African languages. Programmes were developed to redress the status of African languages, and to ensure equitable access to the education system, as well as quality learning and success for all learners within the system. This language policy targeted all levels of education, from primary school to university. However, the lack of means and properly prepared educators, as well as the positive perception of English for social, economic, and educational development, has made such implementation ineffective in South Africa and other African countries (Howie 2003; Rubagumya 1994). Unfortunately, the mismatch between the languages used at home and at school has a deleterious effect on students' performance, particularly aggravated at the university level (CEPD 2012; Hurst, Madiba & Morreira 2017).

Regarding the specific promotion and learning of foreign languages, in 2003 the South African Department of Education approved Spanish as one of the eleven foreign languages to be formally studied in the country. This was followed in 2006 by government approval of a new academic curriculum for secondary education that made the study of two national languages compulsory and allowed two foreign languages as electives, Spanish being one of them since 2003. This meant that students doing Spanish up until the last year of their secondary education have the possibility of taking Spanish as one of their exams for matriculation (a requirement for university acceptance). It is worth mentioning that when the World Cup was hosted in South Africa in 2010, Spanish became very popular due to the initial match between South Africa and Mexico, followed by the overall victory of the Spanish national team.

Therefore, the landscape of Spanish as a foreign language has changed, not always positively, in the past two decades. UNISA, the first university to offer Spanish in 1966, closed its Spanish department in 2015, while the University of KwaZulu Natal, which started in 1993, closed in 1997. Nowadays, out of 23 universities in South Africa, only four teach Spanish as a foreign language: Stellenbosch University, the University of Cape Town, the University of Pretoria and the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The last three mentioned are the only ones, however, that offer Spanish as part of the university curriculum. The study of Spanish at the University of Stellenbosch is not part of a university programme. It rather comprises

courses that run in collaboration with the Postgraduate and International Office (PGIO) and are offered to Stellenbosch University students and the general public.

Another important contribution to the teaching of Spanish in South Africa comes from the Language Training Unit of the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), which oversees the linguistic training of its officials within the Diplomatic Training, Research and Development Branch. This governmental body teaches languages such as English, French, Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, as well as Portuguese (DIRCO 2015). DIRCO started teaching Spanish in 1987, and since 2007, there have been two full-time permanent Spanish instructors. In 2020, the number of enrolments at DIRCO rose to nearly 50 students, a considerable increase if we compare it with the 12 to 13 students reported in 2014.

In the already mentioned 2014 study done by Serrano (2014), that provided a detailed portrayal of the situation of Spanish teaching and learning in Sub-Saharan Africa, Gómez and Pérez (2014), the specific chapter dedicated to South Africa revealed that students from the University of Cape Town, the University of the Witwatersrand, and the University of Pretoria mainly learnt Spanish for future professional opportunities, personal interest, travelling, appealing sound, knowledge of similar languages, and curiosity. Students also reported having some awareness of Spanish language and culture (e.g., food, cinema, music, soccer, bullfighting, and way of life, among other aspects). These authors highlighted that by 2012, South Africa experienced an increasing demand to learn Spanish in secondary schools, and with private tutors. Following Gómez and Pérez (2014), we would argue that Spanish holds an enduring attraction for South Africans, with a fluctuating demand that responds to language policies, time, money, teaching staff availability, and other variables (e.g., past learning experiences, musical hits, sport-related victories, and the like).

Taking the above into account, and comparing the situation presented by Serrano's publication, the main conclusion we can draw from Gómez and Pérez observations (2014) is that there has been a slow, but consolidated interest in the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language in the past decade. This has been partly due to public funds coming from Spanish-speaking countries, such as the Spanish Embassy in Pretoria, through its Spanish language teaching assistants (*'lectorados'*) and UNAM, through its Mexican Studies Centre in Johannesburg. The learning scenario, however, has changed in recent years with the implementation of language policies in tertiary education. Bachelor programmes such as Engineering and Arts, at the University of the Witwatersrand, implemented a language policy in 2019 that compels students to learn Zulu, Sesotho, or South African Sign Language before they choose one of the six modern European languages offered by the School of Literature, Language and Media.

Chart 1 below shows the number of students enrolled in the past eight years in the three South African universities that include Spanish as part of their university curriculum. In this chart, we can observe two things. Firstly, a decline of the number of students enrolled in Spanish courses at the University of Cape Town and even more drastically at the University of the Witwatersrand—except for the enrolment in 2021 at Wits (84 first-year students registered), due to a technical error on the platform that allowed students to enrol in Spanish courses instead of the new compulsory languages. Secondly, it allows us to appreciate the enormous difference between the

number of students that take first year Spanish and the ones that effectively finish the three-year degree programme.

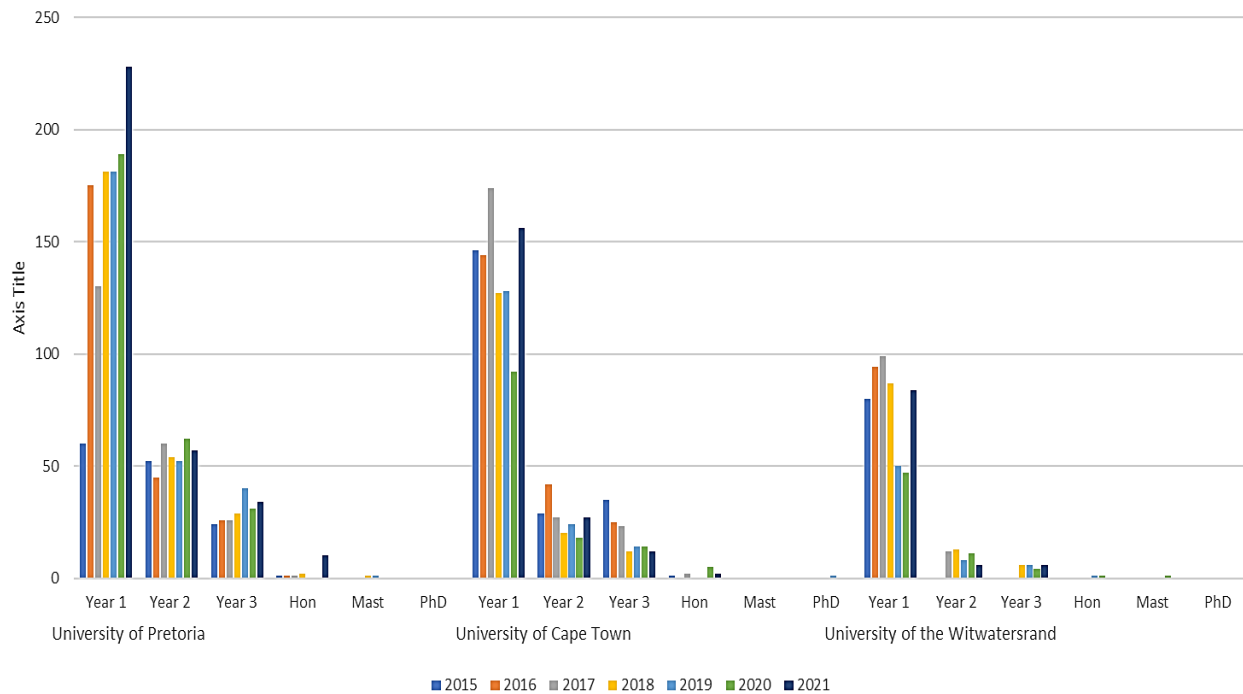


Chart 1. Spanish enrolment in South African Universities

Regarding the low numbers in Spanish registration at the University of Witwatersrand, this issue is directly related to a language policy recently implemented in 2019 but conceived in 2003. Its aim is to promote multilingualism, highlighted by the inclusion of Sesotho as co-medium of instruction alongside English (Conduah 2003). However, few changes were made since 2003, and in 2014, a large-scale survey showed that most of the students, scholars and administrative staff would prefer to use English as a medium of communication (University of the Witwatersrand 2014). It also showed that isiZulu and Sesotho were chosen first and second by most students as the preferred African languages to be developed and learnt within the university. Thus, in 2015, Wits adopted a new Language Policy 'aimed at promoting creativity, selfhood and cognition through linguistic diversity' (University of the Witwatersrand 2021). In 2016, the university created a Language Planning and Development Board at Wits with a new strategy to implement the language policy in four phases. Phases one and two included interpreting services, the translation of key documents, multilingual signage and branding, and the development of teaching materials in isiZulu, Sesotho and South African Sign Language, which was included in the list of languages to be taught. Phase three was implemented in 2018 for staff and in 2019 for students, by teaching the aforementioned languages as part of their professional and educational development. Phase four is set to be carried out by academics by including isiZulu, Sesotho and South African Sign Language alongside English as medium of instruction in relevant fields. In 2018, this language policy

became mandatory for Bachelor of Arts and Engineering students (Mashishi 2018). Students are compelled to take one full year of one of these three language courses as part of their elective subjects. If, for example, they are fluent in isiZulu or seSotho, they must either learn sign language or they can choose a foreign language, such as Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian or German. This language policy's implementation clearly deters students from learning one of the Modern European Languages on offer and has a clear and direct relationship with the significant decrease in enrolment numbers for Spanish. To support this, Chart 2 below shows the massive increase of students learning compulsory languages from 2019 (i.e., Sesotho, isiZulu and South African Sign Language) at the University of the Witwatersrand.

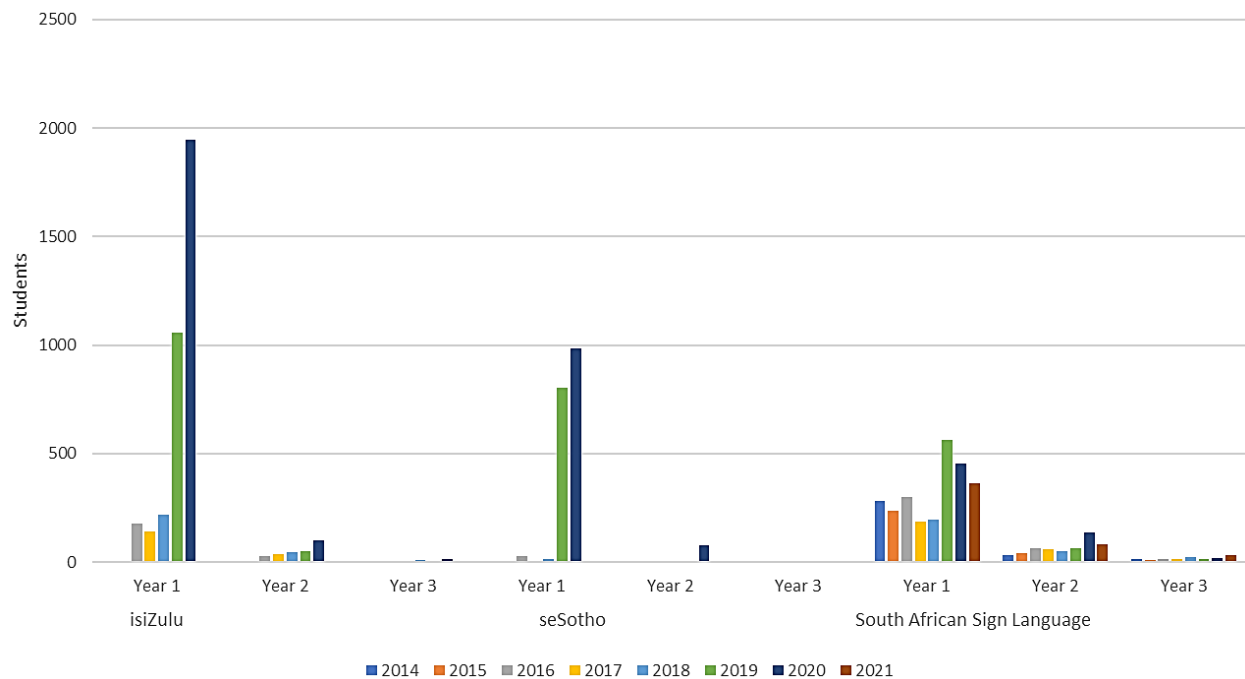


Chart 2. Sesotho, isiZulu and South African sign language enrolments at the University of the Witwatersrand

The sharp difference between the number of students that take first year Spanish and the ones that effectively finish the three-year degree programme might lead us to question the internal organisation of the contents of the Spanish curriculum. According to the way the curriculum is devised in the three universities that offer Spanish in South Africa within the bachelor's degree, language, culture and literature form part of the same programme. This means that students who are only interested in learning the language are compelled to take the culture and literature modules as well.

Although South Africa boasts five of the ten most important universities in the African continent (Times Higher Education 2021), and it represents the third largest economy in Africa, the number of Spanish students enrolled in higher education is sparse in comparison with other African countries. The scarcity of research conducted in Southern Africa impedes the understanding of the teaching and learning situation

of Spanish in this important enclave of the globe. Aside from Serrano's large-scale study from 2014, there are very little means to assess the current situation in Sub-Saharan Africa, other than the efforts deployed by the Instituto Cervantes or, more locally, the *Asociación de Hispanistas del Sur de África* (AHSA), with its activities, including a biennial Colloquium devoted to the analysis of the situation of Spanish as a foreign language in the Southern region of Africa. In 2019, the AHSA Colloquium took place at the University of the Witwatersrand, coorganised in collaboration with the Mexican Studies Centre (National Autonomous University of Mexico in South Africa) and the University of Cape Town. In 2022, after a two-year gap due to the COVID pandemic, the Colloquium took place again at the University of Pretoria. There are a few other associations in the Continent that we are aware of, such as the African Association of Hispanists, the Beninese Association of Hispanists, the Cameroonian Association of Hispanists, the Ghanaian Association of Hispanists (Instituto Cervantes, 2022) and the *Asociación de Hispanistas de Egipto* (HEG), who organised the I International Congress of the Association of Arab Hispanists in 2014 (Kaben 2017). However, the efforts to conduct research and to organise academic events (i.e., workshops, colloquia, conferences and symposia) are seldom and rarely articulated between different regions of the continent. Thus, the aim of this study is to shed light on the teaching and learning of Spanish in higher education in South Africa, particularly in a climate where the implementation of language policies in favour of the teaching of African languages is reshaping the landscape. Students' needs and motivations to learn Spanish should be at the core of the curriculum design in higher education, particularly taking into account that it is about an essential language for a globalised professional perspective.

2. METHODOLOGY

This 2-phased study was conducted in 2019 and 2020 at the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand, the two highest ranked universities in South Africa and Africa (Times Higher Education 2021) and with the most consolidated university programmes in Spanish and Latin American studies. The rationale behind this study was to identify the reasons why students enrol in Spanish at two of the South African universities that offer Spanish as part of the undergraduate curriculum. We also wanted to understand why the number of students enrolled declines steeply from first to second and third year. Furthermore, we wanted to know how they learn Spanish and what value they see in learning this language in Higher Education, as well as the resources and strategies students use to practise Spanish and to improve their language skills.

2.1 Participants

First, second- and third-year students from both universities participated voluntarily in both phases. The total number of students who answered the survey in 2019 and 2020 was 85. Some students did not answer some of the questions, but the full range of answers provided by the 85 students was analysed by the authors of this paper. Most of the students were young adults, with an average age of 21 years. Nearly half of the students were enrolled in first year and the rest of them in second and third

year. Most of these first-year students had never had previous contact with Spanish. As we can observe in Chart 3, the vast majority of students answered that they had learnt Afrikaans as an additional language. This is the result of the apartheid regime, which forced students to learn this language. English is the other colonial language and the lingua franca in the country, so those who do not speak it as L1, must learn English during their primary and secondary education. In tertiary education, nearly all the undergraduate and graduate programmes are taught in English. Around 60 percent of the students learnt this additional language at school, but some of them also learn it at home in private schools or through self-teaching methods.

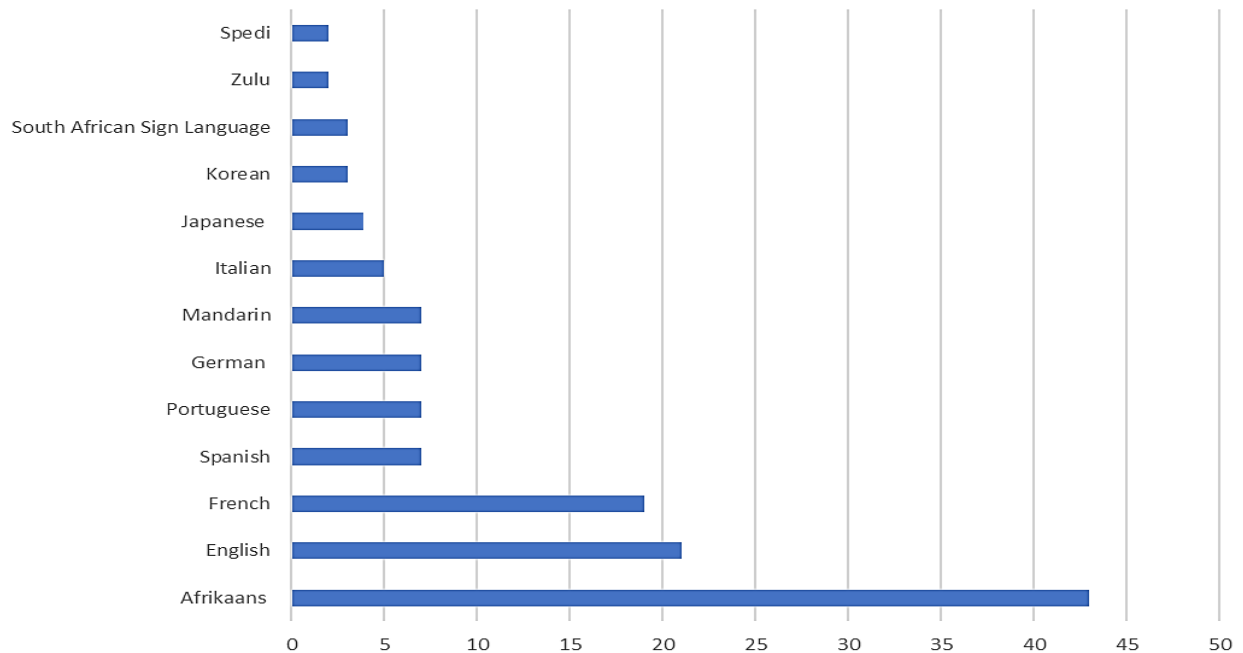


Chart 3. Other languages students learnt before taking Spanish

2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire which was used for the purposes of this article was created by the authors of this paper. In both the institutions involved, an application for ethics clearance was granted, since the research met both the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand's criteria for ethical research and the students' confidentiality was assured throughout the study. The research was based on willing participation and students were informed of the fact that they could withdraw from the study at any given time. First, second- and third-year students from both universities participated voluntarily in both phases.

The first phase of this study was carried out via a paper survey, which was distributed in the Spanish classroom during the second term of 2019. Most of the students took the survey at the same time in one class. A few students missing that particular day took it a few days later within the same week.

For the second phase, the instrument was modified in order to be converted into an online survey (see Annexure 1), based on the initial paper questionnaire.

Students could take the survey at their own convenience within a week. Students who did not answer the survey were reminded after one week¹.

2.3 Data analysis

As mentioned, the two surveys took place during the second term of 2019 and the first term of 2020. Since the first survey was carried out on paper, in the Spanish classroom, during one of their Spanish lectures, answers were collected by the lecturer and then registered manually in Excel documents by the authors of this paper. Lexical frequency was used as the criterion to codify the information provided by students' answers. The second survey was carried out electronically via a Google survey. During one of their Spanish lectures, students were given a link to access the survey. They took the questionnaire either at home or at the university using one of the available computer laboratories. They had a week to access and finish the survey. The results of this second survey were electronically analysed and processed, and lexical frequency was used again as the criterion to organise the results.

3. RESULTS

In this section, we report on the results of the two surveys that were administered to students at the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand (85, in total) in 2019 and 2020. We have divided this section into the following two parts: details regarding motivation to learn Spanish and its usefulness in students' lives, and reasons for studying Spanish and for ending their study.

3.1 Motivation to learn Spanish and its usefulness in students' lives

In order to have a general overview of students' interest in learning other languages, we asked them which other languages they would be interested in learning. Chart 4 shows the popularity of languages students would like to learn. As we can see, Romance languages are the most popular, followed by some Asian languages and Russian. When students were asked about their reasons for learning Spanish, the most common answer was related to the fact that they like the language, the culture, the history, and/or because it is a heritage language for some of them with a Spanish or Latin American background.

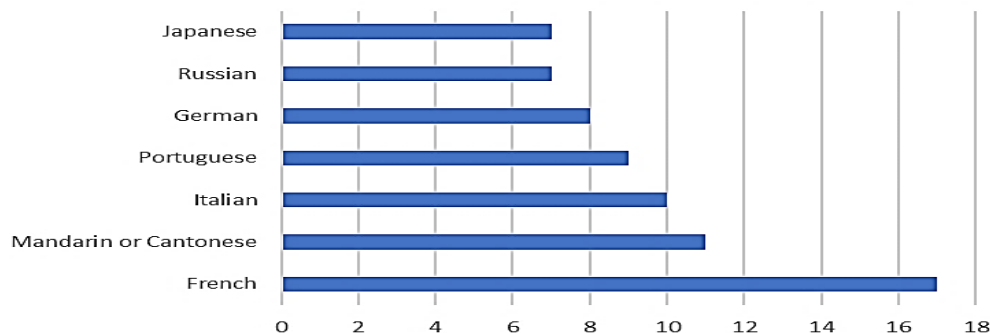


Chart 4. Other languages students would like to learn

Subsequently, it was our intention to gather more specific information about the usefulness of Spanish in their lives for personal, academic, and professional purposes. Chart 5 summarises students' perceptions of the usefulness of Spanish in their personal, academic and professional lives.

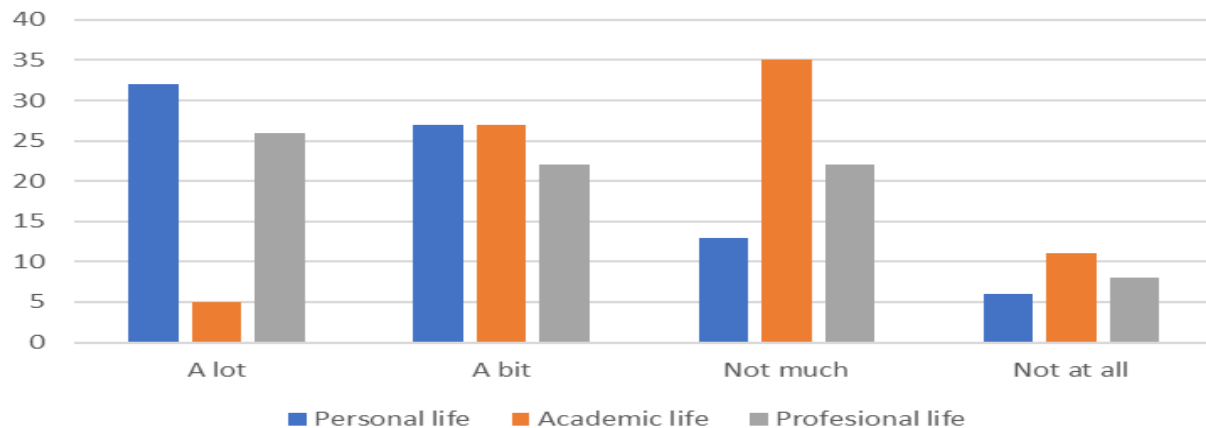


Chart 5. Usefulness of Spanish in students' personal, professional and academic lives

Firstly, we asked students about the importance of learning Spanish in their personal lives. As stated, most of the students learn Spanish because they like the language and it is widely spoken worldwide. Some students also reported that the language was interesting and fascinating for them (11). Some like learning other languages (8) and they chose Spanish because they want to learn a new one (4). They would also like to read literature in Spanish and learn more about the history, culture (e.g., art and literature), and popular culture, e.g., watching telenovelas and movies, or even playing football abroad (5). Some students provided specific answers related to the heritage of Spanish speakers in their families (3), as well as the usefulness of Spanish to travel and to make new friends (9), which would 'allow them to communicate in real life with people from different Spanish speaking countries'. However, students who answered that Spanish would not be useful for them, explained that they do not know anyone who speaks the language and that they do not have the desire to travel abroad. Finally, for some students the reason for learning Spanish was the similarity to other languages that they already speak (e.g., French or Portuguese), which makes it easier to acquire.

We also asked participants about how useful they think Spanish would be for their academic life. The main reason given by students who answered 'a bit' and 'a lot' was their intention to study and work overseas, since they see the language as the gateway to pursuing graduate studies in a Spanish-speaking country. On the other hand, a large number of students who answered 'not much' and 'not at all' explained that as English is the language of instruction in their current studies, they do not see much probability of using Spanish in their academic contexts. A few students reported, however, that they perceive the language as an easy way to 'boost' their university marks, showing a lack of intrinsic interest on the subject. This could contribute to the significant drop in numbers between first and second year.

Students who consider Spanish to be important for their professional contexts considered further working possibilities with people from diverse backgrounds as the

main reason for their answer. Some students believed that many jobs require Spanish-speaking candidates, such as translators, teaching Spanish or English in a Spanish speaking country, and employment in international relations or medical fields. Some of them would like to find work overseas and use Spanish to work or to live in a Spanish speaking country. For example, one student responded that Spanish would help her/him to volunteer as a doctor in a Spanish-speaking country. Another student wrote that s/he would like to play in a Spanish football league. Several students also acknowledged that being able to speak Spanish would 'increase their chances of being employed.' Conversely, students who replied 'a bit' did so since they were uncertain about their professional future. Students who did not see Spanish as a useful language in their professional life referred to the lack of Spanish usage in their chosen careers as the reason for their answers.

Additionally, when students were asked if they would like to travel or work in a Spanish speaking country, the great majority (78) answered affirmatively; hardly anyone answered negatively (2), a few replied, 'not much' (4), and just one person said 'maybe'. Most of the participants cited Spain as the most wanted-to-visit country. Different Latin American countries, namely Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Peru, and Chile, were also mentioned. Students who have been in Spanish-speaking countries agree that Spanish is useful for travel, work and study abroad. The ones who answered positively, considered the benefits of learning and practicing the language in immersion conditions as the main reason, while the students who replied 'not much' or 'no' did so because of their lack of fluency in Spanish.

Next, students were asked if they would, eventually, like to settle down in a Spanish-speaking country. The answers to this question were varied, but the majority showed their willingness to do so (23). Some others replied negatively (18), while five students were hesitant in their answers and replied 'maybe'. As in previous questions, Spain was once more the most popular destination. Some other countries where students would like to live, if not permanently at least temporarily, were Mexico, Chile, and Colombia. Interestingly, however, the distinction was made regarding Spanish being more useful for travelling than for living abroad, since most of them would prefer to live in South Africa. For these students, Spanish would not be a 'second' language for South Africans but an additional language.

3.2 Reasons for choosing and terminating Spanish learning

In terms of reasons to study Spanish, students highlighted the possibilities that the language entails in terms of travelling and possibly working or studying overseas. They also consider that Spanish offers a great opportunity to learn from people and to communicate with family, relatives, and friends from Spanish-speaking countries, as well as to understand TV series and movies without subtitles. In general, students said that they would be keen to continue learning Spanish the following year. The most common reason was that students wanted to continue improving their Spanish until they became fluent in the language. They were aware, however, that the only way to do so is to work hard, to practise and to invest time. Students also expected to gain a better understanding of the culture (e.g., literature and history). The few students who responded that they did not want to continue learning Spanish said that the Spanish schedule of the following year would clash with their majors.

Among the participants, there was a general belief that the main reason for those who dropped Spanish after the first year was associated with the realisation that it is 'time consuming and challenging' and 'it gets too hard quickly.' As one student responded: 'Speakers of other languages (particularly non-Romance languages) often have difficulties with concepts such as conjugation, various moods, and tenses, as well as linguistic nuances (such as the use of 'vos' as opposed to 'tú' in certain parts of Latin America, or 'vosotros' instead of 'ustedes' in Spain). All these make the language more difficult to learn for some and may have something to do with the large number of dropouts.' Other students believed that there is a lack of incentive because they 'do not see a value in the real world, or at least in the field of careers that they are pursuing.' Finally, some students pointed out that Spanish is perceived as an easy way to obtain credits, and when they realise that it is more difficult than what they thought, they drop it the year after. 'I think a lot of students take it as a "filler". What I mean is they have the three main courses that they want to take, and they need a fourth to obtain the credits to pass. Therefore, they take a "filler", which could be Spanish.' Another student reported that 'many find it more difficult than they originally thought, as their impressions are often initially conditioned by portrayals of Spanish in popular culture.'

Despite this, when students were asked about how easy they thought it would be to learn Spanish, a significant number replied that it would not be easy. The main reasons were, on the one hand, the structure of the language (for example, the verbal conjugation, tenses, and use of moods in Spanish, such as indicative versus subjunctive, and the regional variants and dialects of Spanish) and on the other hand, the novelty and the challenge of learning a new language.

4. DISCUSSION

In this study, we have provided a panorama of the current situation of teaching Spanish in Higher Education in South Africa. We also explored the reasons why South African students choose to register for Spanish, along with the reasons behind deregistration, particularly after the first year. In the first place, we would argue that the teaching of Spanish in South African universities would benefit from a revision in the current context of curriculum transformation. There is, in our opinion, a clear lack of suitability in terms of the learning approaches, methods and dynamics and its relevance for the African pedagogic, historical, socioeconomic, and cultural context. This clearly makes the study of Spanish both difficult and yet not relevant enough and/or useful for South African students. These considerations highlight the urgent need for both creativity and self-reflection to acknowledge the misalignment between what is on offer from the University side and the students' needs in South Africa. Following Mandani (2019), we believe that 'the challenge in higher education, in Africa and elsewhere, is to be both responsive to the local and engaged with the global (16).'

The decolonisation of curricula should not merely imply a change of content (i.e., inclusion of the study of African authors in Spanish), but it should also incorporate the means to teach and assess. As Morreira and Lockett (2018) state, we believe that the curriculum does not only cover content but also 'implicit ways of knowing, ways of doing and ways of being.'

Language policy planners, stakeholders and academic professionals in South Africa should revise the Spanish curriculum based on three factors: what to teach, how to teach and to what purpose. As we saw in the survey conducted with students, the two main reasons for dropping Spanish after the first year are, firstly, that the language is not as easy as they would expect, and more importantly, that they are interested in learning Spanish not to get a degree, but to be able to speak the language for personal and professional purposes. Students who continue learning Spanish in second and third year are pursuing a major in Spanish and Latin American studies, which is not the main goal for the majority. The current curriculum in higher education envisions Spanish as an indissoluble association of language, literature, and culture, which deters students from just learning the language. We would argue that the focus in the curriculum should be on the study of the language, at all levels, rather than literature and culture. Spanish as a discipline should be taught as a meaningful language of empowerment, that will allow students to work and communicate in this language in a globalised world.

While not proposing the abandonment of the study of Hispanic culture and literature in Spanish, nor questioning the relevance of the study of literature, we reckon that it should be approached from a different angle, rather as a complement to the study of the language, and not the main objective of any course in an undergraduate degree. Literature and culture, as inseparable manifestations, and consequences of language, should be used as tools by lecturers to teach the language. Teaching Hispanic culture in the Spanish curriculum should include cultural references to Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, with special emphasis and reference to Afrohispanic and Afrolatin culture, and the historical connection between Africa and South America. The cultural exchange, product of the trade of slaves to the Americas after the colonisation of the continent, should be included in the teaching material—another reason why the current teaching material produced, mainly in Spain, for Europeans, Canadians, and Americans, does not respond to the commonalities between Africa and South America.

Furthermore, regarding the language itself, special attention should be dedicated to the study of the different Spanish linguistic varieties of the Spanish-speaking countries in Africa, including Equatorial Guinea and Western Sahara, as well as its written production in other African countries, such as Algeria, Morocco, and Cameroon. In the same vein, all the linguistic varieties of South America should be part of the curriculum, which should necessarily move away from the prevailing Spanish-from-Spain hegemony: this is what has been happening at the University of the Witwatersrand since the opening of the Mexican Studies Centre.

Spanish instruction should also follow a multilingual approach. South Africa is a multicultural country with 11 official languages. English is spoken as a lingua franca, but less than ten percent of the population speak English as L1 (Ethnologue Languages of the World 2022). In everyday life, due to shortage of local human resources, and since most of the Spanish language lecturers come from Spain or Latin America, the only way to teach Spanish is by using English, particularly in the first year (e.g., Corcoll-López & González-Davies 2016). That leaves aside other important local languages such as Zulu and Xhosa, spoken by nearly 40 per cent of the population (Ethnologue Languages of the World 2022). Using English during the first year of Spanish instruction might have a negative impact on South African students' performance whose L1 is other than English (e.g., Heugh 2000; Hurst 2016; Kapp &

Arend 2011; Department of Basic Education, 2010). Following Brown (2021), Gánem-Gutiérrez and Roehr (2011), and Tognini and Oliver (2012), we claim that the teaching of Spanish in South Africa should not be through English as the only L1, but rather exclusively in Spanish, and/or, ideally, through a multilingual approach that includes the different national languages spoken in each province.

The main objective for any discipline, including Spanish in higher education, should remain its usefulness and value for students. The Spanish curriculum should be revised bearing in mind the reasons why students learn this language: their individual interests and motivations. Through this survey we identified that their main goals are personal and professional. Students desire to travel to Spain or Latin America, and they see the value of being able to communicate through a language that is spoken by nearly 567 million Spanish native-speakers around the world (Instituto Cervantes 2021: 174). Students are also aware of the potential job opportunities that will eventually open up in the future if they manage to communicate efficiently in Spanish. We believe that a comprehensive global market mapping and analysis is crucial to unveil the professional requirements and sectors where Spanish students could find opportunities in the business arena, to increase their employability.

Lastly, we are of the view that other degrees should be advanced instead of the current degree in Spanish and Latin American studies. Translation and Interpreting Studies, and degree programmes in Spanish applied to the economic sectors of Tourism, Renewable Energies, Fisheries, Immigration Practising, Health, as well as General Business, should be considered as potential ways of enhancing career opportunities and professional prospects of university students both in South Africa and in Africa. Related to this, the creation of degree programmes such as essential training for Spanish students interested in using Spanish for teaching purposes, where the literary component would certainly find a better fitting space, also needs consideration. This appears particularly important if we consider the significant demand for Spanish teachers in many African countries where the need for instructors of Spanish as a foreign language is a reality (Serrano 2014).

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have explored students' motivations to learn Spanish in higher education. By addressing the number of students enrolled in the past five years, and across first, second and third year, we can conclude that despite the interest in learning Spanish, the language policies recently implemented in higher education and the current curriculum makes it difficult for university students to learn the language. We believe that a thorough revision of the current curriculum is necessary, considering the professional opportunities for university graduates nowadays. Furthermore, without underestimating the importance of language policies in favour of the learning of African languages, we claim that students should be able to allocate their elective courses in the language they freely wish to learn. It is our hope that this paper will contribute to the debate around this topic with the parties involved in order to improve the current situation to the benefit of students of Spanish in South Africa.

NOTES

1 The survey can be accessed through the following link, which was given to students by their lecturers of Spanish in the classroom:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1LqxbYVeNhhFHclErJug9njDpsZeygPQNY0ghWkbMc/edit>

REFERENCES

- Adra, L. K. & Suárez Viera, C. (2010). *Spanish for Africa. Book 1*. Accra: Woeli.
- Bena, V.T. & Pujol, N. (1988). *Español en África*. Toledo: Larousse.
- Brown, A. (2021). Monolingual versus multilingual foreign language teaching: French and Arabic at beginning levels. *Language Teaching Research*, (0), 1–26.
- Conduah, A. N. (2003). Introducing an African language for Teaching and Learning at Wits University. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 12(3), 245–264.
- Corcoll-López, C. & González-Davies, M. (2016). Switching codes in the plurilingual classroom. *ELT Journal*, 70(1), 67–77.
- Department of Basic Education (2010). *The Status of the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in South African Public Schools: A Quantitative Overview*. [online]. Available on: <https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/Status%20of%20LOLT.pdf>
- DIRCO (2015). *Language Policy of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation*. [online]. Available on: http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2015/dirco_language_policy150706.pdf
- Ethnologue Languages of the World (2022). [online]. Available on: <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/ZA>
- Gánem-Gutiérrez, G.A. & Roehr-Brackin, K. (2011). Use of L1, metalanguage, and discourse markers: L2 learners' regulation during individual task performance. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 297–318.
- Gil Villa, L. & Raharivola J. (2014). El español en Madagascar. In J. Serrano Avilés (Ed.), *La enseñanza del español en África Subsahariana*, (pp. 364–381). Madrid: Instituto Cervantes.
- Gómez Amich, M. & Pérez Abad, A. (2014). Situación del español en un país africano plurilingüe: el caso de Sudáfrica. In J. Serrano Avilés (Ed.), *La enseñanza del español en África Subsahariana*, (pp. 518–546). Madrid: Instituto Cervantes.
- Hartshorne, K. (1995). Language Policy in Education in South Africa: a Background to the Future. In R. Mesthrie (Ed.), *Language and Social History: Studies in South African Sociolinguistics*, (pp. 306–318). Cape Town: David Philip.
- Heugh, K. (1995). From Unequal Education to the Real Thing. In Heugh, K., A. Siegrühn & P. Pluddemann (Eds.), *Multilingual Education for South Africa*, (pp. 42–52. Johannesburg: Heinemann Publishers.
- Heugh, K. (2000). *The Case Against Bilingual and Multilingual Education in South Africa*, Occasional Paper, 6. Cape Town: PRAESA. [online]. Available on: <https://www.praesa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Paper6.pdf>
- Howie, S. J. (2003). Language and other background factors affecting secondary pupils' performance in Mathematics in South Africa. *African Journal of Research in Mathematics Science and Technology Education*, 7, 1–20.
- Hurst, E. (2016). Navigating language: strategies, transitions, and the 'colonial wound' in South African education. *Language & Education: An International Journal*, 30(3), 219–234.
- Hurst, E., Madiba, M. & Morreira, M. (2017). Surfacing and Valuing Students' Linguistic Resources in an English-Dominant University. In D.M. Palfreyman & C. van der Walt (Eds.), *Academic Biliteracies: Multilingual Repertoires in Higher Education*, (pp. 76–95). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Instituto Cervantes (2021). *El español en el mundo. Anuario del Instituto Cervantes*. [online]. Available on:

https://cvc.cervantes.es/lengua/anuario/anuario_21/el_espanol_en_el_mundo_anuario_instituto_cervantes_2021.pdf

- Kaben, Abdelkader (2017). La situación actual del profesor universitario de español: caso de Egipto y Argelia. *Candil* (17), 28-48.
- Kapp, R. & Arend, M. (2011). There's a Hippo on my Stoep': Constructions of English Second Language Teaching and Learners in the New National Senior Certificate. *Per Linguam*, 27(1), 1-10.
- Lampthey, V.A.O. (2005). *Composite Course in Spanish Grammar. Translation and Stylistics*. Accra: Unimax, MacMillan.
- Mandani, M. (2019). Decolonising Universities. In *International African Bibliography Online.*, (pp. 15-28). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter
- Manso Luengo, A. J., Rodríguez Jorrián, D. & Elá, P. (1987). *iBuenos Días!: Curso de Español para niños*. Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia.
- Mashishi, N. (September 22, 2018). *Wits promotes African languages*. Wits Vuvuzela, [online]. Available on:
<https://witsvuvuzela.com/2018/09/22/wits-promotes-african-languages/>
- Medina Revilla, A. & Habissou, B. (2000). *Nueva didáctica del español. Enseñanza secundaria*. Yaundé: Ministerio de Enseñanza Secundaria de Camerún y Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional.
- Mendoza, A. & Guzmán, D. (2019). La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México en Sudáfrica. *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, 116(177-192). Gobierno de México, [online]. Available on:
<https://revistadigital.sre.gob.mx/images/stories/numeros/n116/mendezarruizgrmpe116.pdf>
- Morreira, S. & Lockett, K. (October 17, 2018). *Questions academics can ask to decolonise their classrooms*. The Conversation, [online]. Available on:
<http://www.adp.uct.ac.za/news/questions-academics-can-ask-decolonise-their-classrooms-0>
- Niango, A.C., Melles, I.A., Yepri, A.J.B, Allou, O. & Silué, S. (2018). *iYa estamos! 4e*. Abiyán: Nouvelles Éditions Ivoiriennes/Centre d'édition et de Diffusion Africaines.
- Nogbou, K, M., Alloboué, C.N., Djédjé, A.B., Yeo, A. & Kanga Kanga, C. (2022). *Horizontes. Espagnol Terminale*. Abiyán: EDICEF/NEI.
- Pennycook, A. (1995). English in the world / The world in English. In Tollefson, J.W. (Ed.), *Power and Inequality in Language Education*, (pp. 34-58). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Probyn, M. (2005). Language and the Struggle to Learn: The Intersection of Classroom Realities, Language Policy, and Neocolonial and Globalisation Discourses in South African Schools. In Angel, L.M.Y. Angel & M.W. Peter (Eds.) *Decolonisation, Globalisation. Language-in-Education Policy and Practice. New Perspectives on Language and Education*, (pp. 153-175). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters
- Rubagumya, C. M. (1994). *Teaching and Researching Language in African Classrooms*. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.
- Serrano Avilés, J. (2014). La enseñanza del español en África Subsahariana: documentación y problemas. En J. Serrano Avilés (Ed.), *La enseñanza del español en África Subsahariana*, (pp. 15-92). Nairobi: Embajada de España en Kenia, AECID, Instituto Cervantes, Casa África.
- Servicio Internacional de Evaluación de la Lengua Española (2021). [online]. Available on:
<https://siele.org/encuentre-su-centro>
- Times Higher Education (2021). *World University Rankings*. [online]. Available on:
https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2021/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats
- Tognini, R. & Rhonda, O. (2012). L1 use in primary and secondary foreign language classrooms and its contribution to learning. In E. Alcón Soler & M.P. Safont-Jordá (Eds.),

Discourse and language learning across L2 instructional settings, (pp. 53-78). Amsterdam: Rodopi.

University of the Witwatersrand (2014). *Language Policy Survey 2014. Strategic Planning Division*. [online]. Available on:

<https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/about-wits/documents/Language%20Policy%20Survey%20Report%202014.pdf>

University of the Witwatersrand (2021). *Wits Language Policy*. [online]. Available on:

<https://www.wits.ac.za/about-wits/governance/language-policy/>